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An Investigation in the Usefulness of Travel Blogs as an Autonomous Learning Tool to Foster EFL Learners' Cultural Awareness

The case of Master One LMD students at Biskra University

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Dedication

To *The Almighty Creator who made me;*
my beloved prophet who guided me;
my dear mother who raised me;
my esteemed father who nourished me;
my darling sister who encouraged me;
my greatest brothers who supported me;
and my beloved ones who remembered me;

I love you all.

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Abstract

The emergence of web 2.0 technologies has created new challenges and opportunities in the field of foreign language learning. Among all web 2.0 tools, travel blogs can be considered the most well-known one. The present study was an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of travel blogs as an autonomous learning tool outside the classroom to foster EFL learners' cultural awareness. EFL learners cannot communicate the language appropriately due to the lack of cultural awareness. Thus, it is hypothesized if EFL learners use travel blogs and become independent learners, they will enhance their cultural knowledge and become better language communicators. Our investigation aims to demonstrate the importance of cultural awareness and explore the causes behind EFL learners' poor cultural background, and eventually suggest a solution which is "travel blogs". The nature of this research and the testing of the hypothesis require these research tools. First, we designed and administered a questionnaire to 25 Master One LMD students of English at the Department of Foreign Languages at Biskra University. Second, an interview was conducted with five teachers who actually teach courses involved in our research and who are experienced in the field of study. Finally, a focus group was conducted with 21 students of Master One. After analysing the data obtained from students' questionnaire, teachers' interview, and the focus group, our research hypothesis is confirmed and some recommendations and solutions are suggested.

Keywords: culture, cultural awareness, blogs, travel blogs, EFL learners, learner's autonomy.

List of abbreviations and acronyms

EFL: English as a foreign language.

TC: Target culture.

NC: Native culture.

FL : Foreign culture.

ICT : Information and communication technologies.

WWW : World Wide Web.

Q: question.

RQ: Research questions.

RH: Research hypothesis.

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المخلص

General Introduction

General Introduction

Introduction

Learning a foreign language is not anymore a matter of acquiring that language. However, it became more about helping learners' acquiring culture, values, knowledge and education which can be used in their life beyond the classroom. Nowadays, globalization is irreversible and the internet is used to gather and connect people and share information worldwide. Multimedia tasks have become an important part of everyday life. At the same time, the use of new technological tools in learning a foreign language culture has been a well-established practice throughout the last decades.

In some ways, travel blogs are making a very constructive contribution by presenting sympathetic and accurate portrayals and images of distant places and people. Everybody can claim that they know a great deal about places they have never visited or cultures that they have never encountered. All in all, EFL learners' should be given their opportunities to know more about the target language culture and develop their communicative competence outside the classroom rather than just use it in few situations controlled by teachers.

As a matter of fact, EFL learners have unsatisfactory knowledge of the cultural background of the foreign language. This lack of cultural awareness causes difficulties in their language proficiency and communication. The present study is concerned with the analysis of the effectiveness of travel blogs in enhancing Master One students cultural awareness.

The present study ensures the effective relationship between cultural awareness and travel blog. It reveals that EFL learners are aware of the importance of having cultural background and be autonomous in their learning process; however, their background

knowledge of the English culture is unsatisfactory. The analysis of the data collected demonstrates that EFL learners would develop rich background information of the target culture if they use travel blogs as an autonomous learning strategy outside the boundaries of the classroom. Thus, our research aims were achieved and our hypothesis was confirmed.

Statement of the Problem

Foreign language learning is no doubt an intercultural subject matter and developing cultural awareness has been a constant challenge to most EFL learners because less importance is given to the teaching of the target language culture; thus, they face difficulties communicating real life situations appropriately. It is important to consider that if a person lacks socio-cultural knowledge relevant to the target language, a person can hardly use a language accurately and appropriately and be an effective intercultural communicator. In this respect, the present study suggests the use of travel blogs as an autonomous learning tool outside the classroom to develop EFL learners' cultural awareness and to enhance their communicative competence as well. This type of blogs provide appropriate exposure to the target language culture, stimulate learners' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and encourage empathy towards its people.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to contribute in the development of the cultural awareness of English language learners through the use of travel blogs. That is, it aims to investigate the role of blogging as an autonomous learning strategy (tool) to enhance the cultural awareness and the communicative competence in EFL context.

More specifically, this study aims at:

1. Raising EFL learners' cultural awareness beyond the classroom.
2. Seeking to develop the autonomous learning strategy outside the EFL class.
3. Suggesting a new learning strategy which is travel blogs.

Research Questions

Based on what has been stated in the issue, this study investigates these research questions:

RQ1: Are EFL learners culturally competent and aware? If no, what are the reasons behind the lack of cultural knowledge?

RQ2: Are EFL learners more autonomous nowadays?

RQ3: Does the use of travel blogs foster EFL learners' cultural awareness?

Hypothesis

The present research is based on the following hypothesis that shall be verified through this study:

RH: We hypothesise that with the help of travel blogs, students will be able to enhance their cultural awareness autonomously and thus, develop their communicative competence and language proficiency.

Significance of the Study

In our research, we attempt to shed light on an important issue that of improving the cultural awareness of EFL learners' through being exposed to English travel blogs. Students must be aware of the fact that being exposed to such kind of blogs will bring them

closer to the target language culture and equip them with the necessary ingredients to develop their language proficiency.

Methodology

To demonstrate that the assumption made in this dissertation is built on a solid ground, and to accomplish the research aims a mixed method is adopted. This research is conducted qualitatively through a questionnaire that is designed to a sample selected randomly that is composed of 25 Master One LMD students of English at Biskra University. The data collected will be organized and analysed using statistics and interpreted in a descriptive way. We have opted for Master One students because they may have better experience with the use of Internet and technology. An interview is conducted with five teachers who actually teach courses involved in our present research and who have much experience in the area of study; moreover, a focus group was conducted with 21 Master One students in order to get more insights and information related to our research.

Delimitation of the Study

In this study, a simple random sample is used because most of students learn nearly in the same conditions: level/ age, social status, cultural background, and they follow the same educational curriculum too. Moreover, because of the limited period of time for the study, the variables were treated following the mixed method rather than the experimental one. Additionally, the lack of laboratories, equipment, and internet access also led to the choice of such method.

Research Structure

This research is served into two main parts: the theoretical part and the fieldwork. The former include two chapters, which are devoted for studying the two variables. The first

chapter focuses on culture, its definition, elements, characteristics, culture shock, in addition to cultural awareness and its importance to EFL learners. The second chapter; however, focuses on the second variable, which is travel blogs and learners' autonomy. The third chapter covered the analysis, description, and findings of the data accumulated from the students' questionnaire, teachers' interview, and the focus group.

Literature Review

Developing cultural awareness in the foreign language context is considered one of the difficulties that encounters several students. However, nowadays the handy-dandy internet is packed with all types of information about cultures from all over the world. Sun (2013) emphasise the importance of culture in the foreign language learning. Since the main aim of learning a foreign language is to know about the traditions, beliefs and customs of the speech community and to be competent for communication with the foreign language speakers.

Several people and researchers advocate the use of new media tools such as blogs and precisely travel blogs to foster EFL learners' cultural awareness. New media are "transforming communication across cultures" (Shuter, 2012, p. 219) and among those new media which enable communication across boundaries of time and geography are blogs (Shuter, 2012). Other researchers advocates the idea that bloggers can play the role of citizen journalist, working as publisher, creator of online content and distributor of that content (Bowman & Willis, 2003).

Many researchers and practitioners involved in the field have advocated in favour the use of blog technology to foster cross cultural communication and awareness (e.g. Carney, 2007, Ducate & Lomicka, 2008, Elola & Oskoz, 2008, Lee, 2009). The research

findings have showed that blogs afford learners the opportunity to gain cultural knowledge from various perspectives.

In the same vein, Pfister and Soliz (2011) found that being exposed to multiple views, various ways of doing and seeing the world are crucial ways for understanding and building intercultural skills. As Freeman and Brett (2012) asserted that “blogger’s posts are a personal interpretation of their experiences, thereby revealing their interests and providing frequent insight into the communities in which they participate”(p.1033).

Additionally, Sattar (2015) claimed that blogging facilitates the learning process through exploring other blogs and the learner can learn more about other countries, cultures and the people who blog to them. By participating as an active reader of various blogs, foreign language learners gain the insider’s perspective on different cultural matters and topics.

In conclusion, most of the previous related research findings have shed light on our understanding of the effectiveness of blogs as a teaching learning tool in the academic context. However, the current study attempts to focus more on promoting cultural learning through the use of Web 2.0 technologies (travel blogs) which will bring new dimension to online learning beyond the boundaries of the EFL classes.

Chapter One

**An Over View of Culture and Cultural
Awareness**

Chapter One

An overview of Culture and Cultural Awareness

Introduction

Culture shapes our behaviours and thoughts, and often does so with a heavy hand. It is culture that determines the social dos and don'ts. How do we as, learners and teachers, improve communication with different people from different cultures and social backgrounds? One of the serious problems that most EFL learners wrestled with is how to have or foster cultural awareness and be communicatively competent. Learning about other cultures will increase your global depth and your communication skills. If you actually know the reasoning behind why someone is the way he is in terms of language, attitudes, dress, religion...etc, you inherently garner greater cultural understanding.

In line with that, the present chapter sheds light on the concept of culture and demonstrates some of its important characteristics and key elements. Moreover, it attempts to highlight some theories and models which contribute in the understanding and development of different cultures and cultural awareness. In addition, it investigates the relationship of language and communication. This chapter studies also the concepts of cultural awareness, culture shock, and acculturation. Finally, it reviews and spot light on the interconnectedness relationship of language and culture.

Culture

For many years, culture has been the main concern or the subject matter of several researchers, ethnographic, anthropologists, social scientists, and psychologists. Due to its complexity, the concept of culture is a very difficult term to define, and one single definition may not be sufficient and comprises all the aspects that culture entails. In other

terms, culture is undoubtedly an ambiguous, inclusive and broad term which covers an open wide range of dimensions.

Culture in the view of different scholars

As we have mentioned before, culture is a notably uneasy term to define and it was viewed from different perspectives; that sometimes many scholars from the same discipline look at it from different angles. Byran (1989) declared “The result is a multiplicity of definitions which show that culture has resisted any kind of agreement among scholars from different disciplines”

As a starting point, the origins of the word culture are frequently supposed to be the Latin term “*Cultura*”, derived from the verb “*colere*”; this means “to cultivate”. The term culture is used particularly in relation to the process of tending animals and crops. However, within time, this meaning evolved especially in the early sixteenth century, when culture began to contain the process of social development and human intellectual movement.

Later on, culture shifted to include new meanings; as the entire body of arts, and after that it started to refer to “a total way of life, intellectual and spiritual, material” (William, 1958,p.xvi). Accordingly to some extent, it would be logical to believe that the complicated history of the term culture added in a way or another in the complexity and diversity of its meanings.

Generally speaking, the word culture is often divided into two main categories: culture with big “**C**” and culture with small “**c**”. Richards & Schmidt (2002, p. 138) declared that the former involves arts and literature and the latter includes values, everyday lifestyles, beliefs. (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 138).

From an anthropological perspective, Edward Taylor (1871) sees culture as the sum total of abilities, habits, and qualities that a person learns from the society in which he/she is a part of, and therefore, the social group is the most important source of any culture. Taylor (1871, p .01) argued “That complex whole which involves beliefs, knowledge, art, customs, moral, law and any other habits and capacities acquired by a person as a member of a social group”.

Moreover, Kramsch (1998) viewed culture as “a shared system of standards for believing, perceiving, acting and evaluating”. According to her, these principles are shared by people who identify themselves as a part and members of a particular social group, or society and who also share common imaginings, common social space, and history. Members of a given social group acquire and learn these standards through everyday interactions, and reinforce them also through social organizations such as, the family, place of work, school, etc... (kramsch, 1998, p. 10).

Geertz (1993) highlighted the interconnectedness and inseparability of culture and language. He argues:

Culture is historically transmitted model of perceptions characterized in symbols, a complex of inherited conceptions and meanings expressed and showed in a symbolic form by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and improve their knowledge concerning attitudes and behaviours towards life (Geert, 1973,p. 89).

Thus, he puts emphasis on the historical heritage and culture transmission across different generations of a particular social group. Accordingly, language is considered as a crucial tool to transmit culture.

In general, the study of culture is developed in different domains such as, Anthropological, Ethnography, and cultural studies. On the basis of what has been stated before, culture can be defined as the specific and general body of common knowledge including; beliefs, way of life, behaviours, norms, traditions, values that is learned or acquired by members of society. This knowledge permits to interact successfully, and to behave appropriately.

Some Key Characteristics of Culture

Culture has five basic characteristics which are shared by all cultures in the world. The following are the most important characteristics of culture that are stated by Damen's (as cited in Thu, 2010)

Culture is learned. We do not inherit culture, which means it is not biological. Much of learning about culture process is unconscious; we actually learn culture from peers, families, media, institutions and this process is called enculturation. All human beings have basic needs or what is known by biological needs as sleep, food, and sex. However, our way to fulfil those needs differ cross-culturally. Therefore, culture is captured as knowledge (scientific discoveries and objects such as achievements of arts.)

Culture is shared. Since we share culture with other people or with members of our society, we are capable to behave and to act in socially felicitous ways also to predict how others will behave and act. Regardless of the shared nature of culture, we cannot consider that culture is the same or homogeneous. So, culture is shared when the following take place; migration, trade, tourism, conquest, changes of religious and/or political system.

Culture is based on symbols. A symbol is a mark, sign, or word (something) that is regarded as or used for representing something else. Symbols differ cross-culturally and they are arbitrary. Symbols only have meanings when the members of a society agree on

their use. Money, art and language are all symbols and language is the most essential symbolic part of culture. So, culture is symbolic that enables individuals to explain, create and record new information and ideas.

Culture is integrated. This is related to holism or to the different parts and components of culture being interrelated. All elements of a culture are connected to each other and to really understand a culture, one should master and know about all of its aspects and components not only some of them.

Culture is dynamic. The word “dynamic” refers to the changeability, which simply indicates that cultures change and interact. Due to the fact that most cultures interact and exchange symbols and ideas with other cultures, as a result they influence each other. All cultures in the world change and if not, they would have difficulties adapting to the changing environments. And because cultures are coordinated (integrated) if one element from the system changes, it is important that the whole system have to adjust.

Elements of Culture

The culture concept is often easier to understand by description rather than by definition. Most human organizations if not all of them possess culture. Culture can be divided into two divisions; material culture and non-material culture as mentioned by Triandis (1972) and (cited in Shaules, 2007 p, 40). The former includes buildings, art, jewellery, weapon, and all the man mad tools. Thus, material culture includes the objects and the technology which is required to use them that individuals create and utilize. However, non-material culture includes the abstract side of culture, it consists of a groups’ ways of thinking (values, beliefs, etc.) and patterns of behaviours (gestures, language, and other kinds of social interaction).

Language. Perhaps the most important aspect of culture is language. It is an abstract system of symbols and meanings that every culture has, we use language to convey meanings and communicate with other people and it is probably the most basic and complex element of culture at the same time. Shaules (2007) declared that Language is critical to the life of humans and important for cultural development. It gives individuals the capacity to exchange understandings and assumptions about the past and enhance common perceptions related to the future. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, language does not only express our perceptions and thinking but also contributes to shape them. The “descriptive term” which we use can and influence how we see ourselves, other people, and other objects.

Values. According to shaules, values are collective concepts of what is good, bad, desirable, proper, improper, etc. They influence peoples’ behaviour; we internalize social values and behave accordingly. Thus, they are criteria by which we evaluate others values that change over time. Shaules (2007, p. 57-85) declares “values reflects a cultural groups’ definition of good and bad and serve as criteria to choose between alternatives..... Values define how one wants to behave”. Religion is a crucial source of values, for instance, integrity is an important value in the Muslim societies.

Norms. Cultural norms are standards of behaviours that every society establishes. They are expectations or rules related to behaviours, which develop out of values of certain social group. Norms come into different kinds of ways, either formally or informally. Formal norms are written and sever, this could be a law, and for example, the law in our society is against murder. Informal norms are not written down, however; they are understood such as customs, i.e., shaking hands cited in YouTube (WPSsociology, 2016). Shaules (2007) stated that Norms, whether they are formal or informal; direct the human behaviour to be more appropriate. Also norms can be divided into Mores and Folkways,

the former are necessary for the welfare of society and the latter are norms which govern everyday behaviours.

Going back to the idea of folkways and mores, each society has sanctions that either help us to encourage those behaviours or help us to inhibit them. Sanctions are penalties and rewards for conduct concerning social norms, they can be positive, such as; pay raises, words of gratitude and they can be negative also, such as; fines, threat, and imprisonment.

Rituals. A Ritual is a universal characteristic and part of social human life and existence. Just as one cannot imagine a society without exchange or language, one would be similarly hard-pressed to envision a society without rituals. Rapport (1999, p. 24) declared that ritual is “the performance of less or more invariable sequences, formal utterances and acts not totally encoded by the performance”. Rituals change from one country, culture to another.

Artifacts. They include the concrete things which have specific symbolism for a culture; shaules (2007) stated that artifacts are related to the visible contributions and products of a particular society such as monuments, architectures, and artistic and technological inventions. Artifacts could be a groups’ clothing, type of food and hair style. The Indian Sari and the pyramids of the Pharaohs are examples of cultural artifacts.

Attitudes. They are a complex mental state involving beliefs, feelings, values, and dispositions to act in certain ways. Attitudes are an important factor affecting human behaviour inside as well as outside organizations. Human beings learn many attitudes through direct experience with the object such as the attitudes towards one’s job, church, school, etc. Other attitudes can be learned through the process of interaction with friends, members of the family, and also through socialization (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). For

example, many non-Muslims have negative attitudes toward Muslim people and consider religious practices as savage attitudes like fasting the month of Ramadan.

Assumptions. Deep assumptions are usually taken for granted, they constitute the hidden foundation or structure on which values and norms are based. Deep assumptions include assumptions about equality and hierarchy, degree of separation and gender, the importance of independence and other. For example, the Japanese student bows to his teacher when he enters; this is based on respect. Respect comes upon the assumption that hierarchical relations are conventional and should include caretaking and esteem (Shaules, 2007, p. 242).

Taboos. A taboo is a religious or cultural tradition that prohibits people from talking about a topic or doing some behaviour. The society usually considers taboos offensive and they should be avoided. Allan & Buridge (2006, p. 1) said that: “taboos emerge from social constraints on the person’s behaviour, attitude where it can cause harm, injury, discomfort”. Violating taboos can cause legal punishment, social disapproval, sickness, or death. The word taboo is derived from the Tongan term “Tabu” that means forbidden. A good example of taboos is drinking alcohol or eating the meat of pork in Islamic societies.

