

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING AND ASSESSING CULTURE AND LANGUAGE IN FRENCH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In the context of a rapidly globalizing and multicultural world, developing cultural competence in students of French language in Nigeria for effective cultural and intercultural communications is crucial. This study is formed based on the result of a survey involving 48 French language teachers from Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. Through the use of questionnaire and interview, the study investigated teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and teaching of culture in French language. The results showed that while the teachers held good perceptions about the importance of teaching culture, they do not actively implement cultural teaching practices in their classrooms. This, the study revealed, was due to their lack of the knowledge of the strategies for the teaching and the assessment of culture and language in French language. The present study highlighted the effective strategies for integrating culture in the teaching of French as a foreign language in Nigerian schools. The study concluded by recommending the training of teachers on the uses of the strategies and the provisions of instructional materials for the teaching and the assessment of culture in French language. The study also suggested further studies on the factors that can impede the effective implementation of the strategies and assessment of culture in language learning.

Keywords: *Assessing, Cultural competence, French Language, Nigeria, Strategies, and Teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Modern foreign language teaching has shifted away from the traditional model where the teacher is the sole provider of cultural knowledge. Instead, teachers now act as facilitators, guiding students through the process of exploring, analyzing, and interpreting authentic materials such as texts, videos, and media (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). In this setting, students are encouraged to share insights, consider diverse perspectives, and take responsibility for their own learning journey (Moeller & Nugent, 2014). In such classrooms, learning is typically described as student-centered, lively, interactive, and collaborative. This is all to enhance the learners' cultural competence which encompasses the intra-cultural and intercultural competence. Whereas intra-cultural competence refers to the learners' ability to interact effectively with people from their own country who of course have different cultures and behaviours, the intercultural competence is the ability of the learners to interact effectively with people from other countries. Studies on intercultural competence often depict learners as active explorers or seekers of knowledge, similar to anthropologists, who investigate and engage with cultural topics both inside and outside the classroom (Furstenberg, 2010a).

According to the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), Byram and colleagues (2002) stress the need for teachers to cultivate curiosity and a spirit of inquiry, as culture is constantly evolving. They advocate for an open classroom atmosphere where learners can critically compare aspects of their own culture with that of the target culture, such as examining travel guides from both contexts. Rather than supplying predetermined answers, the teacher's role is to pose open-ended questions that encourage students to uncover cultural differences on their own. This approach fosters an open-minded attitude and positions students as active participants in the learning process, helping to reduce cultural bias. Unfortunately, classroom

observation reveals that this approach has not yet been adopted in many French language classrooms, including those in Nigeria, at all levels of education. Culture and civilization are taught as standalone courses without the aim of fostering students' cultural competence. This context sets the stage for exploring effective strategies for teaching and assessing culture in foreign language education within Nigerian schools. It is anticipated that if educators adopt and implement these strategies, they will significantly boost students' cultural competence and spark greater interest in learning the language.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on the sociocultural theory of cognitive development proposed by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky in 1978 and the theory of communicative competence coined by Dell Hymes in the 1966. Vygotsky postulates that culture plays a determining role in the cognitive development of the child. He argued that a child cannot understand the culture on his own except through the help of a "More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is relevant to the present study as it offers a fundamental and integrated approach to language teaching, emphasizing the importance of social interactions, culture, and progressive pedagogical support in the learning process (McLeod, 2024). Dell Hymes introduces the notion of communicative competence, which encompasses the ability to use language appropriately and effectively according to the requirements of the social and cultural context (Lillis, 2006). This approach is key in foreign language teaching, where the goal is not just grammar transmission but developing learners' ability to communicate effectively. The communicative approach supports this by promoting interactive activities using different strategies and authentic materials. It is especially important in teaching French as a foreign language (FLE), where understanding cultural nuances is vital. In addition, it helps in the development of intercultural skills, making learners aware of the target culture's communicative practices and facilitating their social integration.

The Role of Multicultural Awareness in Foreign Language Teaching

In today's diverse and multicultural society, it is more crucial than ever for educators at all levels, primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions to adopt culturally responsive teaching practices. Diversity now goes beyond race and ethnicity to include variations in religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and language background (Drexel University School of Education, 2025).

