Teaching Culture in EFL Classrooms in Mexico: Current Practices and Pedagogical Recommendations[1]

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Abstract

English Language Teaching (ELT) in Mexico, especially in public elementary schools, has undergone a series of major reforms designed to promote communicative competence among students. However, even with an attempt to include the teaching of culture in EFL classrooms, as documented in the Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica (PNIEB), cultural instruction primarily involves addressing stereotypes. Living in a multicultural and globalized society requires an awareness of one's own culture as well as that of others. In fact, teaching culture is just as important as teaching language, as culture and language are interwoven. This paper calls for the integration of culture to assist students in developing their cultural awareness and intercultural communication to better function in a diverse world. The paper begins by presenting an account of how culture has traditionally been conceptualized and taught in Mexican classrooms. Subsequently, the authors provide pedagogical suggestions on how to better incorporate the teaching of culture in English Language Teaching in this context.

Resumen

La enseñanza del idioma inglés en México, principalmente en escuelas primarias, ha sido objeto de una serie de reformas importantes no sólo para expandirlo al preescolar y a la escuela primaria, pero también para promover la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes. Sin embargo, a pesar del intento de establecer la enseñanza de cultura en las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera en las escuelas públicas primarias, tal como se documenta en el Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica (PNIEB), la enseñanza de cultura ha sido limitada por un enfoque en los estereotipos culturales. Para vivir en una sociedad multicultural y globalizada es necesario estar consciente de la cultura propia y la cultura de otras sociedades también. La enseñanza de cultura es tan importante como la enseñanza de idioma, teniendo en cuenta que ambas están entretejidas. Este trabajo es una propuesta para la integración de la enseñanza de la cultura para así ayudar a los estudiantes a ampliar su conciencia cultural y competencia intercultural necesaria para un mayor desarrollo en un mundo diverso. El propósito de este trabajo es ofrecer una visión general de cómo se ha conceptualizado la noción de cultura, y además cómo se ha enseñado en la última década en México. En base a nuestros análisis, ofrecemos algunas sugerencias pedagógicas para incorporar mejor la enseñanza de cultura en la enseñanza de inglés en México.

Introduction

Recent scholarship on the teaching of English to speakers of other languages reflects the changes of a globalized, multicultural, and more informed society. Examples include the numerous references to cultural awareness, intercultural communication, and global competency in the current English Language Teaching (ELT) literature (Baker, 2011; Byram, 2012; Holliday, 2013). Despite these recent views, the field of second language acquisition (SLA), which informs teaching, still retains its long-held focus on cognitive (as opposed to social) aspects of language learning (Bylund & Athanasopoulos, 2015). This incomplete account of learning has created a dichotomy between language and culture. In fact, teachers have long focused on discrete language skills, such as by asking students to engage in drills and repeat and memorize information. Even as the communicative approach has gained territory, teachers still limit themselves to teaching

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speech acts, or dialogues without the inclusion of cultural explanation, thus separating language from culture.

According to Kramsch (1993), this separation is known as the "linguistic heritage" from SLA to language teaching, which consists of teaching the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) "plus culture" (p. 8). Kramsch (2014) advocates for a language-teaching model that sees language and culture not only as two sides of the same coin but also as a way of addressing students' local cultures in a global context. However, the way in which culture has traditionally been treated in the language classroom is rudimentary and limited to topics such as holidays and stereotypes. If the explicit teaching of culture occurs at all, it is only in an attempt to help students gain linguistic competence. Teaching culture may be a highly difficult task for some teachers because they might feel they lack the time. And even if they do have the time, some may feel that they do not possess either the knowledge or the resources to teach it.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how the notion of culture has been conceptualized in the research literature as well as to provide an overview of how culture has been taught during the last decade in Mexico. The paper likewise offers pedagogical suggestions on how to better incorporate the teaching of culture in Mexican EFL settings.

What is Culture?

The notion of culture is highly complex. Multiple perspectives, definitions, and theories exist. Culture is commonly referred to as the set of socially acquired practices needed to function in a particular society. This definition excludes what is known as "high culture," for example, appreciating the fine arts (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, p. 10). Instead, it includes anything a person needs "to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members" (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, p. 10). Relevant to this definition is the knowledge that the members of the same community use to construct these beliefs, which helps maintain group identity.