Stereotypes. Hofstede (2002) stated that a stereotype is the baseless belief that all people of a given social group share the same characteristics; it has a relation with age, religion, race, gender and others. Stereotypes are often aroused from the interference of negative behaviours towards individuals who are different. Bennett (1998) stated that there are two kinds of stereotypes: negative and positive stereotypes. The former deals with situations in which characteristics and features that are expected to be shared by people of a particular social group are violated. The latter deals with the case in which these characteristics are respected.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

This theory was created in 1980 by Dutch management researcher Geert Hofstede. The purpose of his study was to set out the dimensions in which cultures differ. In order to bridge what is different from one culture to another, he began a large survey investigation in 1970 and in 56 countries. His study shed a significant light on other cultures and countries, mainly with respect to effective interaction among people. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a framework for cross-cultural communication, it describes the effects of the culture of each society on the values of its members, and how these values associate to behaviour using a structure derived from factor analysis. It is a theory that that looks at a unique aspect of cultures and rates them on a scale for comparison.

Cultural dimensions by Geert Hofstede

Hofstede identifies five cultural values orientations for analysing and describing cultures, he divided them into five dimensions, the following figure summarized the five Hofstedes' cultural dimensions.

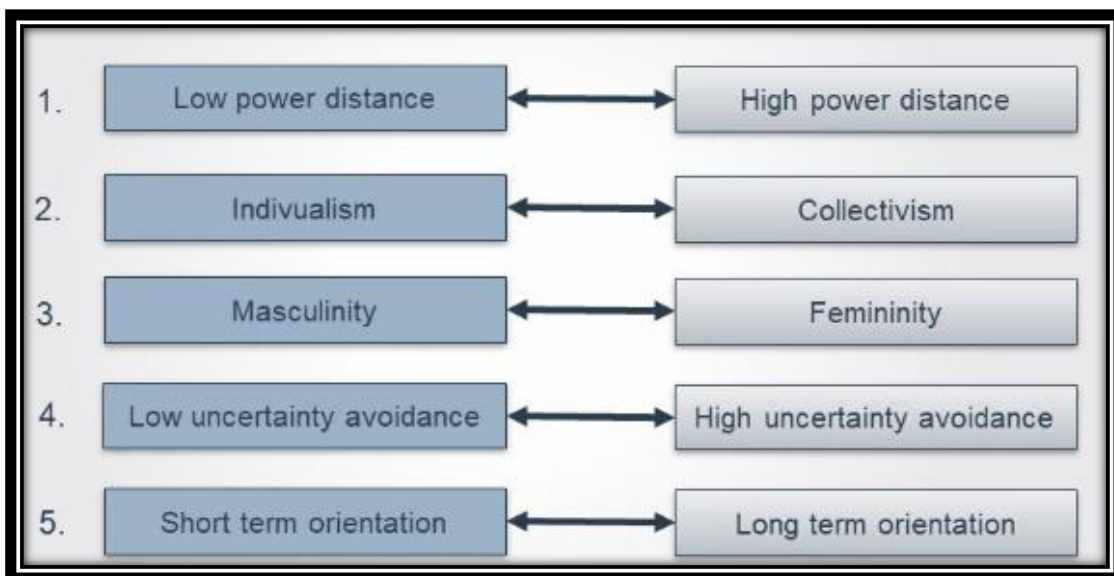


Figure 01: The five cultural dimensions by Hofstedes'.

Low- power distance versus high -power distance. Hofstede's cultural dimension of power distance mainly refers to how cultures measure and deals with inequality which exists and that is accepted by many people whether with or without power. This can be strongly associated with the emotional distance among people from different social status. Hofstede (1997, p. 28) argues "the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally". In other words, in high power distance cultures, people always should show their respect to others who are superior; however, low-power distance cultures agree and believe that all people are equal.

Individualism versus collectivism. Within this dimension, Hofstede refers to the strength of the mutual relationship between individuals in a particular society. Shaules (2007) claimed that cultures which are based on individualism deeply lack ties among individuals. In the sense that, the members of a society are defined in terms of their contributions. People from different nations have different views in terms of the type of persons that is highly valued in that society.

Masculinity versus Femininity. This dimension refers to how much a culture complies with its traditional roles concerning male, female, and values. For men there is a strong emphasis on success and performance; however, for women the emphasis is on sensitivity, modesty and the quality of life. Therefore, masculine cultures are those which esteem and give high values to male, or masculine treats; whereas, feminine cultures are concerned with incorporating both, women and men in social activities.

Low-uncertainty avoidance versus high-uncertainty avoidance. The dimension of uncertainty according to Hofstede is strongly related to the degree of anxiety that the members of a society feel when unknown and uncertain situations faced them. He pointed out that cultures which are intolerant, aggressive, emotional and active are characterised by high uncertainty avoidance; whereas, those are featured by low uncertainty avoidance are relaxed, tolerant, unemotional, and less aggressive.

Short-term orientation versus long-term orientation. This dimension is concerned with the extent to which a culture sees its time horizon. Societies with short-term orientation tend to be truthful, typically nationalistic and religious and the individuals tend to place more emphasis on consistency and principles. However, in long-term orientation, people tend to be more thrifty, modest, and pragmatic.

The Bennett Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

There are several developmental models of cultural competence in the field. The Bennett model is one of the well-known referenced models; it was developed by Dr. Milton Bennett. This model is considered as a framework to explain and discuss the students' experiences which he noticed over the course of weeks, months, and even years in different intercultural classes, graduate and exchange programs and workshops. Integrating concepts from constructivism and cognitive psychology, he classified these observations into a sequence of six phases of increasing sensitivity related to cultural differences.

The Bennett model shed light on the idea of; as an individual is exposed and experienced many cultural differences as a result he/she will become more competent and aware of intercultural relations. Bennett viewed that each phase was indicative of a specific cognitive structure. The Bennett six stages shift from "ethnocentrism" to "ethno-

relativism” which means that an individual experienced his culture in the context of other cultures.

The six stages in Bennett model

According to Bennett (1993), there are six stages that should be known in order to have cultural competency;

1)The first stage is called **Denial**, within this stage one denies and does not believe that cultural differences are a reality and do not exist. This assumption is strongly related to the social or physical isolation from other people of different cultures.

2) The second stage is called **Defense**. In this stage an individual believes and acknowledges that there are some cultural differences. However, an individual still believes that those differences are considered as a threat to her or his sense of self and own reality so he/she constructs defences versus those differences.

3) In the third stage in Bennetts’ model, **Minimization** occurs. An individual in this phase acknowledges and believes in cultural differences; however, understate them, believing that the similarities which exist between human exceed any differences. The peril of this phase is that most similarities are assumed and not known. As Bennett (1993) stated “In general, people who have experienced cultural oppression are wary of the liberal assumption of common humanity. Most of time, the assumption has meant be ‘like me’”.

4) **Acceptance** is the fourth stage in Bennett model. An individual values and recognizes cultural differences without any evaluation to what is negative or positive; this stage shifts a person from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. Firstly,

the individual respect cultural differences in behaviour and after that he/she gains a deeper respect of cultural differences in terms of values.

5) The fifth stage in Bennett model is **Adaptation**. Individuals improve and develop skills for communicating and interacting with people from different cultures, the most important skill at this phase is a perspective shifting, which means being able to view the world through “different eyes”.

6) The last stage in this model is **Integration**. An individual ,in this phase, does not only evaluate many different cultures, but also defines his/her own identity and evaluate values and behaviours in contrast to great number of cultures. Increasing the restrictions of living in a single cultural context. Those individuals combine aspects from their initial cultural perspectives and views with those of other cultures. The following figure illustrates the six stages of cultural competency in Bennett model.

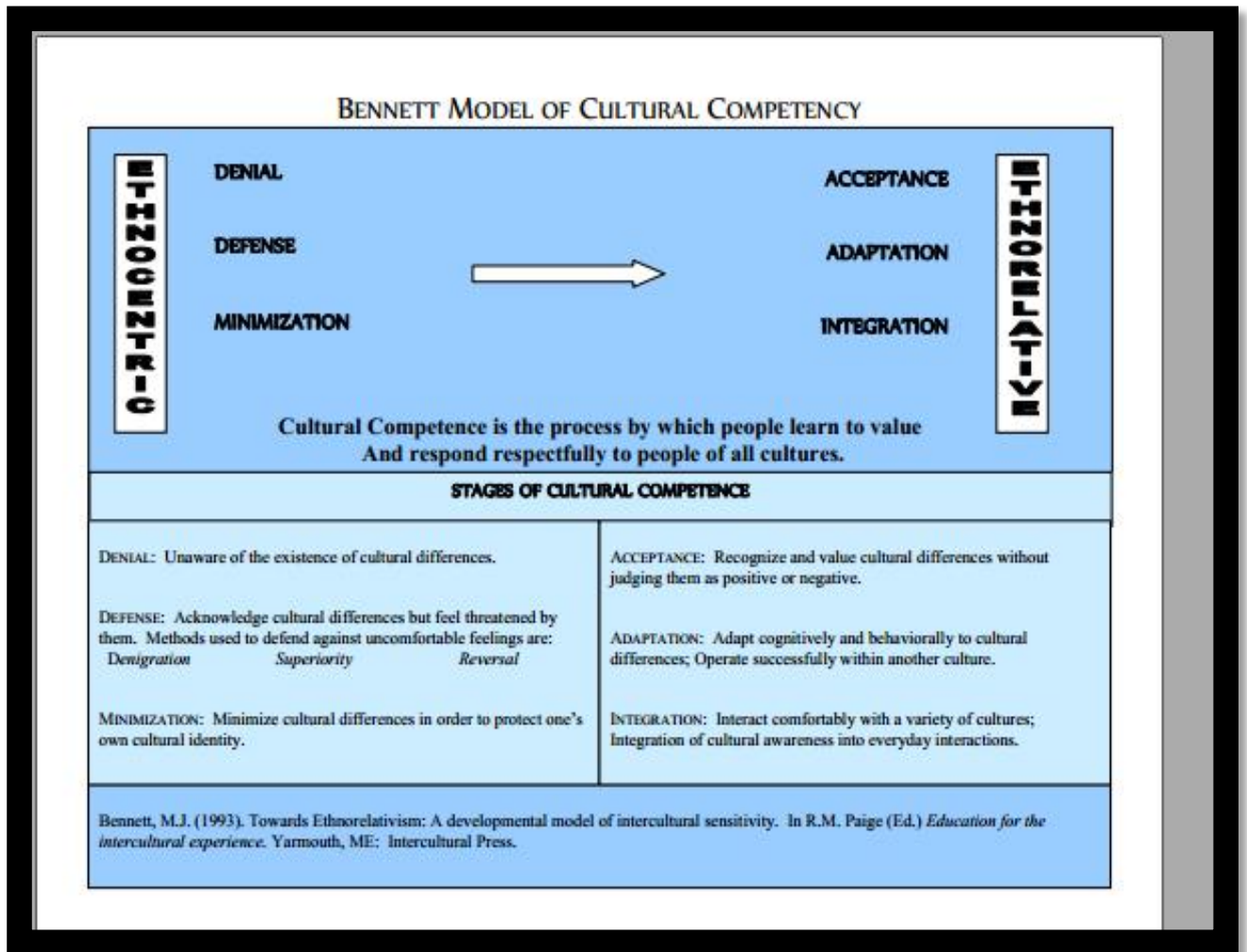


Figure 02: Bennett Model of Cultural Competency.

Culture and Communication

Culture and communication are interrelated and being cultural aware facilitates the act of communication. In this part we introduce the intercultural communication and the fundamental aspects of intercultural competence.

Intercultural communication

From the time of the tower of Babel, language has always been viewed and considered as one of the difficulties to intercultural communication. Today, the process of communication is influenced by a number of different aspects and characteristics of human

behaviour and language; for instance, nonverbal communication can be just as applicable as the precise language forms chosen. The majority of time; however, we are not completely conscious and aware of the beliefs and assumptions involved in a communication exchange with another person from another culture.

Intercultural communication is the process of sending and receiving of messages through languages and cultures so it is the study of communication between people whose symbol system and cultural perceptions are distinct enough (Samovar & Poter, 1997, p. 70). We can also interpret it as a negotiated comprehension of meanings in individual experiences across societies and social systems. When we talk about other cultures, we do not only mean those who speak a different language or who live in a different region or country; but we also mean those who dwell in the same region or country. However, they do not share the same social groups. For instance, a 16 years old teen does not necessarily communicate exactly the same manner as a 75 years old citizen; the conversation among them could be exactly as “intercultural” as two strangers who are from opposite places or corners of the world.

It is important to mention that both terms, cross-cultural and intercultural are used interchangeably and synonymously to refer to interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. In this sense, Kramsh (1998, p. 81) writes: “the term intercultural or cross-cultural often refers to the gathering of two languages or two cultures across the political frontiers of nation-states”. She describes the intercultural communication concept as: “communication between individuals from different social, ethnic, gendered cultures within the limits of the same national language.” (Kramsh, p. 82).

Findlay (1998, p. 111) claims that intercultural communication studies are basically interested in “portraying, analysing, and then applying a comprehension of how cultures

affect communication when individuals from different cultures try to communicate.”

Byram (1997) introduced three situations where intercultural communication takes place:

- 1) Intercultural communication happens between people from different languages and who do not share the same native languages. In this case, one of them is a native speaker of the language which is used.
- 2) It occurs between persons from different nations who do not share the same native language. In this case, the language used is a lingua franca.
- 3) It takes place whenever there are two interlocutors from the same nation; however, they speak different languages, and one interlocutor is a native speaker of the used language.

The Fundamental Aspects of Intercultural Competence

According to Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Intercultural Communication, there are ten basic aspects for effective improvement of intercultural competence. That will act as the foundation for the journey which organizations and individuals follow to develop their cultural awareness and become culturally competent in different communities and cultures;

- ✓ Discovering and investigating each individual's ethnocentrism.
- ✓ Each individual should work to control his own biases and be aware this may affect the communication and interaction with others.
- ✓ Knowledge of organizational barriers that prohibit some cultural groups approaching or entering resources.
- ✓ Valuing and accepting differences.
- ✓ Stressing similarities between cultures.
- ✓ Supporting solidarity.

- ✓ Knowing and training how to deal with cultural relativism and cultural conflicts.
- ✓ Being aware that cultural contact creates the possibility to learn from other cultures to improve our life.
- ✓ Remove boundaries and frontiers through the comprehension of the common and global responsibility of each individual.
- ✓ Effective interaction and communication strategies and skills.

Cultural Awareness

Fons Trompenaars (2000) stated “A fish only discovers its needs for water when it is no longer in it. Our own culture is like water for the fish. It sustains us. We live and breathe through it”

Brief definition of cultural awareness

Cultural awareness is a recent concept in the foreign language learning and teaching fields. As the term suggests, it includes two parts which are culture and awareness. The concept requires some implications with some behavioural and cognitive changes, which sustain us to examine one’s capability to compare, analyse, hypotheses, and signifies his awareness. Therefore, cultural awareness is a concept adopted from cognitive psychology and become a crucial code in the field of foreign language teaching and learning in order to use the target language correctly in various communicative contexts with no misunderstanding and conflicts among people from different cultures and social groups.

Cultural awareness understanding

Cultural awareness becomes essential when we are going to interact with persons from different cultures. Individuals observe, understand and evaluate things and behaviours

in different manners and sometimes what is considered inappropriate act in one culture is often appropriate in another one. It is obvious that misunderstandings emerge when one uses his/her own meanings and beliefs to make sense of others' meanings (Quappe & Cantatore, 2005). In other words misinterpretations happen mainly when we are not aware of the rules which govern our behaviours and apply them on others. Within the lack of better knowledge, we attempt to make suppositions, instead of trying to figure out what behaviour or an act means to the involved person.

Cultural awareness usually provides the sensitivity which is required to guarantee a successful communication with other cultural group members. It shed light on observing and being aware of similarities and differences between other cultural organizations and groups. In fact, this has provided a good help in several practical applications. For instance, in medicine, it is very important to understand how culture influences different individuals' approach to illness and health.

Degrees of cultural awareness

According to Culturocity Learning Center there are several degrees and stages of cultural awareness which reflect how individuals grow and develop to perceive and understand cultural differences.

Parochial level: my way is the only way. At this stage, people are conscious of their way of behaving and doing things; however, they consider their way as the only way and they ignore the influence of cultural differences.

Ethnocentric level: I know their way, but mine is better. At the second stage, people are totally conscious of other behaviour and other ways of doing things; however, they still consider their own way as the best. Hence, individuals consider the impact of cultural differences as a problematic and they reduce their importance.

Synergistic level: my way and their way. During this level, people are conscious of both, other people way and their own way of doing things and they can select the appropriate way according to the circumstances. They are aware that cultural differences can be either problematic or beneficial; however, they are free to use them for opening new solutions/ alternatives.

Participatory third cultural level: our way. This is the last level which brings together different people from different cultural backgrounds to deduce a culture with shared meanings, and they create new rules that fit the needs of a specific situation.

Steps to manage cultural diversity

We are generally conscious that the initial stage in managing cultural diversity is admitting it and learning not to fear it. Since each person is the product of his/her own culture, we need to develop both self-awareness and cross-cultural awareness. The following attitudes sustain to bridge cultures according to Alder (1991):

- a) **Admit that you do not know:** knowing that we are not perfect and we do not know everything, assume differences rather than similarities and believe that our assumptions and judgements may not be true and correct all the time is the first step of the process of being culturally aware.
- b) **Suspend judgments:** investigate and gather much information so that one can describe the situation appropriately before evaluating and giving pre-judgements.
- c) **Empathy:** we should always try to put ourselves in the position of the other one so that we can understand his/her attitudes better. Through empathy we know how others would like to be treated by us.
- d) **systematically check your assumptions:** this means that we always ask to ensure that we understand the situation correctly.

- e) **Become comfortable with ambiguity:** the more uncertain and complicated life is, the more we attempt to seek control. We should believe that others are as resourceful as we are and their ways always add something to what you already know. “If we always do what we have always done, we will always get, what we always got.”
- f) **Celebrate diversity:** “Tolerance, identity, diversity, recognition.” Always find a way of sharing diverse cultures.

The Importance of Cultural Awareness to EFL Learners

The role and the function of English as an international and worldwide language of communication in the 21 century and in the world of globalization impose special requirements on EFL learners. EFL studies have recognized the relationship which exists between culture and language since mid-1980. Krasner (1999) for example, recognized the importance for language learners to develop additional competence besides the linguistic competence which is the awareness of the culturally-suitable features of the target language.

Culture as a social process is concerned with the use of communication and language experienced by people in particular circumstances, they attempt to learn additional languages in order to satisfy the communicative needs in their professional and academic career. The process of learning a foreign language does not only necessitate the learner to practice linguistic patterns but also requires to be familiar with and know the culture of the target language in order to be able to interpret and comprehend intercultural communication. Thus, in learning English as a foreign language, it is important to provide learners with cultural contexts which enable them to obtain proficiency in the target language communications.

It is noticed that language is used as a cultural phenomenon to share opinions and ideas or exchange experiences. Without an appropriate understanding to the social behaviour and cultural setting of language use, breakdowns and misinterpretations in the communication occurs because language is not considered as a process of sending and receiving ideas and information; however, it works as a social behaviour in particular cultural context (Emitt & Komesaroff, 2003).

Culture Shock

In this part, we introduce the different definitions of culture shock, its indicators, and the stages of culture shock.

Definition of culture shock

The term culture shock was coined by Kalervo Oberg in the mid-1950s; he defined it as “the anxiety which comes from losing all our acquainted symbols and signs of social intercourses” (Oberg, 1960). According to him, culture is not innate; a person has only the ability to understand it and use it, since we raised up in a resolute cultural environment and we learn to communicate socially within this environment. As a result, this culture becomes routinely our way of life; it becomes a secure, familiar and automatic way to do things and to get what we want.