In addition, cultural activities sustain students' interest especially, in language learning and promote cross-cultural understanding (Simire, 2019). Students learn better when what is learnt is familiar and fun. Without cultural instruction, students may use the language but lack social appropriateness. As language and culture evolve, continual exploration of cultural practices in foreign language classroom becomes a necessity. Hence, culture should be well integrated in foreign language learning. Promoting awareness and creating a personal connection with diverse cultures in the classroom can prevent students from developing prejudices later in life. It allows them to empathize with people different from themselves since they are more aware of the experiences someone of a different race or cultural group may face.

Effective Strategies for integrating Culture into Language Teaching

An effective integration of culture into language teaching enriches the learning experience by connecting language with real-life contexts, values, and worldviews. Language teaching strategies are the conscious techniques and methods teachers employ to facilitate language learning and enhance learner engagement. They aim to optimize the acquisition and comprehension of a new language, focusing on diverse aspects like memory, cognitive processes, and communication (Study.com, 2025). This section explores practical strategies that can help students to develop both linguistic skills and cultural understanding, making language learning more meaningful and engaging.

Authentic Materials

There is no single best method to teach language and culture together, but there are some general principles and strategies that can guide teachers and learners. For example, using authentic materials and tasks is a great way to engage learners in meaningful activities. Encouraging reflection and comparison helps learners develop intercultural competence, while fostering interaction and collaboration can help them practice language and culture. Moreover, incorporating culture into assessment is a great way to measure learning outcomes while enhancing the learning process. Authentic materials can include texts, audio, video, or images produced by native speakers for real purposes and audiences (Singhal & Gulati, 2020). Peterson & Coltrane (2003) maintained that these resources can be tailored to suit students' language levels, enabling even beginners to engage with authentic audiovisual content and explore cultural practices such as greeting customs. Learners can be given specific tasks to complete while engaging with these materials such as filling in charts, tables, or diagrams. This can be followed by class discussions that examine the cultural values, norms, and behaviors of the target culture, including non-verbal elements like eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, and interpersonal space. Students may then describe these observed behaviors and develop appropriate communication strategies in the target language. In addition, it is important to introduce and practice culturally relevant expressions such as collocations (Kovács, 2017) as well as proverbs and idioms but not in isolation, contextually. These can be achieved through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and by presenting students as cultural resources.

Activities should encourage learners to engage with language and culture in meaningful, real-world contexts. Reflection and comparison exercises might involve students examining their own language and culture or contrasting them with those of the target language. Collaborative and interactive tasks could include joining online discussions or working on a community project with a classmate or a group from the target culture. For assessment, students might develop a multimedia presentation or participate in a role-play or scenario-based evaluation (Drexel University School of Education, 2025).

Teach Students to value and respect Cultures

Students should be encouraged to value and respect both their own cultural backgrounds and those of their peers. Teachers can support this by assigning activities that allow students to explore and share their heritage. Such assignments help deepen self-awareness and promote appreciation of cultural diversity within the classroom. Presenting family traditions and cultural practices can serve as effective icebreakers and broaden students' worldviews. Creating a safe and open environment for these discussions encourages empathy and understanding. Teachers should also educate students on the difference between celebrating a culture and appropriating it. Developing respectful and mature ways of talking about cultural differences is an essential skill for life beyond the classroom (Drexel University School of Education, 2025).

Give Students Freedom and Flexibility

According to authors in Drexel University School of Education (2025), teachers often feel like they need to take on a strict, authoritative approach when it comes to managing their classroom. The most valuable lessons are often learned through a student's own experiences, so giving them some freedom in the course encourages more connection to the curriculum. They advised that students should be allowed to read and present their own materials that relate to the fundamental lesson so they can approach the topic from their own perspective. A teacher should act as a facilitator and encourage conversation and healthy debate between diverse opinions. Group assignments are also a great way to expose students to diverse perspectives, allowing them to work together to explore

and solve a problem (Drexel University School of Education, 2025). Communication is made easy when students have versatile knowledge. Discussing cultural practices in foreign language classroom, enriches students' vocabulary for easy communication.

Kovács (2017) underscores the importance of teaching and practicing these structures during lessons. Phrases like "to wash the dishes" or "to make friends" do not lend themselves to direct translation and require repeated use and memorisation. Idiomatic expressions pose an even greater challenge, as their meanings cannot be deduced from the individual words they contain and are deeply rooted in cultural context. According to Peterson and Coltrane (2003), introducing proverbs in the target language should be accompanied by a comparison with those from the students' native language. They argue that proverbs offer insights into cultural values, reveal potential stereotypes or misconceptions, and encourage critical reflection.