Culture is a system of mediation. Following Vygotsky and Cole's (1978) concept of mediation, which includes both material as well as mental tools (artifacts that link humans and their environment), language is seen as a cultural object that produces conversations and that conveys messages through advertising, letters, music, and movies. Language requires an understanding of culture within a specific context, which problematizes the notion of culture itself. If culture is a "system of practices" (Duranti, 1997, p. 42), and if language is an "instrument of action" (p. 42) that produces systems of mediation that utilize communicative and cognitive tools, then there is no single culture. Thus, it is not possible to use the term *culture* to represent an entire group of people. Culture, then, becomes a mediational activity in which language acts as a "guide" (Duranti, 1997, p. 42) that allows its users to act in a certain manner and to relate to objects and people in specific ways depending on the context.

Culture in the Second Language Classroom

The complexity in defining culture is what makes it challenging to incorporate its teaching in the second language classroom. This results in two detrimental effects. The first effect is the implementation of culture in the language classroom as informed by a cognitive theory of culture. In this theory of culture as knowledge, Goodenough argues that culture is the "forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving,

relating, and otherwise interpreting them" (as cited in Duranti, 1997, p. 27). As Duranti (1997) explains, knowing a culture is like knowing a language; hence, to describe culture is to describe a language. One's knowledge of the grammatical rules of a language thus influences his or her understanding and use of utterances as well as his or her means of communication.

On the other hand, there are researchers, such as Chomsky, who take an innatist position, in which the separation of culture and language favors competence over performance. According to this cognitive view, teaching culture is separate from teaching the four language skills (Kramsch, 1993). This position is reflected in the communicative language teaching model. As a result, a debate between grammar and communication has surfaced. Traditionally, the field of language teaching has focused primarily on the prescriptive forms of language and on accuracy over performance.

This cognitive view was followed by a period in which language teachers increased their focus on culture and not simply on the grammar of the target language (Holme, 2002). However, during this time, culture only served to motivate the practice of grammatical structures, which resulted in lesson plans that included videos, music, and other products of culture (e.g., literature) and behaviors (e.g., customs and habits) that encouraged language use (Corbett, 2003). Holme (2002) calls this the *communicative view*. Although the main goal of this view is to provide students a context in which to practice language, no explanation of the context itself is given. In other words, simple exposure to cultural topics are thought to motivate language learners to learn a language and will intrinsically help them reformulate their interpretations according to the new experiences introduced to them.

Other views of culture in second language teaching are the *classical-curriculum view* and the *instrumental or culture-free-language view* (Holme, 2002). Neither of these views sees cultural content as relevant to success in language learning. The former view provides a rationale for the learning of ancient or dead languages, whose principles of logical thought are presumably valued by the learner. The latter view implies an imperialistic motivation for teaching a language in that the values and knowledge of powerful countries are highlighted. In the culture-free-language view, language is separated from culture to avoid any cultural contamination; thus, language instruction is contextualized within the culture in which that second language is taught. For instance, English can be learned for the purpose of helping Mexicans to immigrate to the U.S. and "defend themselves" once they reach their destination (Sayer, 2012, p. 99). Learning English in this way focuses on practical communication skills, not on American cultures. Alternatively, if the second language is privileged in certain socioeconomic and political areas, then it becomes a medium of access to those areas, but with a disregard for the culture. Sayer (2012) states that English is considered a valuable international language in Mexico, creating a discourse that links "English to the hegemony of multi-national corporations and the threat of privatization of education in Mexico" (p. 109). In this case, the ability to speak English is valued more than knowledge of the cultures in which English is spoken.

In response to the communicative view of culture in second language teaching, in which cultural products are often used to bolster the linguistic acquisition of target language forms, the field began witnessing changes that aimed to more meaningfully incorporate