Moreover, Hofstede (2002, p. 22) stated “culture shock is the process of the first adjustment to an unfamiliar culture”. He declares that culture shock is concerned with experiencing new cultural contexts and situations and sometimes even new town, school, family, or organization. Culture shock is likely to happen in pedagogical settings especially of foreign language learning, when learners are involved in a contact with completely different language and therefore with a different cultural values and norms.

Additionally, Alvin Toffer (1970) stated that culture shock occurs when someone finds himself “in a place where no may mean no, where fixed price can be negotiated, where laughter may express anger, where to be kept waiting outside is no cause for insult” (cited in Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 212).

It is important to mention that culture shock is a deeply personal experience, which is not the same for two individuals or for the same person during two different situations or occasions (Hofstede, 2002).

The indicators for culture shock

There are six main indicators which show that one is experiencing, or facing cultural shock that were stated by Hofstede (2002)

- 1) Recognizable and familiar models and norms of behaving are absent, and if they exist, they have other significance.
- 2) Unlike values; the attitudes that the person regards desirable, good, worthy, and beautiful are unrespected by the host.
- 3) Feeling confused, hostile, depressed, lost, or anxious.
- 4) The person does not expect the new ways of behaving, feels upset.
- 5) The abilities and social skills which are learned and developed in a given society and that used to work are no longer used.
- 6) Losing hope and by that, this dreadful culture shock will never go and will remain.

Stages of culture shock

Culture shock is considered as a process which is made up of a series of stages. These stages do not totally portray culture shock in a precise way and they do not shed

light on each model that one goes through. Hofstede (2002) suggests the stage model of culture shock.

- ✓ **“Honeymoon”**: at this level, one feels curious, excited and optimistic when he meets the new culture at the very beginning; however, his identity is strongly influenced by his own culture.
- ✓ **“Disorientation”**: at this stage, a person lacks his own familiar cues, norms with a feeling of self-blame, disorientation, and personal inadequacy.
- ✓ **“Irritability and Hostility”**: at this phase, one feels resent and angry towards this new social environment due to the obstacles that he faces.
- ✓ **“Adjustment and Integration”**: at this stage, a person adapts and be familiar with the cues of the foreign culture (FC), and becomes able to act well in the new environment, also he develops an ability to distinguish what is bad and what is good in both cultures.
- ✓ **“Biculturality”**: at this stage, one becomes competent in his native culture (NC) and in the target culture (TC), but there is a debate on whether all people have the ability to master both cultures.

It is worth mentioning that culture shock is regarded as a phase that one needs to go through in order to become an acculturated person.

Acculturation

Definition of acculturation

Acculturation is a term that is usually used to report and clarifies the process of acquiring a given culture without losing one's identity and culture. It is related to the adaptation to the new culture and still holding one's original and native culture. Acton &

De Felix stated “acculturation is the gradual adaptation to the target culture without necessarily forsaking one’s native language identity” (as cited in Valdes; 1986, p. 20). They assume that acculturation is the knowledge of the new culture in terms of values, norms, stereotypes, attitudes, beliefs, and respect those differences while keeping the native identity.

Brown (2001) argues that acculturation is experienced in different ways in correspondence to each second language learning context. The extended kind of acculturation is associated with learning a second language in the situation, or setting of a foreign culture. Second language learning in the mother culture diverse in the degree and extent of acculturation experienced by the learner. Motivation, the country, the socio-political status are all factors influence acculturation (as cited in Valdes, 1986).

Stages of acculturation

According to Acton & De Felix (cited in Valdes, 1986) suggested a model of acculturation that includes four stages:

Tourist: is the initial stage. In this stage the new culture knowledge is totally unachievable; it includes to some extent culture shock. The learner refers on his native language, strategies, techniques, and resources.

Survivor: During this phase, the understanding of culture and the use of language will be practical and functional. One must go through this stage in order to be considered as educated, fluent, and competent speaker of a language.

Immigrant: This stage is related to the likely level of acculturation of an educated learner who masters his or her own native language. It is easily grasped by literate people who work and live in foreign cultures for a good period of time.

Citizen: this level deals with the rank of the native speaker; a person has acculturated; however, he still makes mistakes concerning subtleties of culture and language. In this phase, one is expected to have both gestures and pronunciation akin to those of natives.

Language and Culture

Language and culture are intertwined. A specific language usually points out to a particular group of people. When a person interacts with another language, it means that he is also interacting with the culture that speaks the language. One cannot understand another culture without accessing its language directly.

The relationship between language and culture

Folklorist Crats Williams (as cited Qvando, 1990, p.341) stated that language is “culture expressing itself in sounds” which means that it gives the identity to persons and social groups; there is a strong relationship between language and the sociocultural identity. The language we acquired, our very beginning words in, the language which was used in our closest environment, the language we use with our friends, family and the language our fathers and mothers talked to us will always remain a part of our identity.

When someone learns a new language, he/she also learns more about a new culture. Language is the symbolic presentation of a given society or nation and thus, it is the presentation of a culture. According to Kramsh (1998, p. 3), language is mainly associated with culture in three ways. She stated: initially, “language expresses cultural reality”. This means that the words of people are used to reveal common events, experiences, and facts in a given social group, these words also show the language user’s feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and views. Secondly, “language embodies cultural reality” individuals provide

understanding to their experiences through selecting the medium of interaction or communication; for example, sending a letter or having face to face conversation. Finally, “language symbolizes cultural reality”; this means that native language speakers regard look to their language as a symbol for their cultural identity (Kramsh, 1998).

The interconnectedness of language and culture is appeared in some acronyms. Paul Friedrich (1989) used the term “linguaculture” to refer to the deep relation of language and culture. Metaphors also illustrate the interconnectedness of these two concepts for example, “language is the mirror of culture” and “the iceberg” (cited in Jiang, 2000, p. 328).

Sapir and Whorf Hypothesis

Sapir and Whorf hypothesis is a hypothesis which developed and expended by Whorf (1897-1941). This hypothesis claims that a language resolves and determines the perception and thoughts of its speakers. This means that no language can survive unless it is in the context of culture, and in turn, the culture which does not own at its heart the structure of ordinary and standard language cannot subsist (Sapir, 1921; Berlin & Kay, 1969). This was called the “**linguistic relativity**” principle

Indeed, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is a theory of the relationship between thoughts and language. The main idea in this hypothesis as (Whorf, 1952) puts it, is that each human being sees the world from and by his own native language. Whorf supports this theory by illustrating from different languages. In Hopi, which is an Amerindian language, the term “masa’yataka” is used to refer to all what can fly except birds, which is totally something different from a person who thinks in English. Hopi language does not include the concept of tenses and time, whereas the English language contains different forms which enable it to express many different durations as cited in (Kramsh 1998, p. 11).

The Sapir-Whorf theory demonstrates some crucial contributions, or additions for intercultural learners. The hypothesis shows that a language is a system of symbols that reflects the culture and social reality of the speaker (Kramsh, 1998). For the reason that a given social group or society is different from those of other societies, a misunderstanding may occur when a foreigner talks the language of different country. Therefore, in foreign language learning, comprehending and learning a language, words, structures, vocabulary, grammar includes learning its culture also. Byram & Morgan (1994) asserted “it is axiomatic in our vision that cultural learning must occur as an integral, immanent part of language learning and vice versa” (cited in Hinkel, 1999, p. 7).

Conclusion

This chapter has been devoted to culture and to the explanation of some important concepts related to it. Mainly, its definition, elements, characteristics, cultural awareness, cultural shock, and acculturation. It can be said that culture is profoundly rooted in human life aspects. In this chapter, we have deduced that in order to live in today’s multicultural globe, foreign language learners have to develop not only a linguistic competence but also cultural competence and awareness to overcome the cultural barriers that may be encountered in interaction and communication with people from different cultures. Therefore, cultural awareness participates to a better language use and the interconnectedness of culture and language necessitates that language can neither be appropriately used nor fully learned without enough cultural background and knowledge.

Chapter Two

An Over View of Travel Blogs and Learners'

Autonomy

Chapter Two

An Overview View of Travel Blogs and Learners' Autonomy

Introduction

With technological progress, human beings have become closer to each other, and the world has become narrower than ever before. Therefore, EFL learners need to find a common tool or medium of communication which will facilitate the process of interaction among individuals who do not share the same beliefs, language, and cultural background. No one can deny the importance of learners' cultural awareness in order to develop his/her communicative competence and obviously there is no better place to sustain progress and meet this goal than Internet and in particular travel blogs. Hence, students are held responsible for reaching this ultimate goal through developing their learning autonomy outside the classroom.

The present chapter presents general insights into blogs and travel blogs; also it sheds light on learners' autonomy. It is divided into two sections; the first one presents different conceptualizations of blogs and travel blogs in particular, their history, characteristics, types, and the reasons behind their popularity. Moreover, this section studies a case of travel blog which is Tripadvisor and discusses the importance of travel blogs in fostering EFL learners' cultural awareness. The second section is related to learners' autonomy. It starts with different definition to the concept of learner's autonomy, then, its aspects; moreover, this section highlights the levels of autonomy and learners autonomy development in education. Finally, this section explores the relationship between learners' autonomy and communicative approach.

Section One

An Over View of Travel Blogs

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

According to Davies & Hower (2008) ICT is a term which is favoured and supported by most educational and business institutions. It is related to the new technologies and associated with the significant role that computers and the Internet play in the educational area. ICT has been introduced in language learning and teaching since 1980's, it is originally aimed to serve as a tool of enhancing efficiency and proficiency in the educational context and the learning process. For many learners, learning English via ICT's may appear to be interesting and motivating.

Several researchers have conducted recent studies in the field such as, (Benson, 2001) he researched the effectiveness of using ICT's including: Internet, Blogs, Emails, Facebook, and Skype to progress learners' self-regulation. It was found that being exposed to ICT had a significant impact on learners' autonomy.

The use of ICT as a learning tool may change not only the contents, but also the learning procedures and quality. Some learners use the net as a source to find authentic materials which may help them to study English. Blogs in particular can be so attractive, they offer students the opportunity to practise writing, speaking, and other skills out of the classroom, and they are useful learning strategy which helps students develop their language and cultural awareness. Also, they allow for learner autonomy because learners participate in real communication.

Moreover, when using ICT, for instance blogs, language learners be able to decide by themselves what topics to know, discuss, and discover their needs in language learning.

Therefore, they keep up with the fast changes and movements in modern communication technology.

Definition of Related Key Terms

Travel

Several key terms requires definition, first of all, “travel” it refers to a person who “moves between different geographic locations for any purpose and any duration” (World Tourism Organization UNWTO, p. 29) and includes “the activities of people travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for no more than one consecutive year of business, leisure, and other purposes” (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2010, p. 2).

Internet and World Wide Web (WWW)

Technological terms that require a definition comprise Internet and World Wide Web (WWW). The Internet is a network which connects billions of computers around the world; every computer represents an individual host or stand-alone device. Different business provides computer users’ access to the Internet that is used to exchange news, information, opinions, and data around the world (Webopedia, 2010). However, the World Wide Web is a huge collection of formatted files and documents which are created using Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) that works as a link between these documents, as well as video files, photographs, audio clips, and graphics (Webopedia, 2010). Both terms often used interchangeably and synonymously; however, they are different; In the sense that all WWW documents are part of Internet; whereas, not all services on the Internet are part of WWW (Webopedia, 2010).

Blogs and Travel Blogs

What is a blog?

Jamie Spencer who is a successful blog designer stated that a blog is an online journal or a diary which is located in a website, so it is a type or a kind of website. The content of a blog often includes pictures, animated GIFs, texts and even scans from previous physical offline journals or diaries besides other hardcopy texts and documents. The presentation of the blog content is organised in reverse chronological order. Therefore, a blog is an online platform where a writer or a group of individuals share their opinions and views that are related to specific subject.

The term blogs originated from the shortened term “web logs” (Chow, 2005). Moreover, Blood (2002) said that blogs are as link driven sites in which individuals are able to publish commentary, compile essays, and personal notes as a brief journal on the web. Recently, blogs users are very different in the sense that individuals are able to use their mobiles to make contributions and include rich media such as, video and audio (Baker & Green, 2005).

History of blogs

A. The early years (1994-1999)

It is commonly recognized that the very first blog was generated by Justin Hall “Links.net” and this was during his studies at Swarthmore College in 1994. At that time blogs were referred as personal homepage. The term “weblog” was coined in 1997 and it has been attributed to John Barger. The term was mainly created to refer to “logging the web” process.

1998 witnessed the first appearance and example of a blog on a new site and this occurred when Hurricane Bonnie was blogged by Jonathan Dube for the Charlotte Observer. In 1999, the programmer Peter Merholz shortened “Weblog” to “Blog” and after five years, the word blog was declared to be the word of the year by Merriam-Webster. Few other “blogging” platforms occurred and cropped up during these early years, and the most recognizable and known of the early sites was probably LiveJournal.

Moreover, in 1999, Evan Williams and Meg Hourihan started the platform which became later on “blogger” at Pyra Labs. Blogger is mainly responsible for contributing blogging process to the mainstream.

B. The growth period (2000-2004)

According to Technorati’s state of blogosphere report, the early 2000’s is considered as the growth period of blogs. At that time, there were nearly 23 blogs on the internet, and by the middle of 2006, the number arose to 50 million blogs. Political blogs are considered the most known early blogs; during this time period, some political candidates began using blogs such as, Howard Dean and Wesley Clark.

In 2001, blogs get more popular when the comments US Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott made in regards to the then senator Strom Thurmond. He gave rather contentious statements which claim that US would be in a better position if Thurmond was president back in the year 1948. This event sparked up too much talk and bloggers broke the internet world with this story.

In addition, in depth subject blogs were becoming well known during this period, they frequently delved more and much deeper into pop culture and current news than mainstream media sources, also commenting directly on what traditional media was delivering and reporting.

Moreover, a number of well-known blogs got their started point in the early 2000's such as, Dooce, Boing Boing, Gawker, Gizmodo, and Wonkette. In 2003 the Weblogs, Inc was invented by Jason Calacanis, and after that it was sold to AOL for 25 million. That sale helped blogs to cement as a force that is not just a passing fad but a power to be reckoned with.

The year 2004 witnessed the emergence of video blogs; this was a year before the appearance of YouTube. In this year AdSense was launched also, which is the first ad network, it allowed bloggers to make money from advertisements.

C. 2005-2010 blogs reach the mainstream

Blogs reached many people and the mainstream in the late 2000's by 2005; statistics showed that 32 million Americans read blogs regularly. In 2005, Garret M. Graff was the very first blogger who granted the press accreditation for white house. Many other media websites now used and owned blogs that cover full stories with online commentary.

Additionally, 152 million was the number of active blogs online and this was by the end of 2010. Famous media sites like CNN were associated with previous established blogs and they did not create their own. However, by the end of 2010 almost all media sources and companies had their own blog.

D. 2010-2018 where is blogging today?

Before ten years, blogs were the main and the only source of communication and content for internet users. The massive increase of the usage of social media has led to the emergence of social networking as a popular and well-known source of information.

In the year 2012, Evan Williams and Pyra Labs established Medium, which was developed into great blogging platforms today. Where users are allowed and able to

publish and post their own content. This platform blurs the line between blogging and news reporting sites. And it is worth mentioning that the major development in the industry of blogging have taken place within the evolution of blogging platform World Press.

Key Characteristics of Blogs

Blogs could be used in many EFL fields. Many learners are not familiar with the efficiency of this tool. Therefore, Huann & et all (2007) designed a diagram that demonstrates the potential of blogs.

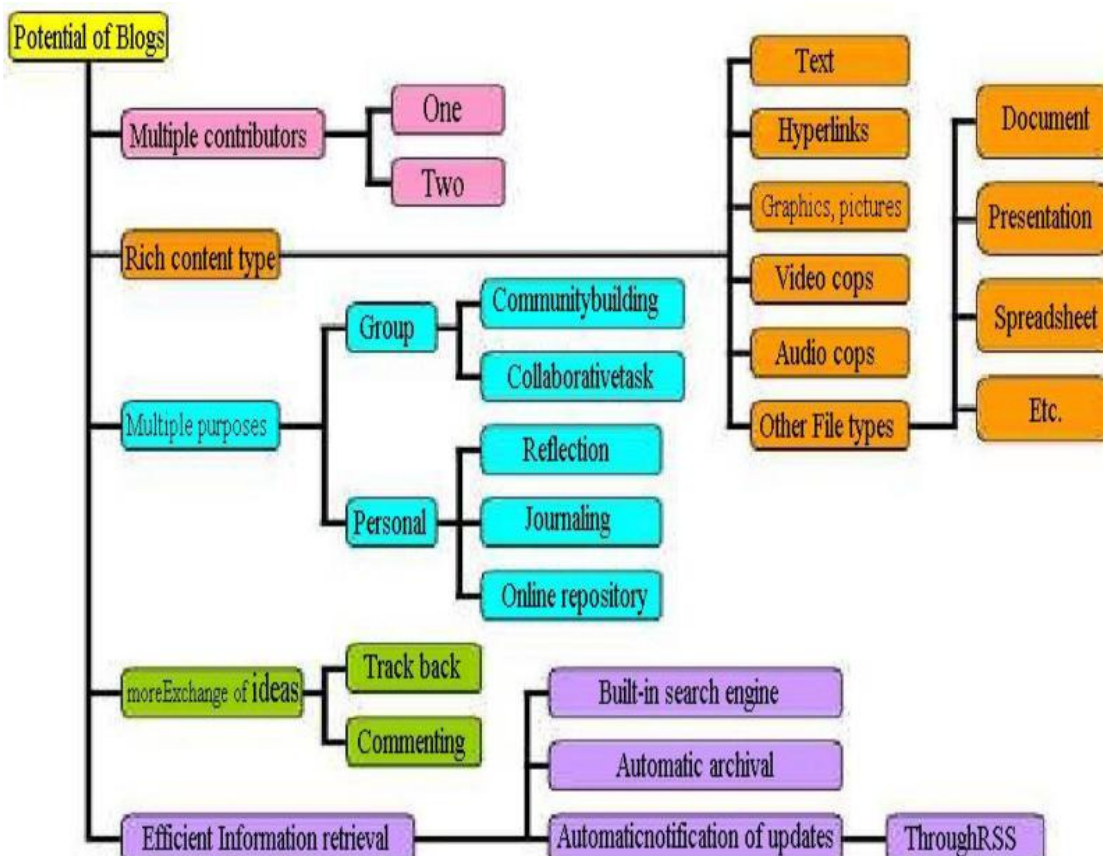


Figure 03: Flow chart of the blogs potential by Huann et al (2007).

The blog’s potential according to Huann et al (2007) comprises five main principles; multiple contributors, rich content type, multiple purposes, more exchange of

ideas, and efficient information retrieval. Moreover, Paquet (2003) reshaped the five characteristics of blogs into the following:

- ✓ Free and easy function
- ✓ Personal editorship
- ✓ Public access to the content
- ✓ Archival features
- ✓ Hyper linked post structure

Blogs versus Websites

According to A Guide to Understanding the Concept of Blogging by Janie, the primary difference between a website and a blog is that a blog is a particular type of content that is displayed on web pages on a website. Confusion usually happened because representative of business and individuals often use both terms interchangeably. For instance, someone might say that they visited a company's blog when in fact the blog was just one part of company's website. Moreover, confusion occurs also because platforms which are devoted totally to blogging create the impression that company's or individuals' blog on one of these platforms is also their official website.