Kovács (2017) emphasizes the importance of preparing future language teachers to establish clear goals for incorporating cultural content into the curriculum and to design cultural activities that align with these objectives. However, teachers should not be expected to create all instructional materials from scratch. Rather, they should be trained to critically assess existing textbooks and select those that most effectively support not only the development of the four core language skills listening, reading, writing, and speaking but also the integration of culture as a "fifth" essential skill.

Use of cultural materials in the language classroom

In order for students to understand that the foreign language culture (C2) is distinct from their own culture (C1), they need to actively interact with authentic materials such as the afore-mentioned, and not just be passively exposed to them. For example, playing a C2 song as students enter may set the mood for the class, but does not provide meaningful immersion in the target culture. For this exposure to be truly beneficial, it is necessary to accompany these materials with additional discussions or activities, allowing students to develop a deeper understanding of the target culture (Bilash, 2011). Some resources, such as advertisements, films, music videos, and newsletters, which are both visual and dynamic, can present the culture in a clear and accessible way. These materials facilitate discussions about how the culture is represented and the differences between L1 and L2 cultures. Other media, such as photographs and images, are more complex to use effectively to illustrate culture in action according to Bilash (2011).

Effective use of Images and Photographs to Teach Culture

In her exploration of using visuals and photographs in language instruction, Bilash (2011) proposed various methods to enhance their cultural impact. Students frequently encounter images that support different learning goals, such as vocabulary development, prompts for speaking activities, and photos of regions where the target language is spoken, as well as textbook illustrations. Although making these visuals accessible is important, their cultural context is often neglected. For instance, textbook images are typically used to clarify or reinforce concepts from the lesson, but they rarely explain the cultural meanings behind them.

To bridge this gap, Bilash (2011) suggested that teachers should prompt students to analyze and interpret these visuals, encouraging them to consider the cultural messages they may convey. This can be done by asking simple guiding questions like, "What do you think is happening in this image?" Such activities promote critical thinking about the culture depicted and help learners engage more deeply with the target language and its cultural background.

Assessing Cultural Competence in a Foreign Language Classroom

In a foreign language classroom, assessing cultural competence plays a key role in measuring learners' ability to navigate intercultural environments. This includes understanding the social norms, values, traditions, and perspectives specific to the target culture. According to Petitjean (1984) in Zarate (1986), assessing is to assess the degree of success of learning by relating it to a pre-established standard by establishing the possibility of comparing the performances of one

learner to another, within the same level of education. The major difficulty is finding the appropriate measurement instruments to judge cultural competence in a foreign language. In addition, assessing these skills poses challenges, as they are often subjective, multidimensional, and contextual. This session explores potential approaches to integrating them into language learning.

Assess assessments

In the area of assessment, teachers can use multiple measures to assess student learning and acquisition of knowledge. Students should be invited to share knowledge in multiple ways which include not only traditional tests but low-stakes quizzes, quick writes, homework, responses to class questions, and group discussions, as well as authentic assessments such as life history interviews, personal stories, autobiographical journaling, and portfolios to demonstrate and personalize learning. Singhal (2020) argued that students should be allowed to accumulate grade points in a number of different ways, not just through midterms and a final. Finally, teachers should clearly communicate the purpose of assignments and activities, and the knowledge and skills that will be gained by doing these (Singhal, 2020). Here are some key steps to assess cultural competence in a foreign language classroom as proposed by some authors:

Define the cultural competences to be assessed:

Identify the elements of cultural competence: attitudes (open-mindedness, curiosity), knowledge (customs, values, history, modes of communication), and skills (intercultural interaction) Byram (1997). Here are categories of cultural knowledge as given by Weidman-Koop (2025):

- i. Communication in a cultural context: knowing what to say and how to say it in various social situations. Knowledge of cultural styles, variations and codes is fundamental to communication. This involves not only verbal communication but also nonverbal communication, that is, gestures, proxemics, facial expressions, body movements and everything that is in the domain of "paralanguage".
- ii. Value system: the supreme and secondary values that are specific to the target culture and whose knowledge facilitates the understanding of the external manifestations found within this culture such as social patterns, institutions and artistic expressions.
- iii. Social conventions: these are the informal patterns, visible in the collective behavior of the members of a given culture and which include phenomena such as, for example, social hierarchy and social mobility; relationships that exist according to sex (or gender), age group, or ethnic group; counterculture; etiquette; the manner of writing a letter, the ritual of meals; or signs and postings.
- iv. Social institutions: these are the more formal structures of society. They are often governed by laws or by an official status and include religion, education, social security, artistic and scientific organizations.
- v. Geography and environment
- vi. History
- vii. Arts and literature

Integrate cultural objectives into the learning programme:

Insert specific objectives related to cultural competences into lesson plans, in relation to linguistic aspects (Council of Europe, 2001).