knowledge of culture. This is the second effect of implementing culture in the language classroom. In this view, language is seen as culture, thus aligning more with an intercultural approach. According to Byram, Holme, and Savvides (2013), language teaching is currently facing a "cultural turn", through "the introduction of an 'intercultural competence' to complement 'communicative competence'" (p. 453). Living in a multicultural and globalized society requires individuals to be aware of their own cultures as well as other cultures. It is in this context that terms such as "cultural awareness", "transnational competence", and "global competency" have emerged. However, Baker (2015) calls attention to the difference between cultural awareness and intercultural awareness in the context of language teaching. According to him, "while [cultural awareness] explores the manner in which national conceptions of culture frame intercultural communication, [intercultural awareness] focuses on the INTER or TRANS cultural dimension where there is no clear language-culture-nation correlation, particularly in global uses of English" (p. 131). Raising cultural awareness is not enough. Promoting intercultural awareness is also a must in a diverse society. Kramsch (2014) proposes that teachers and students develop reflexivity and interpretative capacities in response to "increased complexity in the way we are to conceive of language, communication, culture and learning in an era of globalization" (p. 303). The research literature suggests that more than recognizing the essential role that culture plays in ELT, language should be seen as culture. In this way, students develop not only cultural awareness but also intercultural communication, skills that will more effectively equip them to live in a globalized world.

ELT in Mexico

Several changes followed the 2009-2010 educational reform that promoted ELT in Mexico's elementary public school system. According to the Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP), which created the National English Program in Elementary School (Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica, PNIEB, 2011), students in the public educational system must begin learning English at preschool. At this stage of education, the goal is to make students aware of a second language. This includes English in the case of Spanish speakers, or English and Spanish in the case of speakers of indigenous languages. The formal teaching of English began when students reached elementary school. However, the program is still in the initial phases of implementation. PNIEB is based on the Common European Framework of Reference, developed by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (SEP, 2011, p. 17). Using this framework, SEP (2011) created a set of national standards for second language teaching and produced a language-level certification at the national level (CENI—Certificación Nacional de Idioma) for the purpose of showing the equivalence between the national program and the international (European) one.

Regarding how culture is addressed in ELT, PNIEB states that the goal of ELT in elementary and secondary schools is as follows: to graduate students who will develop the multilingual and multicultural skills required to successfully face the challenges of a globalized world; who will construct a broad view of linguistic and cultural diversity worldwide; and who will respect their own culture and that of others (SEP, 2011, p. 9). Therefore, ELT should consider not only the linguistic aspects of language but also its cultural components. In this manner, language learning equips students with the social

functions needed to achieve the three goals previously mentioned (SEP, 2011, p. 55). Importantly, this position promotes the teaching of culture within language teaching.

Despite the fact that culture is addressed in PNIEB, SEP (2011) does not provide specific information about how it should be included in individual English programs. This step is necessary because curricula, textbooks, and syllabi are chosen and designed based on the specific concept of culture that SEP encourages English teachers to adopt in class. Without such parameters, English language programs will lack consensus on how to teach culture, thus resulting in individual educators determining how this concept will be integrated into their programs.

Even though the curriculum used by all teachers is the same on a national level, each state approaches it differently. Thus, English language textbooks vary from state to state. Prior to the education reform that updated curricula in all subject areas (SEP, 2009), the main goal of teaching a second language was simply to become familiar with its grammar. Also, despite the inclusion of statements of communicative objectives, grammar-translation and audiolingual methods remained popular.

Since the reform (SEP, 2009), the curriculum has shifted to a more comprehensive and communicative approach that emphasizes students' communicative competence and pragmatic knowledge (SEP, 2011). Education in Mexico is mandatory for children five to fourteen years old (roughly pre-school to secondary school). There are national standards for high schools, but they vary from state to state. For example, in some high schools, the teaching of English occurs during the first three semesters, but not in the last three. Given the variation in the curriculum from state to state, there is not necessarily an emphasis on the teaching of culture or on what types of culture teachers should address and how.

In addition to changes in the curriculum, language programs have also reviewed their teaching methods. In the 70s and 80s, national and state curricula espoused grammar-translation and audiolingual methods, more recently, due to globalization and the status of English as an international language, programs have been placing English instruction within an international framework. This approach emphasizes the competent use of English rather than knowledge of simple grammatical rules and vocabulary (Baumgardner, 2006).

Davies (2009) observes that one might think that universities are responsible for providing students with the level of English required for graduation, regardless of whether students have attended a public or private university. What he finds, however, is that learning outcomes tend to be much higher at private universities, while at public universities there is often little progress. He concludes that Mexican public universities are failing to provide students with all the necessary tools that would grant them access to a better future.