Additionally, in most cases associated-blog and blog devoted websites are updated with new content more than non- blogging websites. Blog typically receives daily, weekly, or even less than hourly updates; whereas, non-blog websites for example, biography, individual personal interests, or business sites, they only update their blog content and news at that frequency. Then they add new pages or update some content when needed. Blogs also provide discussion and have a section for comments designed to allow online conversations.

Popularity of Blogs

According to A Guide to Understand the Concept of Blogging article, a lot of people are curious to know the reasons behind the popularity of blogs and blogging. They provide a social outlet. Several people are social animals by nature. They actively try to interact with others and share different knowledge and perspectives. Even people who are not familiar with social in face-to-face, online settings offer them joyful interaction online through social networks using any anonymous personas.

Additionally, people can interact with others from their homes and building new friendships and gaining better understanding of how people live. For instance, blogs offer individuals opportunities to interact with people who live in other geographic regions, and who are from other cultures, people who have taken up previously geographically rare and limited types of hobbies, also people who work in different carrier fields. In these cases, blogs content is so varied as well as offering its audience interesting subjects.

It is worth mentioning that social media provides many channels for information, and not all consumers-generated the “travel blog” from other social media sites as; review sites and virtual communities are defined as groups of people, who exchange ideas and information through Internet networks and bulletin boards (Rheingold, 1993). However, travel reviews sites permit consumers to provide both quantitative and qualitative reviews such as attractions and travel experiences (O’Conner, 2008). As a result, travel blogs are online stories and diaries in order to provide information and engage the reader in the travel experiences.

What is a Travel Blog?

Since the early 1900's, the terms "travelogue" or "travel blog" have been used to refer to any travel related video/motion, photo/album, picture, slide show, brochure, or face to face lecture. From the perspective of contemporary WWW language, travel blog is an online space where individuals receive, share stories and information. More precisely, it is a virtual space where travellers and tourists share their ideas, opinions, and thoughts about other travel experiences including cultures, lifestyles, food, traditions, and places (travel journal, 2012).

Moreover, Puhlinger & Taylor (2008) gave another definition to travel blogs. Individual entries that are related to planned, past or current travel. Travel blogs are similar to personal or individual online diaries; however, they consist of one or more personal entries that are strung together by a common theme. Travel blogs are commonly written by tourists or travellers to report back to families and friends about their experiences and activities during trips (Puhlinger & Taylor, 2008, p. 179).

Additionally, blogs offer the opportunity to reveal tourist's interpretations of tourism experiences and products, and to express tourists' perceptions, impressions, feelings, and thoughts; otherwise, all that may not be revealed in more constrained environment as personal interviews. Today Internet users are better motivated and positioned than ever to tell their experiences and stories which deliver "an interpretive" view point and perspective of each traveller and their trip or journey into the open spaces of our globe" (Pudlinger, 2007, p. 47). Moreover, McCabe & Foster (2006, p. 194) stated that stories provide a "Mechanism to escape, becoming immersed in characters, plots, accounts and descriptions contained therein".

It is worth mentioning that social media provides many channels for information, and not all consumers-generated comments are considered travel blogs. What differentiates the “travel blog” from other social media sites like review sites and virtual communities is the communicative scope. Virtual communities are defined as groups of people who exchange ideas and information through Internet networks and bulletin boards (Rheingold, 1993); whereas, travel reviews sites permit consumers to provide both quantitative and qualitative reviews such as attractions and travel experiences (O’Conner, 2008). As a result, travel blogs are online stories and diaries in order to provide information and engage the reader in the travel experience.

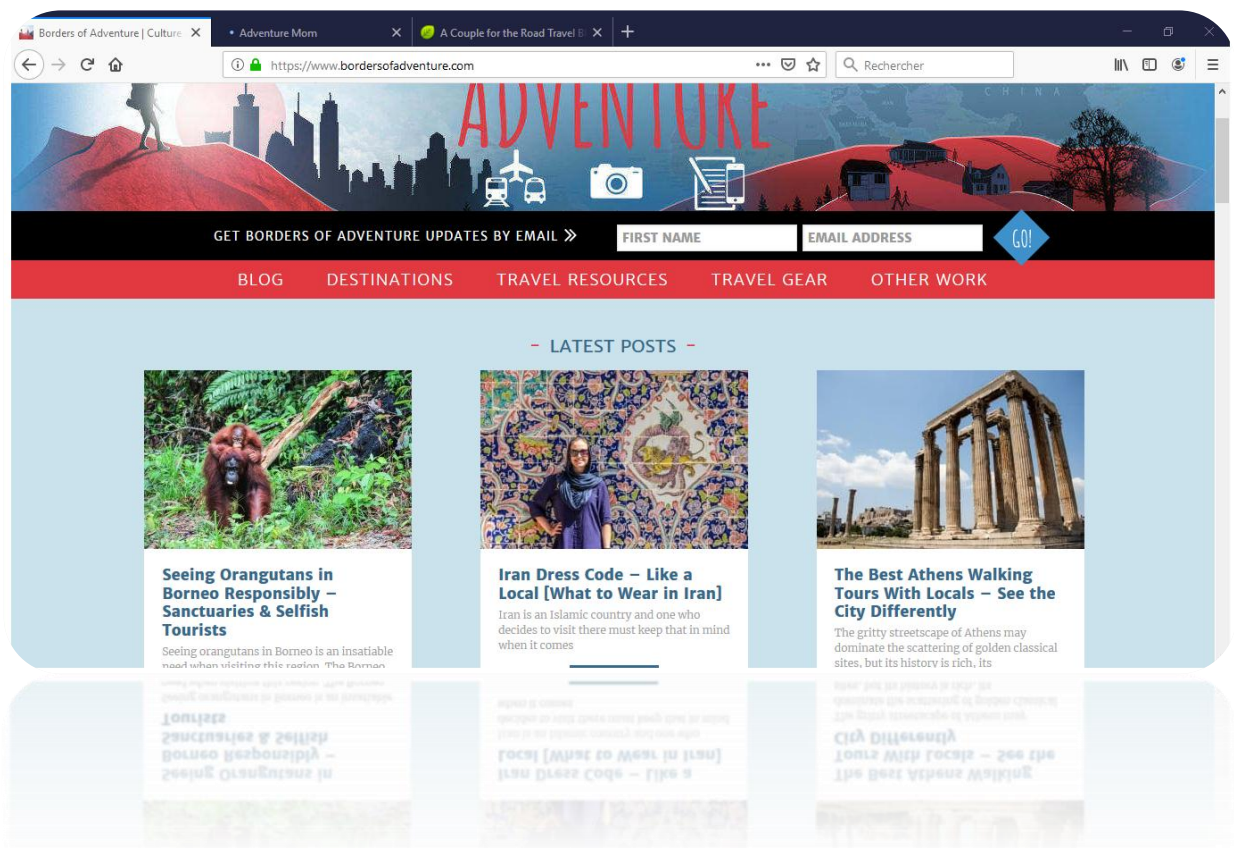


Figure 04: screenshot picture from Borders of Adventure (social and cultural twist) travel blog.

Travel Bloggers

Travel bloggers who write the content of the blogs do it for two main reasons; from one hand, they like to express themselves and their experiences and from the other hand, they do it for social interaction (Papacharissi, 2002). Moreover, Wang & Fesenmaier (2004) found that helping others and the satisfaction of sharing experiences was the main motive for travellers to write online blogs. This idea was confirmed by Hsu & Lin (2008) who conducted a study on the field and found that persons actively participate in a blog to support and help other bloggers and not for any other purposes such as rewards. In other words, people do not hesitate to share their experiences online for the sake of sharing knowledge and helping others, not just because of financial motives or egoistical.

Bosangit (2012) reported that travel bloggers as tourists were motivated to post online for the following reasons:

Expressing oneself by writing , networking with others, keeping a record of travel, find out information about new places, updating family and friends about one's whereabouts, for entertainment, keeping in touch with friends who are also blogging, passing the time, sharing knowledge with others to raise their awareness about cultural differences, and earning money. (Bosangit, 2012, p. 209). In other words, the reasons behind writing a travel blog differ from one blogger to another.

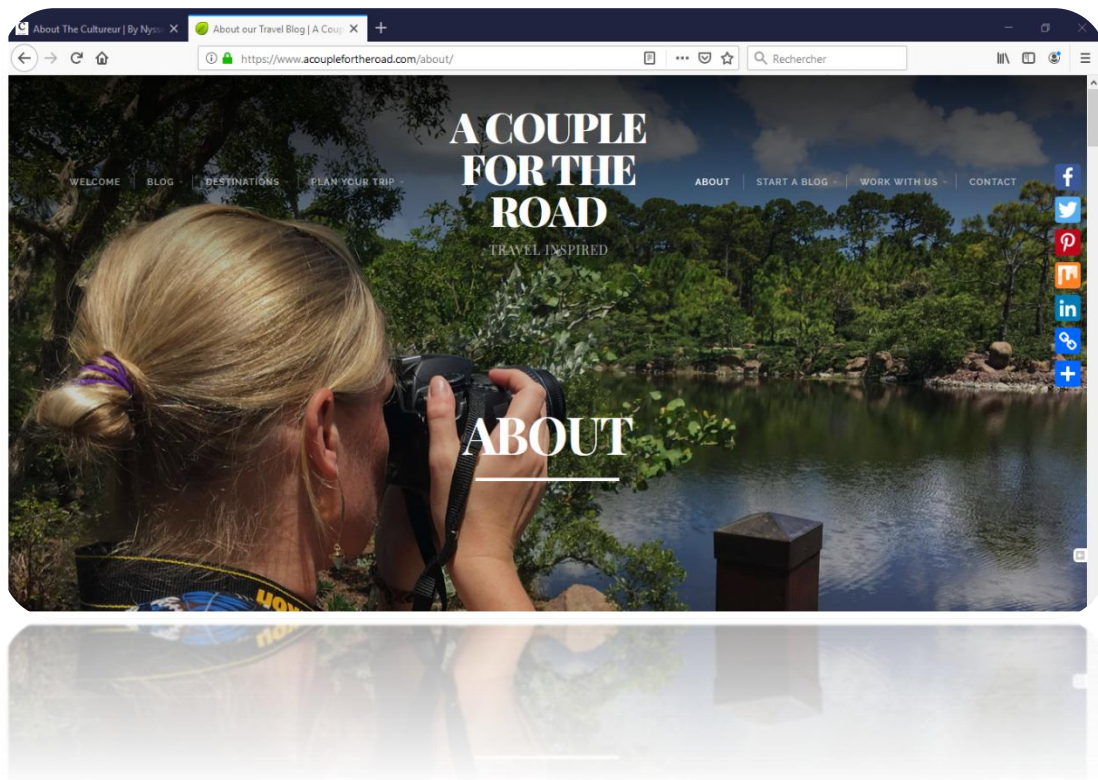


Figure05: screenshot picture from a couple for the road travel blogger.

Classification of Travel Blogs

All blogs that are related to tourism and travel topics can be classified into three main types, or categories; individual, collaborative, and corporate (Thevenot, 2007)

- ✓ **Individual:** and it is called also personal. Blogs are most of the time having a form of online diary, and individual travel blog often gives a combination of certain subject that they want to provide comments or information on and writers' personal life. The number of personal travel blogs is growing all the time and most often provide information about the countries they are visiting in terms of traditions, best places to visit, food, stereotype, and funny stories that happened to them during their journey in discovering these places.

- ✓ **Collaborative:** this type of travel blog differs from personal ones in the way the posts are written by more than one writer. This makes collaborative type more regularly updated, seeing as being more relevant for the reader, and having wider range of information. Collaborative travel blogs are more organized, the main point is that instead of being one-to-many, they turn into being many-to-many (Thraenhart, 2007). Gadling.com is one example of collaborative travel blogs where expert travel writers are sharing information about different destinations, reviews, new trends stories, recent news concerning those people, places, etc.
- ✓ **Corporate:** they are blogs that are published by certain organization, they are also known as “expert blogs” and are used for networking purposes between tourism organization, tourism professional, and business. They discuss latest trends, research findings, marketing tips (Thraenhat, 2007). The benefit of this type of travel blog is often seen as being more credible and appealing for the readers because it permits to communicate with the readers in a more personal manner. They hire professional and experienced bloggers and sometimes they engage local people to provide information about their culture; as a result, this raises the trustworthiness of the source.

The Case of Trip Advisor Travel Blog

Trip advisor is currently the largest travel blog in the world and claims to help individuals or travellers plan and have the best and perfect trip (Trip Advisor, 2014). This travel blog offers its users reliable advice concerning places, food, people from real travellers around the world. It was founded in February 2000 and nowadays it manages sites in 40 countries and in 23 languages (Trip Advisor, 2014). It manages and operates

websites under 23 others travel media brands; such as, “Holiday Lettings, Onetime, Travel Pod, Tripbod, and Virtual Tourist” (Trip Advisor, 2014).

The company has more than 2,000 employees as of May 2014 (Trip Advisor, 2014). According to a factsheet provided by TripAdvisor (2014, p. 1), their content portfolio includes:

- “More than 150 million opinions and reviews from travellers around the world”
- More than 4 million properties and business in 140,000+ destinations, including:
 - ✓ 810,000+ hotels, bed and breakfasts, and specialty lodging
 - ✓ 600,000+ travellers reviews about places, people, cultures, traditions, and other experiences
 - ✓ 2.2 million restaurant with food experiences
 - ✓ 420,000+ attractions and famous places
- More than 21 million candid traveller photos and stories
- More than 100 new contributions are posted every minute
- More than 60 million email able members worldwide
- On average, nearly 2,800 new topics are posted every day to the TripAdvisor forums
- More than 90 per cent of questions posted to TripAdvisor’s English- speaking forums are replied to by other travellers within 24 hours”

TripAdvisor is grounded on the idea that travellers count and rely on other travellers reviews to plan their travels, or can help them making a decision. Therefore, and the point here is that EFL learners can use this tool for travelling purposes or for educational one. One would imagine how important is social

interaction among travellers, discussion about places, stories, food, traditions, beliefs, lifestyles, and cultures would be very beneficial and crucial as well to foreign language learners to gain cultural background and know more about others. Learn how to respect different people and accept these differences as God said in his book Quran “Nay, they have belied the knowledge whereof they could not comprehend and what has not yet been fulfilled” (surat Younes, verse, 39), in the sense that people reject all what they ignore and do not know including different views, lifestyles, religions, beliefs, and cultures.

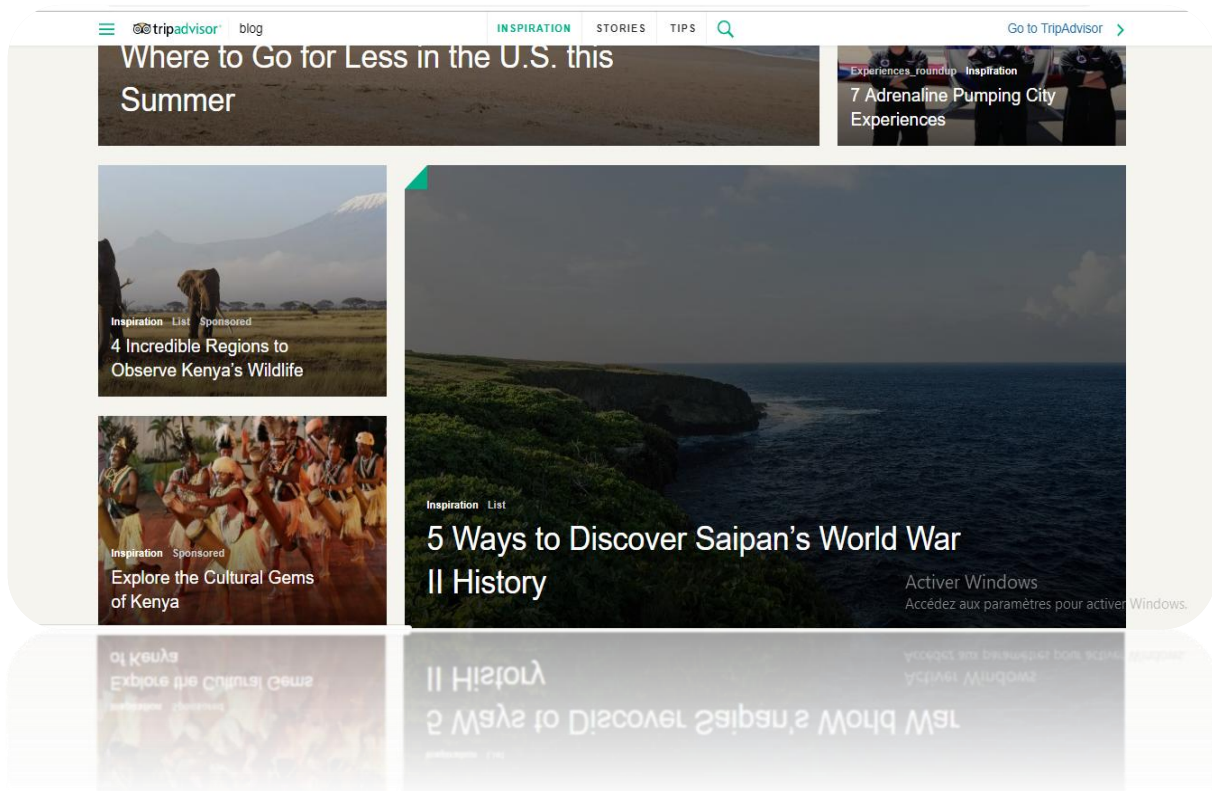


Figure 06: Screenshot picture from TripAdvisor travel blog.

The Impact of Travel Blogs on Enhancing EFL Learners Cultural Awareness

In the 17th century, traveling was a main part of the education for young students of higher classes. Reports of these “Grand Tours” started to be published and form cultural practices of travel and tourism (Inglis, 2000). The tours were expensive and time-consuming for other students, so the most common practice of writing down ones’ travel experience helped to explain the cultures and beliefs of other countries by providing an informative reports and explanations to those students who stayed at home. Tourism pioneers felt the necessity and the urge to compare, evaluate, and express their different experiences (Steward, 2005).

Nowadays, travel blogs can be an efficient tool to build EFL learners cultural knowledge and encourage their learning autonomy outside the boundaries of the classroom through these advantages;

- ✓ Almost everyone, even learners who are not familiar a lot with technologies are able to consult this type of blogs because they are flexible in structure and encourage interaction between author and readers, also between readers themselves (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).
- ✓ Travel blogs can be connected to all kinds of social media which make their ability to spread information easy and fast all over the world, and at the same time they are accessible to wider audience.
- ✓ Travel blogs have turned out to be appreciated and popular source for searching information and also to compare others’ experiences and real peers reviews (Volo, 2012).
- ✓ Travel blogs were ranked as third most influential digital source after retail and brand sites (Technorati, 2013).