Use a variety of assessment tools:

- Class observations: Record learners' interactions during intercultural activities.
- Case studies and role plays: Assess their ability to respond to real-life situations in the target culture.
- Reflective journals: Ask learners to write about their intercultural experiences and perceptions (Deardorff, 2006).

Design formative and summative assessments:

- Formative: Incorporate ongoing tasks, such as guided discussions on cultural aspects or media analyses.
- Summative: Propose final projects such as a presentation or essay on a specific cultural topic.

Adapt the assessment to the learners' levels:

- Use differentiated criteria according to the CEFR level (A1 to C2) to adjust the complexity of cultural tasks.
- Example: For an A1 level, assess the recognition of simple cultural greetings; for a C1 level, assess their ability to debate on an intercultural topic.

Encourage self-assessment and reflection

- Provide self-assessment grids to help learners identify their strengths and weaknesses in intercultural interactions.

Validate the results with regular feedback

- Organize collective or individual feedback to reinforce learning and correct cultural misunderstandings.

These steps allow for a consistent and progressive assessment of cultural competence, taking into account learners' needs and educational objectives. Fonseca-Greber (2010) posited that it is vital for teachers to first guide their students to reflect on their preconceived ideas and misunderstandings of the target culture. Then, students will be open to the possibility of self-awareness and identity transformation in addition to learning the language content. Therefore, alternative forms of assessment, such as self-assessment, reflective journals, diaries, peer review, interviews, and portfolios are preferable ways to assess intercultural communicative competence. Examples of instructional ideas to foster intercultural communicative competence in the world language classroom are National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL)-ACTFL Can-Do statements (ACTFL, 2017) and the Observe State Explore Evaluate (OSEE) Tool (Deardorff, 2006).

Example of 'Observe State Explore Evaluate' (OSEE) Assessment Tool

The OSEE Tool.

Moeller & Nugent (2014) believed that world language educators were no longer the source of transmitting target culture information. Instead, the educator's role is to facilitate the learners to actively explore, discover, analyze, and evaluate meaningful information through primary and authentic materials (Byram, Bribkova & Starkey, 2002). Moller & Osborn (2014) recommended the OSEE tool (Deardorff, 2009) to be used in world language classrooms for a multitude of reasons. First, it is a way for language learners to explore their own attitudes and assumptions of the target culture in a non-judgmental way. Second, it allows the learners to gain a deeper understanding of the products (i.e., what people have), practices (i.e., what people do), and perspectives (i.e., what people value) of the target culture through interpreting authentic material (Van Houten, 2012). Therefore, the OSEE Tool is used in world language classrooms to promote intercultural communicative competence; however, teachers must first understand how to implement the tool with fidelity.

The OSEE Tool consists of four stages; *Observe* what is happening, *State* what is happening, *Explore* possible explanations for what is happening, and *Evaluate* the most likely explanation (Deardorff, 2009). In the initial Observe state, learners observe actual products or images and videos of those products and practices from the target culture. They may draw what they observed in a simple sketch to demonstrate engagement. In the State phase, learners state objectively what they noticed or what is happening in the previous stage. They may orally share or write down their objective observation of the products and practices, such as the shape, color, patterns, or sizes. In the Explore

portion, learners explore possible explanation for the perspectives behind the cultural products and practices they have examined. Up to this point, the instructor's role is to facilitate the conversation, and not to provide answers or reveal their expertise.

In the final phase of the OSEE process *Evaluate* students use authentic resources to conduct further research, assessing the cultural perspectives or underlying beliefs and values connected to the cultural products and practices they have studied. Depending on their language proficiency, learners can express their findings either in the target language or in their native language, through both written assignments and class discussions. Through this reflective process, the OSEE Tool supports learners in building both linguistic and cultural knowledge while also encouraging them to examine their own assumptions and potential stereotypes as they interpret authentic materials (Deardorff, 2009).

This study presents several important implications for education. Firstly, teacher preparation programs should incorporate cultural components such as courses in intercultural communication to help future educators develop intercultural awareness and competence. Both aspiring and practicing teachers should be exposed to models that integrate language and culture instruction and be encouraged to experiment with innovative approaches to teaching culture. As teachers deepen their understanding and confidence in this area, they will be better equipped to weave cultural elements into their language lessons. Professional development programs can also help educators recognize the potential of experiential learning opportunities, like cultural exchange projects, to nurture intercultural competence. Future research might explore the factors that influence how teachers teach and assess both cultural and language learning.