López (2010) also discusses problems with studying a foreign language at the university level. Problems specifically related to teaching language and culture are as follows: 1) the general lack of reflection and action at a meta-curricular level regarding how and where to insert the study of languages, 2) the lack of research on whether intercultural competence promotes interdisciplinary cooperation, and 3) the consequences of separating reading comprehension from courses focused on productive abilities. The last

point is particularly related to the view of culture that sees culture as a fifth language skill to be studied separately.

This situation is even more problematic if one considers that some of these same language students will be future language instructors. If they are taught language skills separately from each other and are not taught culture at all, or if culture is incorporated only as a context in which to teach language, the chances that they will reproduce the model they learnt is much higher. Future teachers should be introduced to a model that promotes intercultural competence and that sees culture as an integral component of language. Likewise, future teachers should learn to analyze culture critically, as opposed to addressing it superficially based on stereotypes.

When it comes to the use of textbooks in ELT, the private sector has not followed the same trend as the public education system. Although the national standards apply to both types of schools, public institutions use commercial textbooks, whose table of contents are often adapted and used as course syllabi (Baumgardner, 2006). Sayer (2012) states that this practice can be problematic because some textbooks take into consideration neither students' sociocultural contexts nor their English proficiency levels. When students' sociocultural backgrounds are not taken into consideration, teaching language as culture cannot occur.

Additionally, important differences exist between teachers in each sector. In public schools, teachers are not necessarily trained to teach English or not even proficient in the language. If they are, they may have limited access to teacher training or to workshops that would keep them abreast of the latest trends. Also, many of these teachers are not members of the Mexican Association of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages (MEXTESOL), a valuable source of knowledge. On the contrary, teachers hired by private schools usually have a bachelor's degree in the language they are teaching and/or are native speakers with a TESOL certificate. As part of their jobs, these teachers are often sent to conventions or to teacher training workshops. Moreover, materials and textbooks in private, more affluent settings tend to address communicative skills (Salazar, 2002), especially because the goals of these programs, unlike in the public schools, are often to prepare students to study abroad or to pass the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or Cambridge examinations. These important differences across institutional types suggest that ELT in Mexico often fails to consider the needs of students, the characteristics of teachers, and specific contexts. Although teaching culture is addressed more in the private sector (English teachers who work in these settings may teach the behaviors, values, and norms that exist in a particular society), this does not necessarily mean that culture is integrated with the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening).

The descriptions above have discussed the state of ELT in Mexico in public and private schools, including in universities, and suggest that culture does not have an explicit place in this instruction. Even when the importance of teaching culture in ELT is acknowledged, as in PNIEB (2011), what is missing is a better framework defining culture and guidelines for how English teachers could incorporate language as culture. The following section provides examples of how culture has been addressed in ELT in Mexico.

Culture in English Language Programs

Few studies exist on how culture is taught or integrated in ELT in Mexico. Sayer (2012) found that the teachers he observed agreed that language and culture were intertwined, but they were only able to address cultural differences sporadically. Most of the lessons he observed focused on language content, such as checking vocabulary and comprehension (p. 119). When cultural differences were addressed, the focus was on holidays, such as Halloween and Day of the Dead. This approach reflects a cognitive view of culture in which the structural aspects of language (e.g., vocabulary about Halloween) are favored over underlying beliefs and norms. In this way, culture is minimized to stereotypes, due either to teachers' lack of cultural understanding or to the lack of emphasis on culture during teacher training. This method is problematic not only because it addresses culture superficially but also because it does not foster students' interest in learning about culture on a more critical level. Ordorica (2010) studied Mexican students' motivations for learning English and found that they were interested in studying English for professional reasons, not because they wanted to learn about other cultures. It is therefore the English teacher's role to promote intercultural competence in the classroom and to make students aware of the cultural diversity that exists in the world.

In her paper, Zoreda (2005) presented a complete description of the how the inclusion of films can serve as a focus on intercultural reflection in ELT in Mexico. According to her, "the study of genre in film is particularly pertinent for illustrating changing cultural behavior, beliefs, and myths of the target culture and provoking reflection on their counterparts in the native culture" (p. 65). Importantly, this approach goes beyond comparing holidays as it encourages critical reflection on deeper issues in society that are not always easy to see. Similarly, Fernández Sesma (2008) and Reilly's (2007) studies on improving oral production in an adult EFL classroom in Mexico used culture to contextualize a task and bolster students' oral skills. These examples stem from the same philosophy of teaching culture through literary texts or adaptations in film.