- ✓ Travel blogs are trusted to provide more authentic information about other people lifestyle, cultures, traditions, food, and other based on real personal experiences (Vrana et all, 2012)
- ✓ Travel blogs play the role of motivational factor for EFL learners because they contain pictures, videos, and other attractive reviews such as stories to encourage them discover other cultures.
- ✓ Encourage critical analysis, debate, exchange of opinions and ideas.
- ✓ Encourage learners' autonomy.

Section Two

Learners' Autonomy

What is Learner Autonomy?

The etymology of autonomy gives a basic principle of what is meant by the term. Originally "Autonomy" is a Greek term which was "autonomos", and it may be divided into "auto" (self) and "nomos" (law), which made up the literal translation "self-law" or "self-rule". The most widely cited definition of learners autonomy in language learning was "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" Holec (1991, p. 3). He claimed that this includes the ability to make all relevant decisions concerning the learning process, such as determining learning content, objectives, assessment, and methods. Additionally, Trebi et. al (1990, p. 102) who stated that learners autonomy is "readiness to take charge of one's own learning", also his definition put emphasis on the learners' motivation and the sense of responsibility.

Moreover, David Little (1991, p. 4) who stated "autonomy is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action" this definition highlighted the cognitive process of learning, and hence established the definition of learner autonomy to learning theory. Holec's definition emphasised the skills of autonomous learners and the technical aspects of learning autonomy; however, Little added to the previous one the idea of how autonomous learner is psychologically able to use these skills. What we call the psychological aspects of learners' autonomy and both definitions are concerned with the view of learner autonomy and learner centeredness where the main focus of attention is the learner rather than the teacher.

In contrast, Leslie Dickinson (1987, p. 11) proposed another view of learners autonomy that contradicted with the one of Holec, he stated that learner autonomy is a"

situation where the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions” in the sense that, learner autonomy may be seen as a context or situation in which the learner has the responsibility for his/her learning. A distinction between learner autonomy as a learning situation and learning autonomy as an ability is important. The former perspective stated that autonomy is a mean or tool to a different end as improving language learning while the latter perspective stated that learner autonomy is an objective and a goal(an end in itself) (cited in Voller, 1997, p. 2).

Although we saw different interpretations and definition of learner autonomy, an agreement is on the fundamental qualities of autonomous learners in which they understand the targets and aims of their studies, have the responsibility for their own learning, take initiative and active role in learning both outside and inside the classroom. Also, learner’s autonomy entails positive attitudes and high motivation toward learning.

To summarize, the term learner autonomy and in light of the many different definitions. We can say that learner autonomy in foreign language learning is not simply a goal of learning how to learn neither a means of improving language learning; rather it is a double process of meta-cognition and cognition (Fenner, 2003, p. 29). In the short term, autonomous learning permits the learner experiencing learning the language on their own also to make the learning situations more motivational, more suited to their individual needs, and more effective whether inside or outside the classroom. In the long term, learners will take charge of their own learning (lifelong learning).

Aspects of Learners’ Autonomy

Sinclair (2010) comes up and gave thirteen aspects of learners’ autonomy as (cited in Borg & Al- Busaidi, 2012, p. 5):

- ✓ Autonomy is a construct of capacity.
- ✓ Autonomy involves a willingness of the part of the learner to take a full responsibility of his/her learning.
- ✓ The willingness and capacity of learners to have such responsibility is not necessarily innate.
- ✓ Complete and full autonomy is an idealistic goal.
- ✓ There are degrees and levels of autonomy.
- ✓ The levels of autonomy are variable and unstable.
- ✓ Autonomy is not just a matter of putting learners in situations and contexts where they have to be independent.
- ✓ Developing autonomy needs conscious awareness of the learning process (i.e. decision-making and conscious reflection)
- ✓ Promoting autonomy is not just a matter of teaching strategies.
- ✓ Autonomy can take place both outside and inside the classroom.
- ✓ Autonomy has an individual as well as a social dimension.
- ✓ The promotion of autonomy has a psychological and political dimension.
- ✓ Autonomy is interpreted in different ways by different cultures.

Accordingly, Benson (2003, p. 3) stated three perspectives which shape-up autonomy as political, technical, and psychological. According to Benson (2003) political perspective is related to making students able to learn by giving them control over their learning process and content selection. Technical perspective is strongly related to learners meta-cognitive, cognitive, and social skills which they use to learn and teach themselves without any control or supervision. Psychological perspective is related to learners' attitude and motivation which also lead them to take responsibility of their learning.

Levels of Autonomy

Learners' autonomy is strongly related to the level of learners. In middle schools for instance, pupils are supposed to be less autonomous in comparison to secondary pupils. Which means that autonomy as a capacity grows and develops within learners' maturity and progress. Lifelong learning can be considered as the highest level in which total and full autonomy is practised.

In the late 1990's a group of researchers suggested that the concept of autonomy is a matter of levels. There are many models of autonomy levels. Firstly, Nunan (1997) designed a model encompasses five levels of autonomy in the learners' action: awareness, involvement, interaction, creation, and transcendence. At the awareness level, for instance, learners should have a high level of awareness of their needs. In the involvement and the intervention level, learners should identify strategies concerning their autonomy and start using them. After that, they should be able to identify their own and most preferable learning strategies in which they feel comfortable. At the transcendence level, learners be capable to use those strategies I different contexts and in real life situations.

Secondly, Littlewood (1998) identified three dimensions of autonomy; the first dimension is having an ability to operate independently with the language and practice it to communicate personal meanings in unpredictable real situations (autonomy as a communicator). The second dimension is related to classroom organization; it involves learners' capability to be responsible for their own learning and to apply active strategies (autonomy as a learner). And the last dimension is related to the broader context, it involves a grater and higher generalized autonomy (autonomy as a person).

Thirdly, Macaro (1997) suggested a similar three dimensions or autonomy levels model which includes;

- ✓ Autonomy of language autonomy.
- ✓ Autonomy of language learning competence.
- ✓ Autonomy of choice and action.

And finally, Scharle & Szabo's (2000) suggested three-stage model which involves;

- ✓ Raising awareness.
- ✓ Changing attitudes.
- ✓ Transferring roles.

The above mentioned levels are somehow different; however, they have many aspects in common, for instance, all the previous mentioned classifications analyse how language learners can be autonomous gradually moving from a level or stage to the other.

Philosophical Thoughts on Values of Autonomy in Learning

Certain concepts in language learning have strong relation with educational philosophies. Learner autonomy has been part of a big range of educational philosophies. Recently, it is identified as an important step toward the development of lifelong learning. The concept of learner autonomy is associated with three major philosophies of learning: humanism, constructivism, and experiential learning. Before dealing with this concept in learning it is important to relate autonomy to its natural context, which is refer to biological autonomy. The development of autonomy starts as a process of maturity rather than at school while learning, thus is is a natural characteristic of human beings.

In the same vein, Maturana and Varela in their book *Biological Autonomy* declare "Scientists would benefit if they take a look at principles of biological

autonomy before doing research in cognition and social sciences.” (Maturana & Varela, 1979, p. 55). In this sense, as the individual starts his life by over reliance on his mother, then he develops his self-reliance gradually. It is the same for the language learner; he starts his learning process by over reliance on the teacher, after that in developed stages the learner starts to reach independency and develops his self-reliance (Hadi, 2012).

Humanistic psychology: it was the most dominant in the field of language learning in the early 1970's. language teachers have been influenced by insights from humanistic psychology, this perspective highlights the importance of affective conditions in learning, such as: age, learners' attitudes, aptitude, and motivation towards the language. The philosophy of humanism is a paradigm that emphasizes compassion and sensitivity towards learners, and the rejection of anything that makes learners feel uncomfortable while learning. That is to say to remove any psychological barriers or obstacle that can undermine language learning such as: synthesis, anxiety, stress, etc. Robert et al. argue that: “ The affective aspects of language learning are as important as the cognitive aspects, the learner should be treated in some sense as a ‘whole person.’” (Robert, et al., 1994, p.101). in other words, the teacher should be concerned with the learner as a whole with needs, desires, and fears not only with the cognitive or the mental side with the learner personality(Hadi, 2012).

Constructivism psychology: it is founded on the principle that, knowledge cannot be taught but only learnt (constructed), it is built up by learners. Thanasoulas put that: “ by reflecting on our experience, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in.” (Thanasoulas, 2003, p.3). Constructivism is a learning philosophy that considers learning as a constructive, and active process. In the sense that, individuals create or construct their own knowledge actively.

Experiential psychology: experiential learning is the process of making meanings from direct experience. David Kolb (1984) participated in popularization of the idea of experiential learning through his book *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. His work can be traced back to the well-known dictum of Confucius” Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand” . David Kolb believes that learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences.” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). He suggested a cyclical model of learning that consists of four phases; Concrete experience (do), reflective observation (observe), abstract conceptualization (think), and active experimentation (plan).

Learners’ Autonomy Development in Education

Originally, the concept of learners’ autonomy is not an educational one; however, it is imported from the fields of moral philosophy and politics. Autonomy as a political concept was well-known in the French revolution in 1789 and the Enlightenment period. Due to the social and political tendencies in Europe and the whole world in 1960’s, the interest of the term autonomy within the educational field was as a part of response to these tendencies.

It is generally agreed that the term autonomy first used in the domain of teaching and learning through the Council of Europe’s Modern Language Project which was established in 1971. Holec’s opened the door for debate about autonomy in second and foreign language learning when he published his book *Autonomy and foreign language learning*, since then, other researchers started further research in the field.

The emergence of learners' autonomy as an educational concept was not until the beginning of the 1970's. However, it has been long used in other domains and fields such as, religion, medicine, and philosophy in the early 1970's (Hadi, 2012).

Benson (2001) stated "the idea of autonomy first appeared in language learning along with the establishment of Centre de Recherches et d'Application en Language (CRAL), which was aimed at adult education" (Benson, 2001, p. 8). Since then, autonomy in language learning has become a necessity.

Galileo has affirmed the necessity of autonomy stating that you cannot teach a man anything; you can help him find it within himself. In the sense that, teachers should encourage learners to rely on themselves and be autonomous both inside and outside the classroom.

Communicative Approach and Learners' Autonomy

The concept of autonomy in language learning is strongly associated with the communicative approach both theoretically and historically. Some researchers and scholars started seeing language as a tool for communication and the communicative approach emphasised the communicative functions of language (Hadi, 2012). Behaviourist assumptions were strongly rejected and refused, as a result autonomy in language learning has flourished in the 1970's and 1980's. By conducting research related to autonomy in language learning, several researchers have explored the relationship of autonomy to their work (Nunan, 1995).

Researchers within the psychology and sociology of education have argued that concepts of self-direction and autonomy are helpful and important in General and to second and foreign language learners in particular. Similarly, Little(1991) stated "over the

past twenty years or so, the concept of autonomy together with related concepts such as, independent learning, self-direction, and self-regulation has become increasingly important in the educational literature where it has been viewed as both a desirable goal of education and a constituent element of good teaching and learning (Little, 1991, p. 4) . In the sense that cultivating language learners to become autonomous and competent in the process of learning of learning a language.

Conclusion

In sum, the emergence of blogs technologies has created new opportunities and challenges in the field of second and foreign language learning. Travel blogs activities, stories, and experiences are one way of enhancing students' cultural knowledge and awareness. Moreover, they play the role of moving students from being dependant on their teachers during the class toward autonomy or independent learning.

When the learner feels that he/she is not able to perform well in one language skill or subject, he can depend on himself and travel blogs are the way to achieve such independency. Finally, with the evolution of travel blogs, there was a paradigm shift from classroom contexts to naturalistic settings, from foreign language learning to foreign language use, and from cognitive orientation to social orientation.

Chapter Three

Field Work

CHAPTER THREE

Field Work

Introduction

The current study deals with the use and the effectiveness of travel blogs to enhance EFL learner's cultural awareness. For the requirements of this study, three tools are used; a questionnaire for students, interview for teachers, and a focus group. The former was distributed to Master One students of English at the Department of Foreign Languages at Biskra University. The latter was conducted with teachers who have experience in the same area of study and who teach courses involved in our current study. Moreover, a focus group was conducted with 21 students of Master one, the previous tools aim mainly at gathering the needed data to reach our research objectives. The present chapter includes descriptions to the three data collection tools in addition to the pilot stage of the teacher's interview and students' questionnaire. Finally, it includes the data analysis of each tool with a discussion for the research results and findings.

Students' Questionnaire

Students' sample

To conduct our research, a sample of 25 master one students of English was randomly chosen from a whole population of 188 students (4 groups) at the field of English at Mohamed Khider University during the academic year of 2018/2019. The representative sample constitutes 13% of the whole population and the participants are from the four groups.

The decision of working with Master one students is mainly due to two reasons. On the one hand, we have opted for master one student's because they have more experience with

the English culture and language. On the other hand, they are mature, more aware and they are in contact with technology and the Internet.

Description of the students' questionnaire

The students' questionnaire was mainly designed to study and know the learners' perceptions and thoughts about the issue which is treated in the current study. The questionnaire was distributed to twenty five students. It is initiated by a small paragraph that clarifies the objectives of this research followed by guidelines and instructions for students to know how they are supposed to answer the questions.

Section One: general information/questions (1-2)

The first section consists of two questions, the first one is about gender and the second one is about age. It attempts to collect the participants' background information.

Section Two; language learning/ questions (3-5)

The purpose from this section is to warm up students for the next section and also to obtain information, to know the reasons behind their choices to learn English, how they see and evaluate their level in English, and their perception and comprehension about the nature of learning English.

Section Three; cultural awareness/questions (6-14)

This section is designed to explore the students' understanding about cultural awareness, to know their perception to the meaning of the word culture, how much cultural background they have about their culture and the English culture. Also, this section attempts to discover if they are aware about the similarities and the differences between their native culture and the target one (English). Moreover, we investigate if they have

experienced culture shock, the cultural components or elements they have cultural background and information about and what they lack also. In addition, we attempt to explore their opinions about the relationship between cultural awareness and intercultural communication.

Section Four; attitude toward the English culture/questions (15-17)

This section is devoted to know how EFL learners' find learning about other peoples' culture is. Moreover, we investigated their learning autonomy, if they rely on external sources in their learning process.

Section five; blogs and travel blogs/questions (18-22)

In this part, we attempt to collect and obtain information and discover what kind of social media are used when students communicate with foreigners. Moreover, we aim through this section to study EFL learners' perception toward both terms; blog and travel blog also to know if they have already used them before.

Section Six; travel blogs and cultural awareness/ questions (23-25)

The last section is concerned with the effectiveness of travel blogs in enhancing EFL learners' cultural awareness and their communicative competence as well. In this part, we attempt to collect information about students' views concerning travel blogs and their learning autonomy. Finally, we conclude our questionnaire with further comments or suggestions that could be helpful for the expansion of the current study.

Piloting Stage

A piloting study is undertaken to make sure that all questions in our questionnaire are comprehensible for students, so the process of gathering data is successful. The

questionnaire is piloted during three days before distributing it to our eight (8) master one LMD students participants. During the piloting stage, students are given the chance to check the questions and ask for clarification if any question is ambiguous. The unclear questions are modified so that the students will be able to answer the questions appropriately and provide us with the needed data.

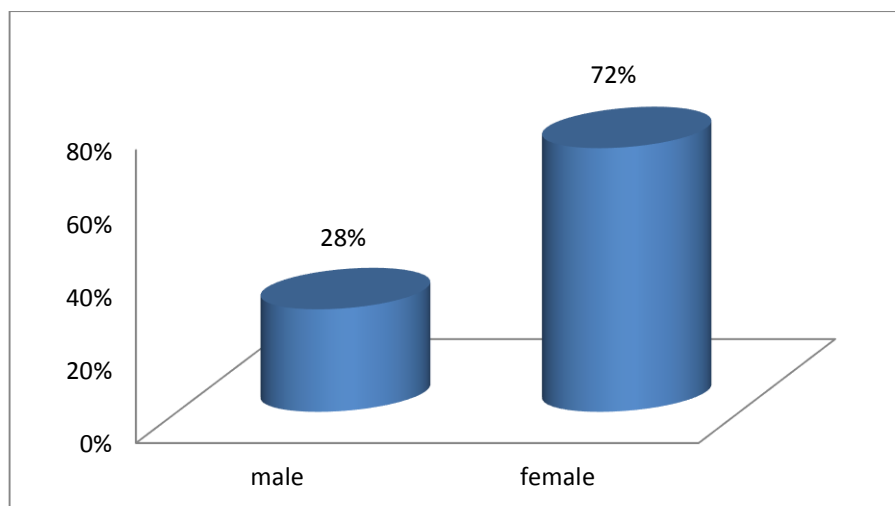
Data Collection and Analysis

Section One: General Information

Question 01: Students' gender

Table 01: Student's gender.

Option	Number	%
Male	7	28%
Female	18	72%
Total	25	100%



Graph 01: Students gender.

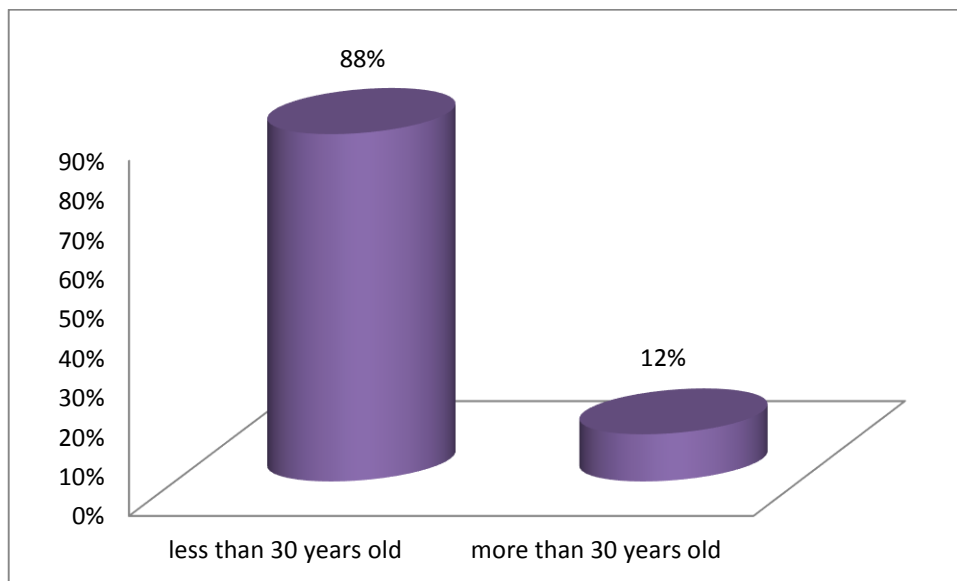
From the table above, it appears that most participants are females. We have recognized 18 female from a total number of 25 students. Female students make up 72% of

our population. Whereas, we have 7 male students with a percentage of 28% of the whole population under study. Knowing female and male percentage in EFL classes, enable us to reach a variety of views and opinions about travel blogs and their effectiveness in enhancing EFL student’s cultural awareness.

Question 02: Students’ age

Table 02: Students’ age

Option	Number	%
Less than 30 Years old	22	88%
More than 30 Years old	3	12%
Total	25	100%



Graph 02: Students age

The results obtained reveal that most students from our sample are adults because the majority are less than 30 years old with a percentage of 88%. Whereas,12% is the percentage of students who are more than 30 years old with a number of 3 students

variation of students age enable us to obtain and gather different opinions about the issue treated in our research from different angles and life experiences.