Example of Culture Teaching and Assessment

Level: Beginners (A1)

Topic: How do you prefer to dress?

General Objective: Say what you like to wear at different moments

Specific Objectives: 1. Say what you are wearing. 2. Shopping for clothing. 3. Mention some of the cloths you have. 4. Describe what you wear at different moments/occasion. 5. Describe the traditional wears of some tribes in Nigeria. 6. How do the French dress different from Nigerians.

Cultural materials: Videos on shopping for clothing and on describing what you are wearing (the ones with translation may be preferable especially for beginners and to help the teacher avoid writing too much on the board); Pictures of clothing. Teacher can download the images from the internet.

Objective 1: Say what you are wearing

i Listen/Observe: Example of a dialogue (French Clothing Vocabulary/SuperEasy YouTube)

Marie : Qu'est-ce que vous portez aujourd'hui ?

Janette : Ehm—Un pull, un legging, des baskets euh--- des chaussettes (a sweater, leggings, sneakers uh---socks, des sous-vêtements, Et voilà---(underwear, And that's all- - -

Marie : Et comme accessoires ?

Janette : -un sac. Et puis, le chariot pour les courses, mais alors, voilà- - - (A bag, and then, the shopping cart, but well, you know- - -)

Marie : Et des bijoux, peut-être ? (And some jewelry, may be?)

Nan, j'ai rien- - -ah si, si, bah j'ai (No, I don't have any- - - ah, yes, yes, well I have) mes bracelets, mais ça c'est en tissu, et c'est tout. (My bracelets, but they're made of fabric, and that's all).

ii. Say what you hear or see.

The teacher asks the students to say what they heard and saw in the video.

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Learn language structure

Vocabulary

Using different methods of teaching vocabulary, the teacher guides the students to learn to pronounce well the new words; Spell and Master the words. The teacher adds more vocabulary on clothing to the list in the dialogue (Example: French clothing words-LearnFrenchvocabulary online-French with Tama).

Some Classroom-Based Assessments:

Multiple-Choice Questions: These questions assess vocabulary by requiring students to select the correct definition or usage of a word.

Matching Exercises: Students match words with their meanings, synonyms, or antonyms.

Fill-in-the-Blanks: Students fill in blanks with appropriate words in sentences.

Word Association: Students provide words related to a given word.

Contextual Usage Tests: Students use words correctly in sentences or other contextual situations.

Writing Tasks: Students write about target vocabulary words.

Grammar

The teacher through another video that describes clothing guides the students to learn how to make sentences on clothing.

Listening For Comprehension

Teacher guides the students through listening exercises using one of the passages he used to teach the students or a new one still on clothing and to answer questions orally and in written

Loud Reading and Reading for Comprehension

The teacher guides the students to read aloud and silently, then answer questions from the text orally and in written.

Assessment of written and oral skills

This can be in form of composition writing, role-play and simulation.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Assessment of Cultural Knowledge:

Example: Name some 3 traditional attires in French language. Mention some dressings common with the French. Arrange into traditional and modern wears.

Assessment of Cultural Attitudes:

Example: Give some dressing codes for Nigerian university undergraduate males and females students and give reasons for your choices. Students can discuss this in groups. They can discuss in the local language or in the target language depending on their linguistic level.

In summary, the study disclosed teachers' inadequate knowledge on the integration of culture in language teaching as a result of lack of proper training. The study highlighted strategies for teaching and assessing language and culture in foreign language. The study laid emphasis on the use of authentic materials; on encouraging reflection and comparison as well as on interaction and collaboration in both the teaching and the assessment of language and culture for the development of students' cultural competence.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, further research should be conducted to examine factors that can impede or promote the effective use of the strategies for the integration of culture in French language teaching in Nigerian schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future language teachers should establish clear goals for incorporating cultural content into the curriculum and design cultural activities that align with these objectives through the use of authentic

materials and different assessment strategies. Based on the findings, the study recommends the training of future-teachers on the strategies for teaching and assessing of language and culture in French language. School administrators should encourage the teachers in their efforts to teach language and culture by providing them with the necessary teaching materials especially, audio-visual materials. Classrooms should be powered with electricity for the use of audio-visuals in the classroom.

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