Perales Escudero (2013a) provides an example of how to teach language as culture using a critical reading framework to address intercultural awareness. His findings show that this approach helps students better understand their own culture as well as another one. Through written reflections, students demonstrated changes in their definitions of U.S. culture, recognizing diversity as an important characteristic of culture and questioning their own culturally-rooted ideological positions (p. 262). In this study, culture was seen as a discourse. Similarly, in a different study, Perales Escudero (2013b) aimed to improve the critical reading skills of Mexican EFL pre-service teachers. Based on his research on Complexity Theory (CT) and Design-based research (DBR), Perales Escudero implemented a DBR intervention to help the participants read critically U.S. political opinion texts, using constructs and procedures from Systemic-Functional Linguistics and rhetoric. The findings showed that when the participants engaged in inferential comprehension, most of them made repeatedly implausible inferences about authorial positions, intentions, and targeted audiences. This study showed once again that students were critical about their own culture as well as the targeted cultures.

The examples described above are representative of the tendency to use culture only as a context within which to practice linguistic forms, a criticism pointed out earlier

(Corbett, 2003; Murphy-Lejeune, Cain, & Kramsch, 1996). However, as Mugford (2006) explains, training teachers to learn about and then teach cultural knowledge can be challenging. One reason for this is because teacher trainees favor American English due to Mexico's business and economic ties with the United States. Thus, international English, or other kinds of English, are often not presented to students which is less useful because the curriculum is not inclusive of or relevant to all students. Tapia Huerta (2007) reports on a language training program which included intercultural education for teachers. Her conclusions suggest that it can be difficult to incorporate elements from diverse cultural backgrounds within a homogeneous group of Mexican teachers who have never been directly exposed to cultures other than their own. Tapia Huerta found that bringing in speakers from other cultures, having video conferences and presentations, and gathering authentic materials from the target culture were helpful for motivation and promoted learning. However, this approach was also very difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. Other programs likely face similar challenges. In the next section, we offer pedagogical recommendations that can help ELT professionals incorporate the teaching of culture in their language teaching in Mexico.

Pedagogical Recommendations

Addressing culture in the language classroom is not an easy task. In the specific case of Mexico, ELT has mainly focused on teaching cultural stereotypes, e.g., holidays, and on using culture as a context for language teaching. In this way, culture is taught as if it were a fifth language skill; in other words, culture is seen as a separate entity from language. However, the fact that the discussion about teaching culture has gained attention among language educators is already a positive step toward the incorporation of activities that promote cultural awareness and, consequently, intercultural communication. The goal should be to adopt a more intercultural approach. To learn another culture, it is necessary to understand one's own culture first. Additionally, in an English language classroom, it is necessary to have more than one target culture in mind (Baker, 2011). The more cultures to which students are exposed, the more chances they have to negotiate meaning across cultures. However, it is not a matter of comparing cultures, but rather of understanding the reasons behind beliefs, values, and norms that constitute a particular culture. English language teachers should guide their students in going beyond superficial discussions about culture, thus avoiding stereotypes. Importantly, English learners need to understand and respect the cultural diversity that exists in this globalized world.

In the Mexican context, ELT has the potential to explore the following events as resources for the teaching of cultures: 1) the proximity between the U.S. and Mexico, 2) the increasing number of Americans living in Mexico (over a million), and 3) the significant number of returnee migrants from the U.S. (half a million between 2000 and 2010) (U.S. Department of State, 2014). These numbers illustrate the presence of American cultures in Mexico and their interaction with Mexican cultures. What follows are suggestions on how to teach culture in language classrooms utilizing these resources.

Address students' cultural backgrounds. Students' own cultures play a significant role in learning about other cultures. Kramsch (2014) states that it is fundamental to relate students' local cultures to global issues. One's own culture is often taken for granted in