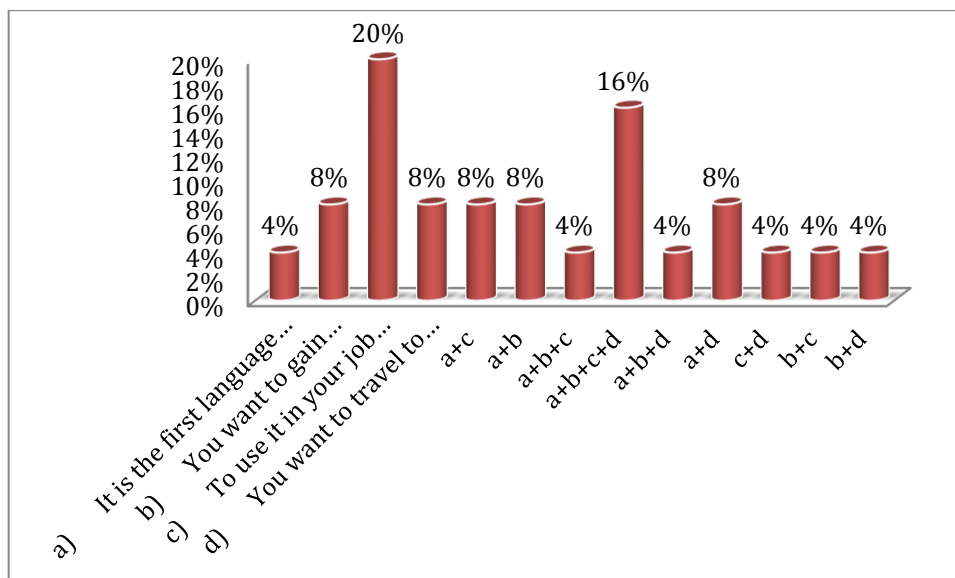
Section two: Language Learning

Question 03: Are you learning English because?

This question is designed to explore the reasons behind learning English. The results are summarized below:

Table 03. Students' Reasons behind Studying English

OPTION	Number	%
a) it is the first language in the world and the language of technology	1	4%
b) you want to gain knowledge about its speakers and their culture	2	8%
c) to use it in your job career	5	20%
d) you want to travel to an English country	2	8%
a+c	2	8%
a+b	2	8%
a+b+c	1	4%
a+b+c+d	4	16%
a+b+d	1	4%
a+d	2	8%
c+d	1	4%
b+c	1	4%
b+d	1	4%
Total	25	100%



Graph 03: students' reasons behind studying English

The above table shows that the majority of the respondents (20%) of the whole sample choose to learn English because they want to use it in their job career. Moreover, 16% of students choose the four choices. Whereas, 8% is the repeated percentage of students who choose the following; (because they want to gain knowledge about its speakers and their culture, because they want to travel to an English country, also 8% was for those who choose to learn English because of the two first choices “a and b”, “a and c” and “a and d”).

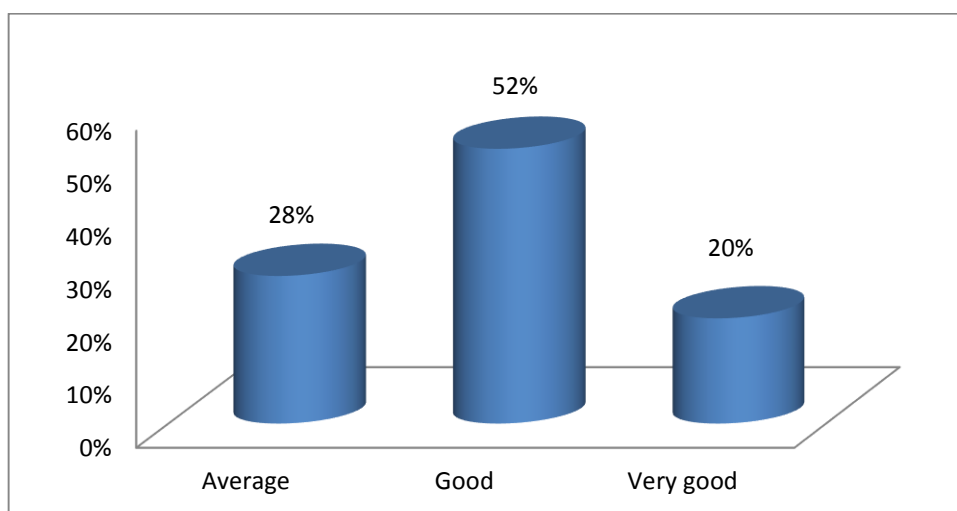
Additionally, 4% of students from the whole sample are learning English because it is the first language in the world and the language of technology, similarly 8% was the rate of students who choose to learn English because of the first, second, and the third answers, others only because of “c and d” statements and others choose to learn it because of all statements (choose all answers). Also, 4% refer to the lowest rate of students whose answers are made up of the following choices (because it is the first language in the world, the first language in the world plus because they want to gain knowledge about its culture

and people plus to use it in their job career. Others with 4% too choose it because “a and b and d” “c and d”, b and c”, and “b and ”).

Question 04: How do you see your level in learning English?

Table 04: Students self-evaluation of their level in English

Option	Number	%
Average	13	52%
Good	7	28%
Very good	5	20%
Total	25	100%

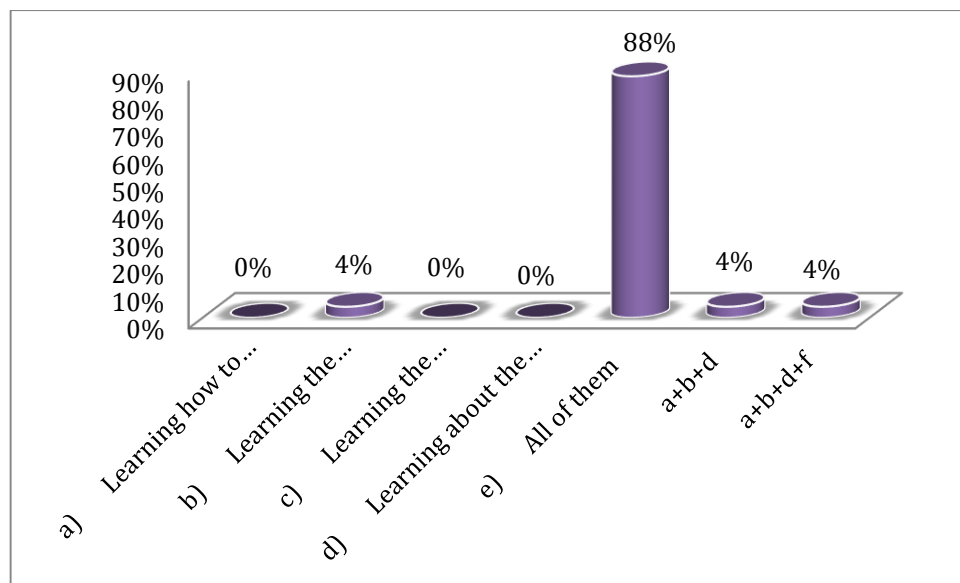


Graph 04: Students' self-evaluation of their level in English.

The results which are summarised above demonstrates that a major number of students consider their level in English as Average with a percentage of 52% followed by 7 students (28%) who see their level as good. Finally, a minority of 5 students consider that their level in English is very good with a percentage of 20%. We can assume that there is a high percentage of students who considers their level as average which means that they are not completely satisfied with their levels and they need to enhance and improve their proficiency in English.

Question 05: What does learning English mean most to you?**Table 05: Students' perceptions about the nature of learning English**

Option	Number	%
a) Learning how to construct and how to use words and sentences	0	0%
b) Learning the meanings of words and sentences	1	4%
c) Learning the pronunciation of words and sentences	0	0%
d) Learning about the culture of English speaking people	0	0%
e) All of them	22	88%
a+b+d	1	4%
a+b+d+f	1	4%
Total	25	100%

**Graph 05: Student's perceptions about the nature of Learning English.**

From what is shown above we can notice that Students look at learning English from different perspectives. Through the results obtained from this question, we noticed that 88% which made up the majority of students look at learning English as matter of learning syntactic, semantic, morphology, and phonology. Moreover, 4% of students think that learning English is a combination of building structures, meanings, and sociocultural

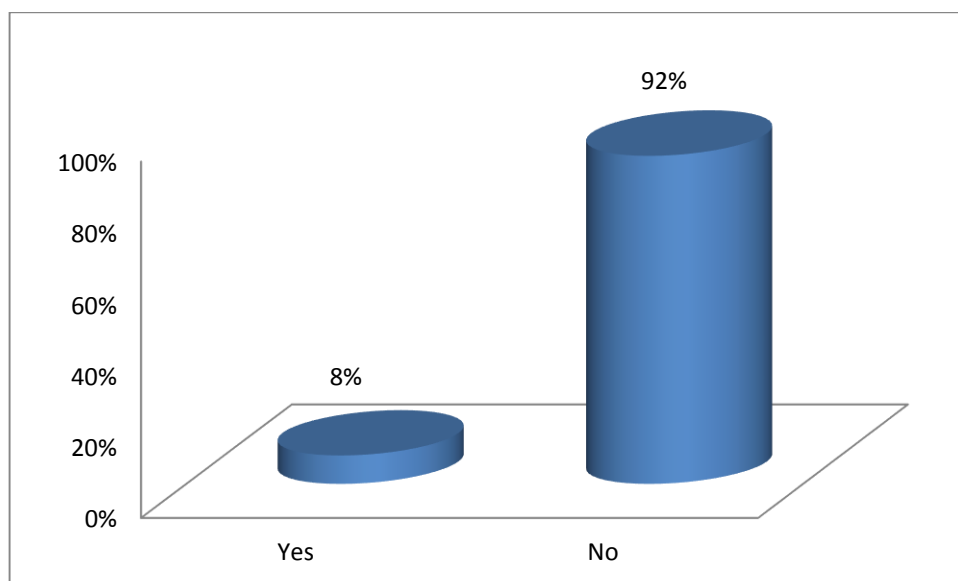
Aspects of language. Similarly 4% of students think that learning English is a matter of how to construct words plus meanings and then pronunciation.

Section Three: Cultural Awareness

Question 06: Do you think that the linguistic competence is enough for the learners' to master English as a foreign language?

Table 06: Students' views about the importance of the linguistic competence.

Option	Number	%
Yes	2	8%
No (not enough)	23	92%
Total	25	100%



Graph 06: Students' views about the importance of the linguistic competence

From the above table (number 6), we can say that a major number of EFL students are aware of the importance of being knowledgeable not only linguistically but also culturally. 23 students (92%) see that the linguistic competence is not enough to master

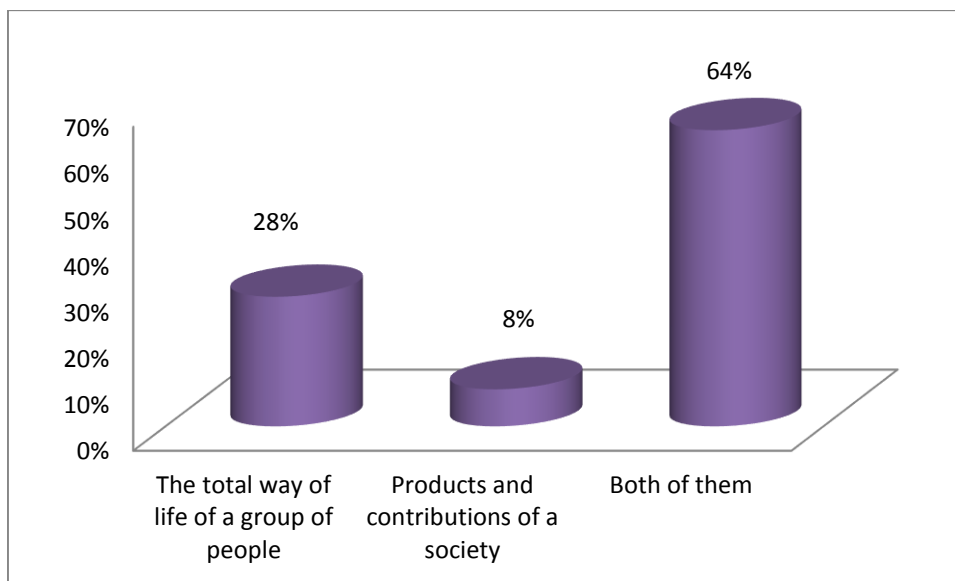
English as a foreign language; whereas, a minority of 2 students (8%) considers that the linguistic competence is enough.

The second part of this question was about the justification of the answer. Those who agreed with the fact that the linguistic competence is not sufficient to master English as a foreign language were the majority. They supported their answer by saying that; being aware of the rules of any language without practicing or applying them in real life is worthless and the learning process will be incomplete. Moreover, they mention that knowing the words and the linguistic aspects and rules of the language is not enough. As a great deal of importance is within the connotation of these words in its specific culture, for we come across words that we understand differently due to our own cultural background, while they mean a total different meaning; so both competences work hand in hand.

Question 07: According to you the word culture refers to:

Table 07: Student's definition of culture.

Option	Number	%
a- The total way of life of a group of people	7	28%
b- Products and contributions of a society	2	8%
c- Both of them	16	64%
Total	25	100%



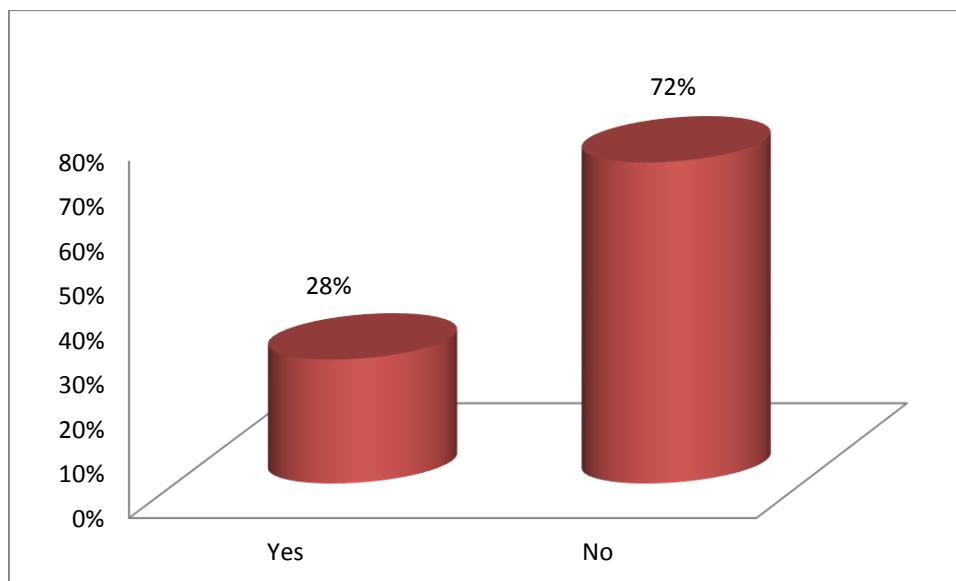
Graph 07: Students' definition of o culture

Statistically speaking, the majority of students (64%) regarded culture as the total way of life of a group of people as well as products and contribution of a society. 28% of students culture as the total way of life of a group of people; whereas, a minority considers culture as products and contribution of a society (8%).

Question 08: Do you think that you have enough cultural background and information about the culture of your country (including all the regions of your country)?

Table 08: Students' perceptions about their country cultural background.

Option	Number	%
Yes	7	28%
No	18	72%
Total	25	100%



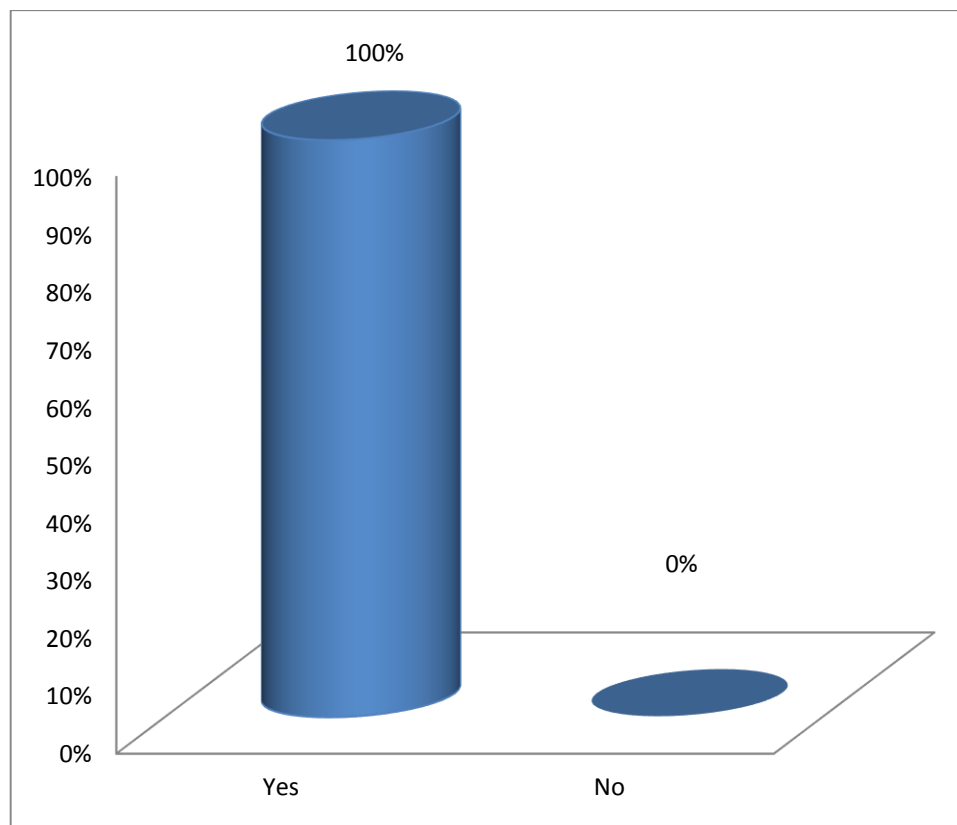
Graph 08: Students perceptions about their country cultural background

From the table above, we can say that a wide variety and a considerable number of students are ignored and do not know about the culture of their country. A number of 18 students, and 72% of our sample was the percentage of students who answered by No; whereas, 28% of our sample confirmed their answer by saying Yes.

Question 09: Do you think it is necessary for EFL learners to know about the culture of English speaking people?