that more value may be placed on the target culture than on the cultures students bring to class. Relating other cultures to local cultures is a way of raising cultural awareness and of preparing students to manage diversity when they encounter it. One example of a relevant activity would be to have students think about local writers, including how these writers represent Mexican society. As part of this activity, teachers could ascertain what students' experiences are with reading at home and at school and learn more about their favorite books. Moreover, teachers could establish links with information students learn about American writers and how they represent American society. In this way, students would make connections between Mexican and American societies. For instance, students could read *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. The teacher could address the topic of racial inequality, among others, and discuss how the book portrays this issue and how students see it in Mexican society. This activity would be designed for advanced learners. For beginning and intermediate levels, the teacher could play a movie clip of *To Kill a Mockingbird* with subtitles. With lower proficiency levels, the teacher would need to use materials that were more accessible, such as song lyrics, video/movie clips, news, and online reports. The teacher could start a guided class discussion by asking students to write about racial inequality in Mexico. Students could then report their points of view, thoughts, and personal experiences to the rest of class. This reflexive process is necessary for intercultural understanding (Kramsch, 2014). The written work would prepare students for oral discussion. The teacher's role would be to help students to critically analyze the text, to explain contradictions and similarities, to highlight perspectives not addressed, and to establish connections between the two countries.

Integrate the community with the classroom. Due to the increasing number of Americans in Mexico as well as the significant number of Mexican returnees, another idea is to transform students into "ethnographers" (Ho, 2009). Specifically, students could learn more about these groups' experiences in the U.S. and Mexico with a focus on different cultural aspects. In this type of activity, culture serves as more than a context for language practice. Instead, language is seen *as* culture because students move beyond stereotypes and become agents of their own learning. Students could interview family members, friends, and people from the community who have lived in the United States or in other English-speaking countries. Students could also interview people who know someone who lives or has lived in the U.S. The key point of these interviews is to move beyond stereotypes, such as holiday themes, and delve deeper into societal issues (e.g., climate change, transportation, labor force, and health systems) that both influence the way people live and think and also explain their values and behaviors. In this scenario, the teacher should call students' attention to the fact that there is not a "better" culture. Instead, cultures are different and need to be understood within their own contexts.

Incorporate visual and audio materials. Most teachers have already used visual and audio materials in ELT settings at some point. The challenge is to use them in a way that goes beyond providing a backdrop for practicing language skills. Importantly, these materials can be used to develop cultural and intercultural understanding (Baker, 2015). Access to visual and audio materials can be very difficult, but by using the Internet, language teachers can introduce linguistic and cultural diversity through music, movies, books, and other authentic means (e.g., menus, advertisements, and flyers). With the

help of family members, friends, and colleagues, teachers can also try to find Americans and Mexican returnees in their communities who might be able to provide materials in English. However, as Kramsch (1993) highlights, if authentic materials are not used in EFL classrooms in the same contexts in which they are used in "real" life, then they are not considered "authentic" because they do not serve their original purposes. Thus, language teachers need to create opportunities in class for students to use these materials in authentic ways. For example, a teacher who had a grocery-store flyer from the U.S. could use it to ask questions, such as about its purpose, if students have seen anything similar to it in English or in Spanish, what kind of information they typically find on a grocery-store flyer, and in which specific stores in Mexico they might find it. The next day, students could bring a flyer from a local grocery store. If the teacher had only one copy of the flyer from the U.S., he or she could make copies or project it if the school had a projector. Students could analyze the similarities and differences between the flyers and identify any elements with which they were not familiar. Depending on the flyer's date, students could research which foods are seasonal in each country. Students could also analyze the design of the flyer, as well as information about payments and discounts. This discussion would help students to locate and understand cultural information, which would go beyond simply learning vocabulary and numbers. Similar comparisons could be facilitated by using the "street view" feature in Google Maps. For instance, the teacher could give students specific locations of businesses that advertise outside their establishments or on billboards visible from the street. In this manner, students could take a virtual tour of cities and streets in different English-speaking countries.

Another related activity is the use of YouTube videos showcasing popular American minority youth, such as "KevJumba" (Taiwanese-American) and "SuperGirl" (Indian-American). These videos present non-standard views of American society and thus show pluri-cultural constructs of the U.S. There are also video channels that teach language as culture (e.g., *Speak English with Misterduncan, Real English, VOA Learning English, Teaching Channel*, and *PBS Learning Media*). These channels expose teachers and students to different varieties of English, such as American English, British English, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), among others. Through these activities, students would experience linguistic and cultural diversity while learning English and, in the process, move away from the four-skills-plus-culture approach described by Kramsch (1993). Instead, they would develop skills as they are embedded in culture. The videos mentioned above are short and include closed caption, which would help students with listening comprehension and make them ideal introductions for discussion in class. Before watching a video, the teacher could introduce the topic, asking students to pay attention to a particular scenario or to clothes, sentences, music, or anything that would be relevant for the ensuing discussion. The point is to promote critical thinking while considering both the students' context and the ones portrayed in each video. Moreover, some of the channels provide exercises for learners. Language teachers might use these to facilitate guided discussion in which students think critically about language use in specific sociocultural contexts.