Table 09; Students' views about the importance of knowing about the culture of English speaking people

Option	Number	%
Yes	25	100%
No	0	0%
Total	25	100%



Graph 09: Student's views about the importance of knowing about the culture of English speaking people

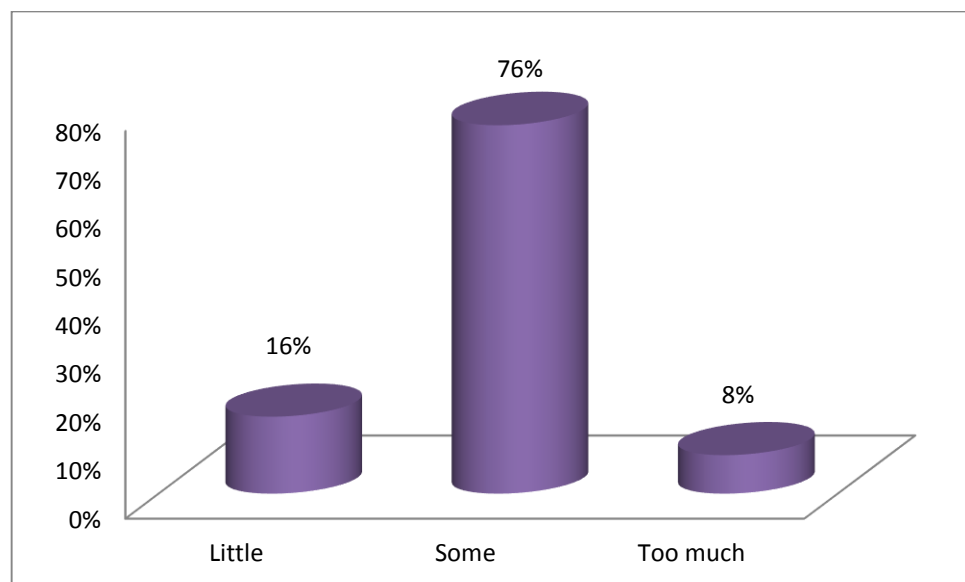
According to the table number 9 and from what is shown in the graph, all participants agree and confirm that it is necessary for EFL learners to know about the culture of English speaking people.

In the second part of the ninth question, students were asked to justify their answer. Our participants supported their answer by declaring that since we are learning a foreign language, it is important to know about its culture including its history, traditions, and life style because language is a part of culture and one cannot understand that language beyond its culture.

Question 10: Cultural awareness is the knowledge of the similarities and differences of both ones' native culture and other peoples' culture. How much knowledge do you have about both cultures?

Table10: Students views about their knowledge of both similarities and differences between ones' culture and other peoples' culture

Option	Number	%
Little	4	16%
Some	19	76%
Too much	2	8%
Total	25	100%



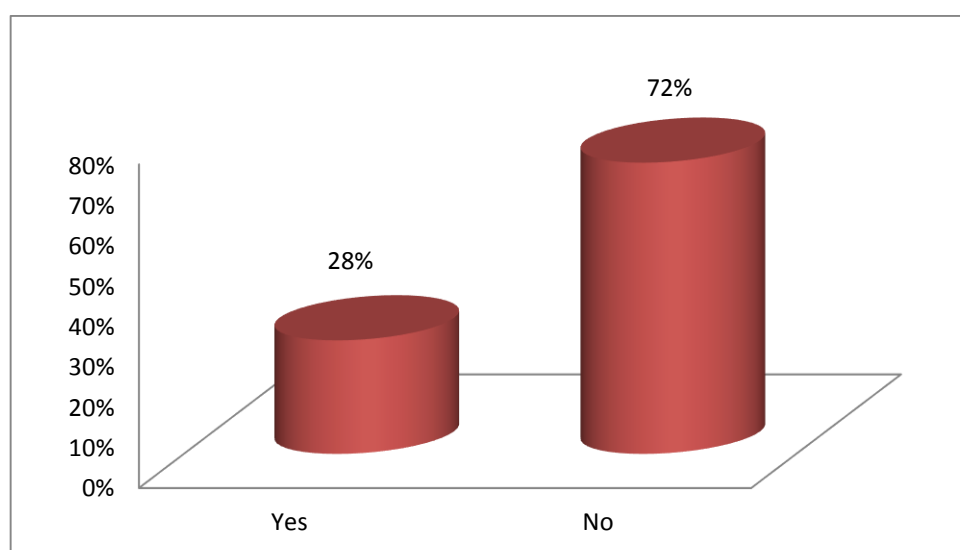
Graph 10: Students views about their knowledge of both similarities and differences between ones' culture and other peoples' culture

The results obtained make it clear that the majority of students (76%) have some cultural awareness about the differences and similarities between their culture and the foreign language culture, followed by (16%) of students who answers that they have little knowledge, and a minority of 8% who declares that they have too much knowledge about similarities and differences between both cultures.

Question 11: Have you ever experienced culture shock? With a foreign person or even with an Algerian person (like Tamazight person)

Table 11: Students perceptions and experiences about culture shock

Option	Number	%
Yes	7	28%
No	18	72%
Total	25	100%



Graph 11: Students perception and experiences about culture shock

From the table above (number 11), we noticed that 72% of students did not experienced culture shock; however, 28% of students said yes and they have experienced culture shock.

The second part of this question is concerned with those who answered by yes. We have asked them to tell us about their experiences briefly, among the answers that have been submitted students said that we have experienced culture shock because some words are accepted in ones' culture; however, they are forbidden or considered as taboos in

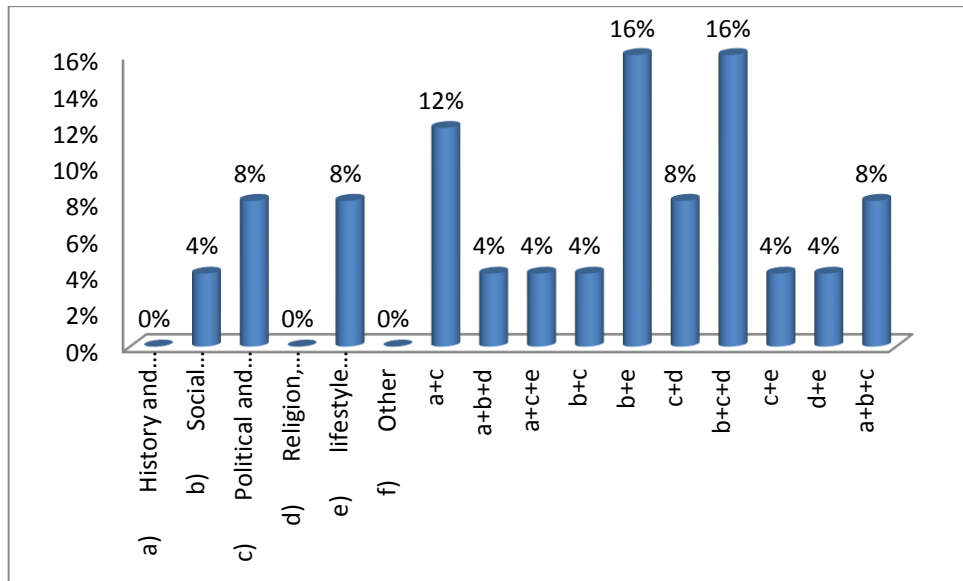
others' culture. Moreover, some students said that they are Tamazight and sometimes they come across cultural shock with non-Tamazight people especially in wedding traditions.

Question 12: Which of the following aspects of the English culture you do not have enough background about?

This question aims to explore the aspects of English culture they have little knowledge about in order to provide them with the appropriate travel blog which may foster their cultural knowledge.

Table12: Students' views about the aspects of cultural background they lack

Option	Number	%
a) History and geography	0	0%
b) Social organization	1	4%
c) Political and economic systems	2	8%
d) Religion, assumptions and beliefs	0	0%
e) lifestyle (traditions, etiquette, food, art, etc)	2	8%
f) Other	0	0%
a+c	3	12%
a+b+d	1	4%
a+c+e	1	4%
b+c	1	4%
b+e	4	16%
c+d	2	8%
b+c+d	4	16%
c+e	1	4%
d+e	1	4%
a+b+c	2	8%
Total	25	100%



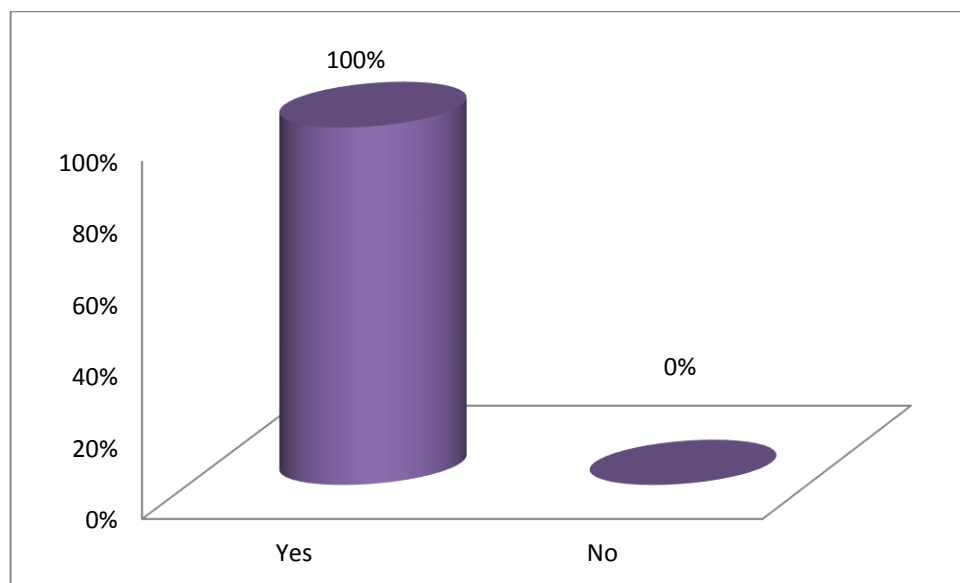
Graph12: Students views about the aspects of culture they lack and do not have enough background about

From the table above, we can say that the highest rate (16%) of students said that they lack information about social organizations, political and economic systems, and other cultural information concerning religion, assumptions, and beliefs, followed by 12% of students who said that they need to know more about history and geography and both systems (political and economic). Then, 8% of students who declares that they lack information about political and economic systems, lifestyles, and even social organizations. The lowest percentage (4%) of students has chosen a combination of lifestyles, political and economic systems, religion and beliefs. The answers were very complex and most students choose more than one answer most of the time.

Question 13: In your opinion, does cultural awareness influences intercultural communication?

Table 13: Students' perceptions about the influence of cultural awareness in enhancing intercultural communication

Option	Number	%
Yes	25	100%
No	0	0%
Total	25	100%



Graph 13: Students perceptions about the influence of cultural awareness in enhancing intercultural communication

The data obtained in the above table (number13) reveals that all students 100% believe that cultural awareness influences intercultural communication.

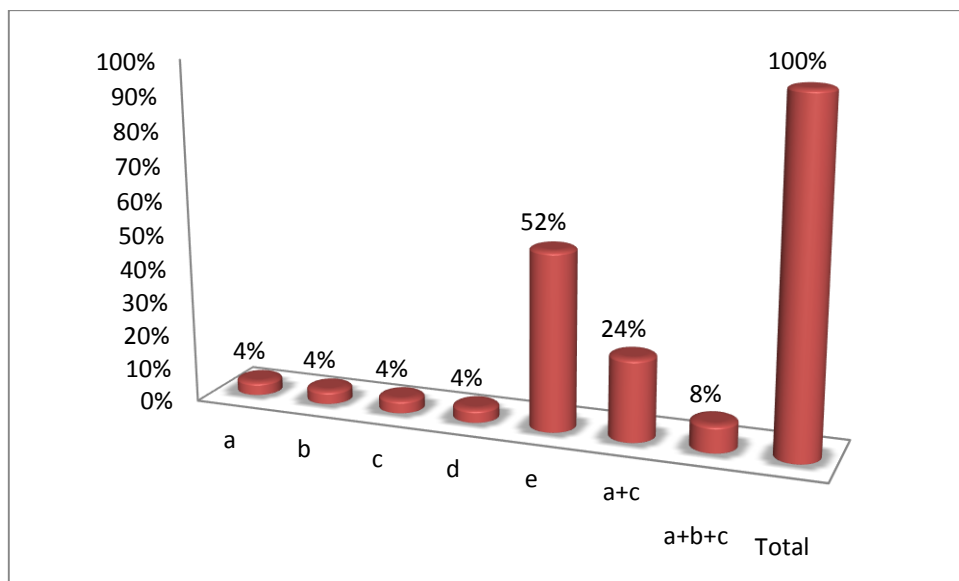
The second part of question 13 is about justification, students responses were different and they believe that whenever you have a clear image and aware enough about the target culture ;consequently, the act of communication will be much easier and

effective. Moreover, they said that an awareness of the culture shapes ones' way of behaving, speaking, and addressing others in that context. Additionally, students stated that being knowledgeable about the different aspects of others' culture contributes in using any language appropriately and helps people understand each other easily and prevents us from falling in communication breakdowns and culture shocks.

Question 14: Which of the following aspects of English culture do you think you have good knowledge about?

Table 14: Students views about the cultural information they have enough knowledge about

Option	Number	%
a) Customs and traditions	1	4%
b) Religion and values	1	4%
c) lifestyle (traditions, etiquette, food, art, etc)	1	4%
d) History and geography	1	4%
e) All of them	13	52%
a+c	6	24%
a+b+c	2	8%
Total	25	100%



Graph 14: Students about the cultural information they have enough background about

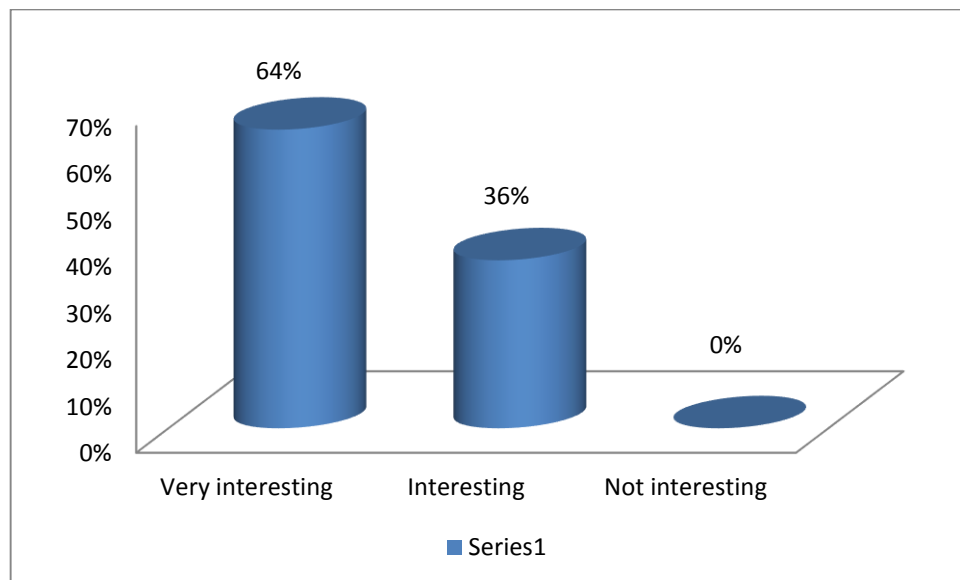
From the table above (number14), we noticed that a high rate (52%) of students said that they have good knowledge about all of the mentioned aspects followed by 24% of students who answered by choosing (a+c) a combination of customs, traditions and religion, values. Then, 8% of students stated that they have good cultural information concerning (customs and traditions+ religion and values+ lifestyles). Finally, only 4 students who opted for the first four answers (1 for each).

Section four: Attitudes Towards the English Culture

Question 15: How do you find learning about other peoples’ culture?

Table 15: Students’ views on learning about other peoples’ cultures

Option	Number	%
Very interesting	16	64%
Interesting	9	36%
Not interesting	0	0%
Total	25	100%



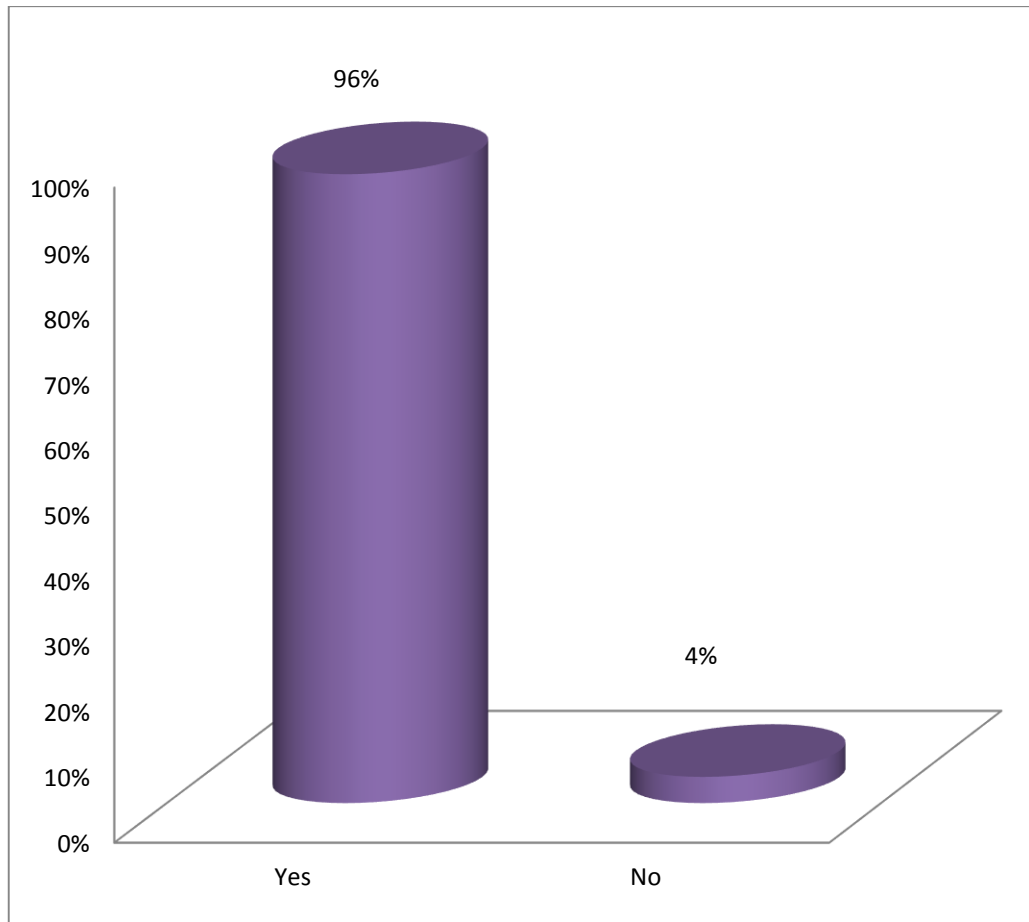
Graph 15: Students' views on learning about other people's culture

The results obtained demonstrate that none of the students sees that learning about other people culture is not interesting. The majority of students see it very interesting with a percentage of 64% followed by 36% of students who see it interesting and 0% of students consider learning about other cultures as not interesting.

Question 16: Do you agree with and support the concept of “learner’s autonomy” and rely on external sources like the Internet in your learning journey?

Table 16: Students attitudes toward their learning autonomy .