Participate in English-language teaching associations. English-language teaching associations are a valuable source of information and professional development. Being a member of these organizations can help teachers formulate activities and gain access to

materials in English. Networking with colleagues is also a good opportunity to share classroom experiences and stay informed of updates in the field. In addition, members have different backgrounds in ELT and include both native and non-native speakers of English, which could expand one's awareness of the challenges that different groups face when teaching English. In Mexico, MEXTESOL is one of the largest English-language associations in the country. Further information about the association's ten local chapters (Chiapas, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Sonora Norte, Sonora Sur, Tamaulipas, Tampico, Nuevo Leon, Puebla, and Yucatan) can be found online at http://www.mextesol.org.mx. National Association of University English Professors (ANUPI) is another professional organization in Mexico. Both are affiliated with TESOL International Association.

Provide students with online platforms to facilitate English learning. Online platforms promote learner autonomy, mainly outside the classroom (Mills, 2010). Students need to be aware of their own role in the language-learning process as the time they spend in class is not usually sufficient. Both teachers and students can access online platforms on a computer or smartphone as long as they have Internet access. If they do not have access to the Internet at home or at school, Internet cafés and public libraries provide public access. Also, many online platforms are free or low-cost. They offer various learning tools, including audios and videos, social networks, and online language lessons. Students can use these resources to find language partners and thus gain direct access to native speakers. This is an important opportunity, especially for students who do not know any Americans or Mexican returnees in Mexico. Globalization has changed the way we teach and learn. Being able to communicate with people through the Internet and using this space for learning are skills that can increase students' cultural awareness and intercultural understanding (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). Teachers can even track the progress students make with online activities. Most websites are gamified platforms that make learning fun and easy. Examples include *BBC Languages, Livemocha, Busuu, and Language Share*.

Promote global knowledge. In this era of globalization, it is important to promote not only U.S. and local cultures but also other cultures (Kramsch, 2014). Addressing global knowledge in the classroom is as important as addressing local knowledge. To be an effective intercultural and global citizen, it is necessary to be able to connect local issues to global phenomena. One needs to be able to discuss topics such climate and environmental changes, poverty, labor markets, immigration, and global economic and political issues. Teachers can help students critically analyze the impact these issues have on their reality and determine what specific actions they might take to improve their own settings and, by extension, their world. Americans and Mexican returnees can likewise share information about how these issues are approached in the U.S. Finally, the Internet, newspapers, and TV news can be sources of information used in and out of class.

Conclusion and Future Implications

The relationship between language and culture is not simple, but it is important to understand, especially because teachers will form perceptions about language based on their understanding of this relationship. According to Holme (2002), teachers need to be careful not to espouse the view that cultural differences can predict and explain the

origins of students' language errors, or that understanding those differences will immediately facilitate language learning. Additionally, depending on the teaching context in Mexico—whether primary, secondary, or tertiary—it is important to understand the context and backgrounds of the students. In this way, the teaching of culture can be made relevant to their lives and needs.

The teaching of culture should be integrated within language teaching as opposed to serving simply as a context in which to focus on language. This does not mean that "high culture" (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015) should not be taught; however, this kind of culture is more visible and easier to understand. When culture is defined as norms, values, and behaviors, it presents multiple layers, which makes understanding it more complex. A language teacher can guide students through the process of critically examining the elements that constitute this concept of culture. The activities recommended above can be used by language teachers as tools and ideas to engage students in a deeper dialogue about the importance of learning culture and about how it should be incorporated in ELT in Mexico.

Further research could be done in this area. Special attention should be given to teacher training offered to public school teachers. Another focus of research could be the transnational contexts created by Mexico-U.S. border relations. For example, more Mexicans are returning to Mexico out of fear of harsher laws in the U.S.; however, these individuals take their American-born-and-raised children with them, another factor to take into account in basic education (Cortez Román, & Hamann, 2014; Tacelosky, 2013). These children are bilingual in English and Spanish but often lack the means to partake in bilingual-education programs in Mexico.

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