Option	Number	%
Yes	24	96%
No	1	4%
Total	25	100%



Graph 16: Students attitudes toward their learning autonomy

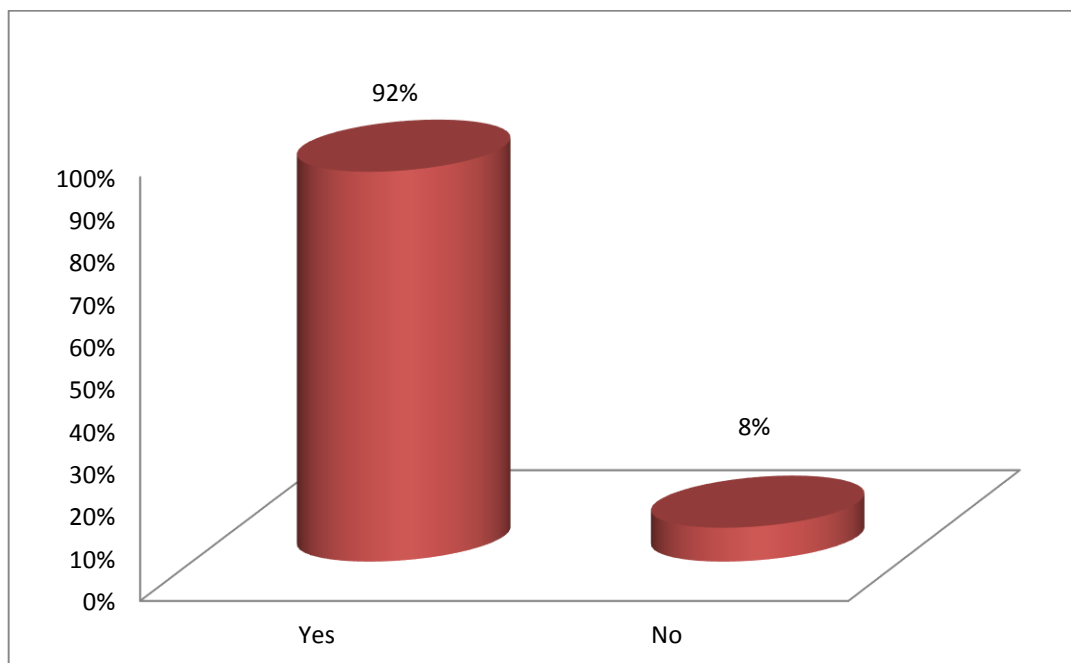
The data summarized in the table 16 reveal that most students 96% are autonomous learners and rely more on external sources in their learning journey; however, 4% of students rely only on their teachers and what is mentioned and included in the course.

The second part of this question is about explanation. Students said that is not sufficient at all to rely only on the lecture. Moreover, they said that we have to build our knowledge outside the boundaries of the classroom because if we were dependant only to what the teacher gave, we would never develop our skills.

Question 17: Do you try to learn more about the foreign language culture outside the classroom?

Table17: Students attitudes towards learning about the foreign culture outside the classroom

Option	Number	%
Yes	23	92%
No	2	8%
Total	25	100%



Graph 17: Students attitudes towards learning about the foreign culture outside the classroom.

Through the statistics shown in table 17, we notice that 92% of students make extra efforts outside the classroom to learn about the foreign language culture. A rate of 8% of students represents the students who are satisfied and do not try to learn more about the foreign language culture outside the classroom.

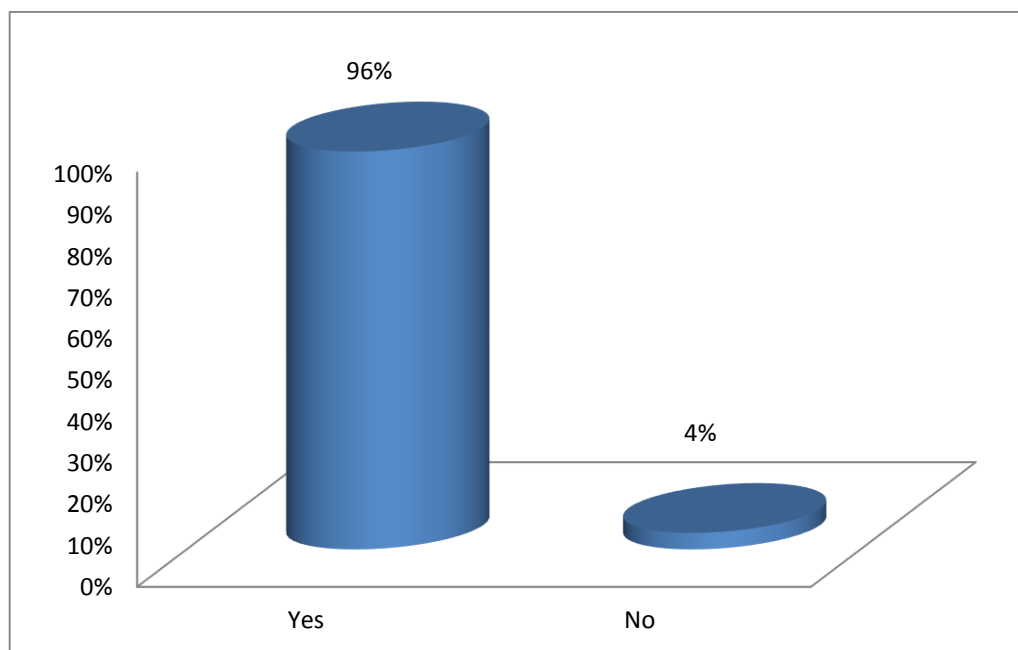
According to the second part of this question, some students gave ambiguous responses. The rest of the students gave different responses, they said that we learn about the foreign language culture outside the classroom by so many means such as: YouTube, Instagram, movies, documentaries, and books. Moreover, they said through talking to native speakers, playing games, travelling, sometimes through surfing the net, and trying to read about the culture of that language.

Section Five: Blogs and Travel Blogs

Question 18: Have you ever communicated with English native speakers?

Table 18.1: Students' attitudes toward communicating with English native speakers

Option	Number	%
Yes	24	96%
No	1	4%
Total	25	100%



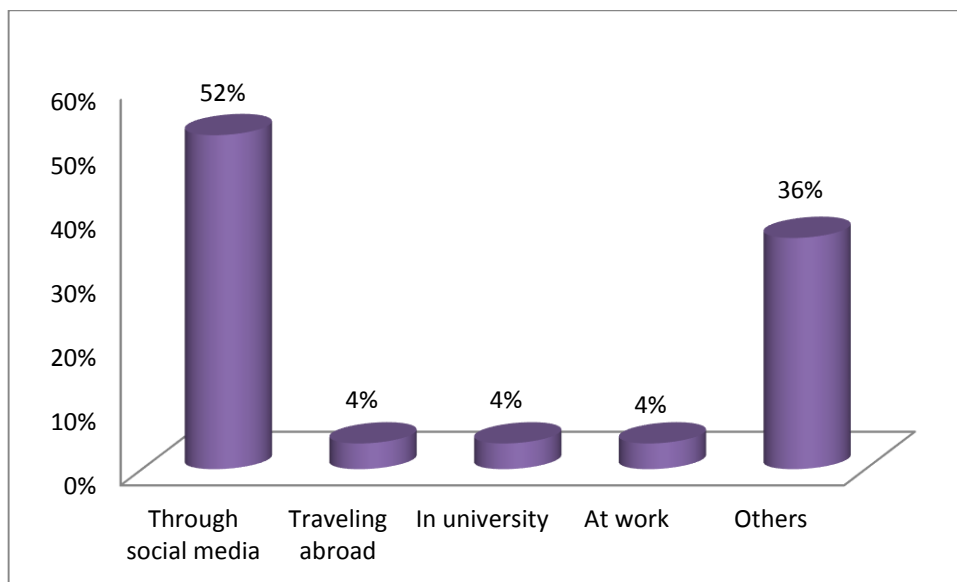
Graph 18.1: Students attitudes towards communicating with English native speakers

The data summarized above reveal that most students have already communicated with an English native speaker with a high rate of (96%); whereas, 4% is the percentage of students who did not experience communication with native speakers.

In the second part of this question, we have asked them to justify their answers and their justifications are demonstrated in the table next page:

Table.18.2 Students’ responses toward the means by which they communicate with English native speakers

Option	Number	%
Through social media	13	52%
Traveling abroad	1	4%
In university	1	4%
At work	1	4%
Others	9	36%
Total	25	100%



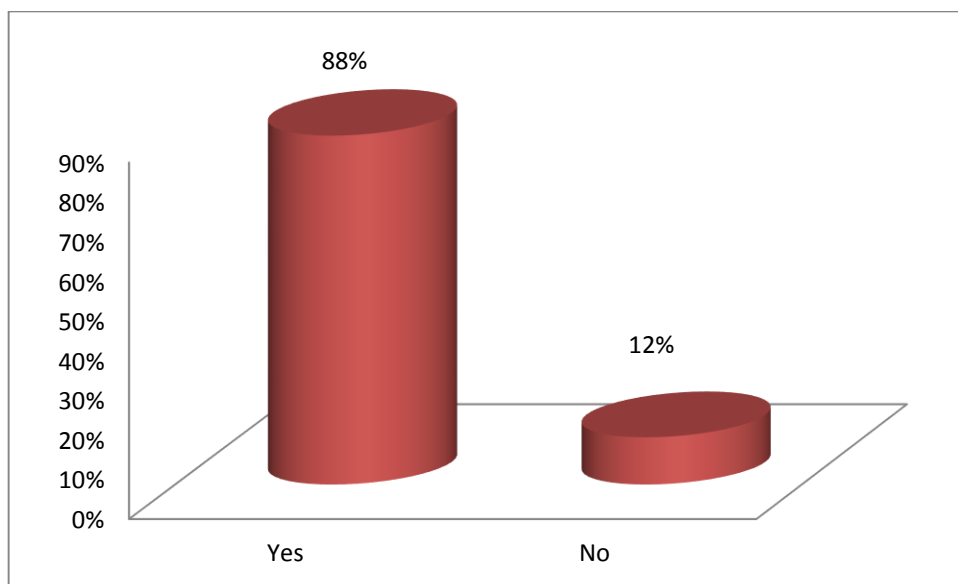
Graph 18.2 Students’ responses towards the means by which they communicate with English native speakers

In the second part of this question, a high rate of students (52%) said that they have communicated with native speakers through social media. 36% of students said that they use other tools to communicate, and 4% of them stated that they communicate at work. Similarly 4% in university also 4% of students communicate with native speakers through traveling abroad.

Question 19: Do you know what a blog is?

Table19: Student’s perception about blogs

Option	Number	%
Yes	23	92%
No	2	8%
Total	25	100%



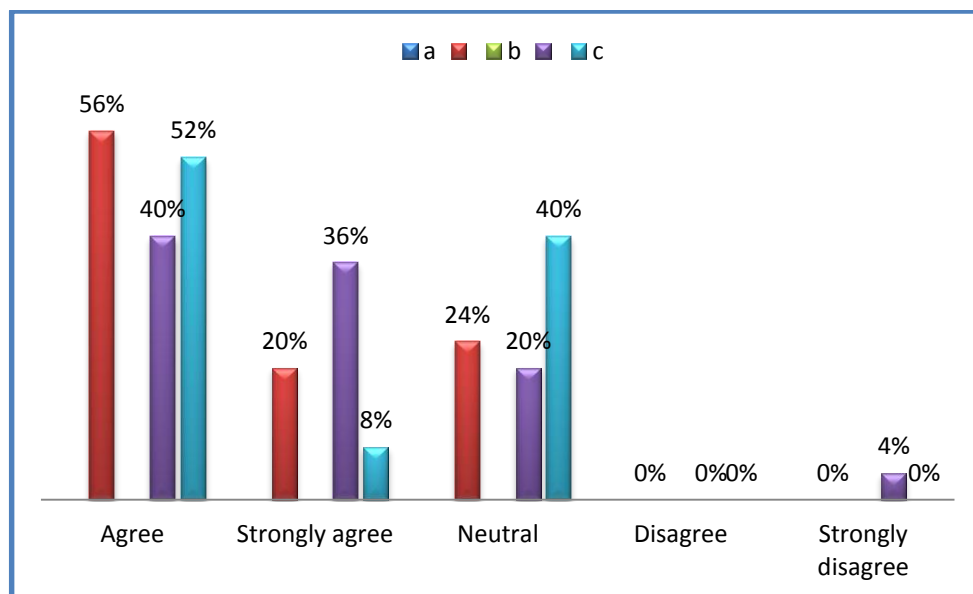
Graph 19: Student’s perception about blogs

Through the statistics shown in the 19 table, we notice that 88% of students have an idea and know about the concept of blogs; whereas, students who do not know about blogs make up 12% of the chosen sample.

Question 20: To what extent do you agree with these statements?

Table20: The extent to which students agree or not with the mentioned statements about blogs

Statement	Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) Blogs are an efficient method of learning as they can give instant support.	14 (56%)	5 (20%)	6 (24%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
b) Blogs are a more flexible method of learning as they can be done anytime, anywhere.	10 (40%)	9 (36%)	5 (20%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)
c) Blogs improve communication between learners and native speakers.	13 (52%)	2 (8%)	10 (40%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)



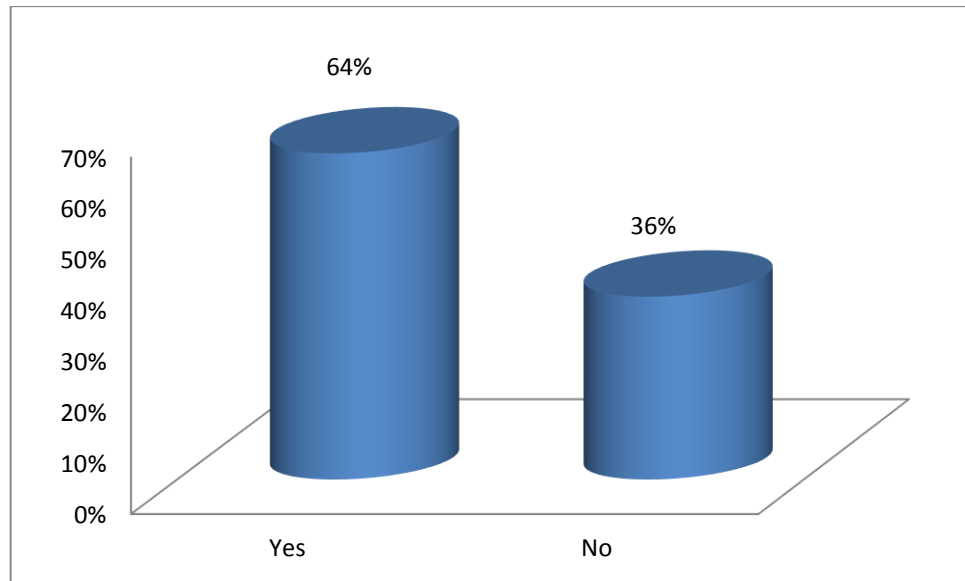
Graph 20: The extent to which students agree or not with the mentioned statements about blogs

According to the table above(number 20), we notice that 56% is the percentage of students who agrees that blogs are an efficient method of learning as they can give instant support, followed by a percentage of 24% of students who are neutral; whereas, the lowest rate 20% of students who strongly agrees with this statement. Concerning the second statement, a high rate of 40% of students agree that blogs are a more flexible method of learning as they can be done anytime and anywhere, followed by 36% of students who are strongly agree; whereas, students who are neutral make up 20% of the chosen sample, and a low rate of 4% of students who are strongly disagree. Last but not least, a highest rate of 52% of students agrees that blogs improve communication between learners and native speakers followed by 40% of students who are neutral and then 8% of students who strongly agree with this statement.

Question 21: Do you know what a travel blog is?

Table21: student's perception about travel blogs

Option	Number	%
Yes	16	64%
No	9	36%
Total	25	100%



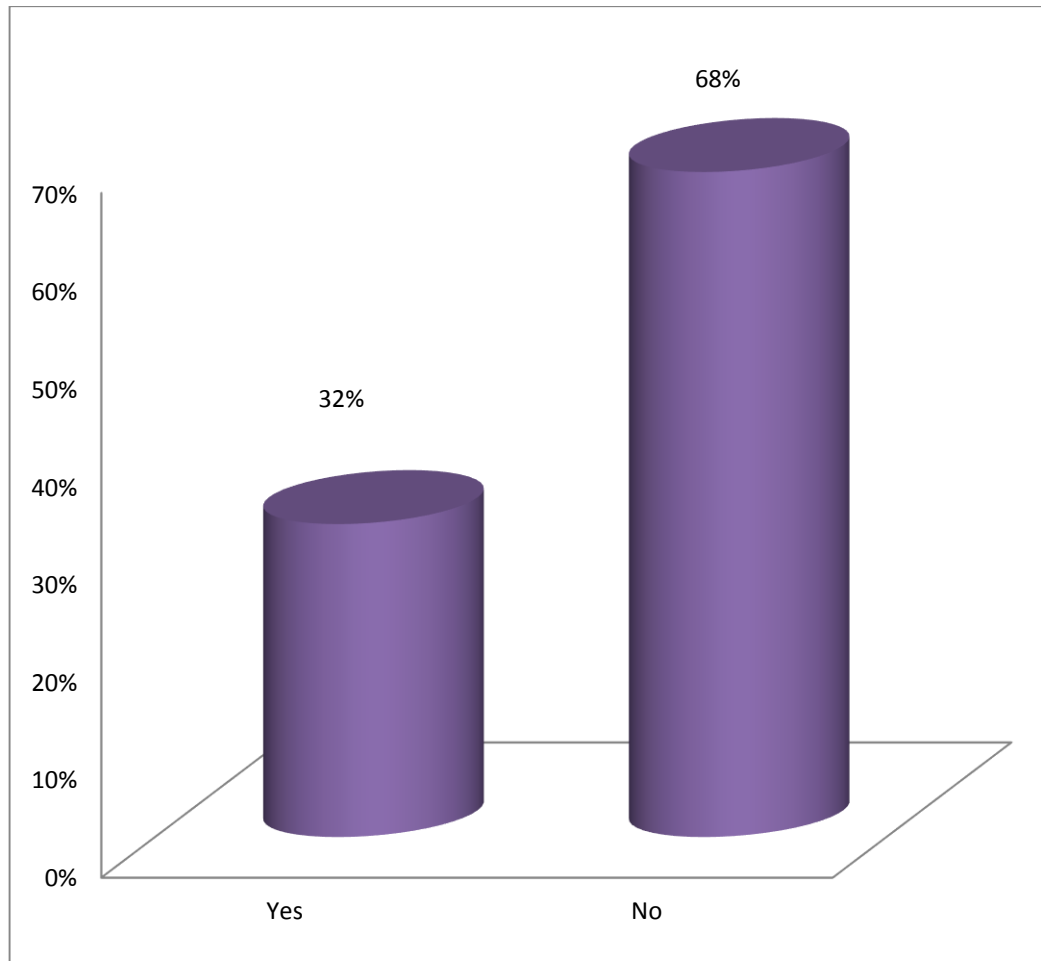
Graph 21: Students’ perceptions about travel blogs

Statistically, 64% of students do know and have an idea about travel blogs which make up a number of 16 students of the chosen sample whereas 36% of students do not know about travel blogs (9 students).

Question 22: Are you following any travel blog?

Table 22: students’ answers about the use of travel blogs

Option	Number	%
Yes	8	32%
No	17	68%
Total	25	100%



Graph 22: Students answers about the use of travel blogs.

According to what is shown in table(22), 68% is the percentage of students who are following some travel blogs; whereas, 32% of students do not follow any travel blog. We conclude that most students do not use travel blogs and they are not aware of their benefits.

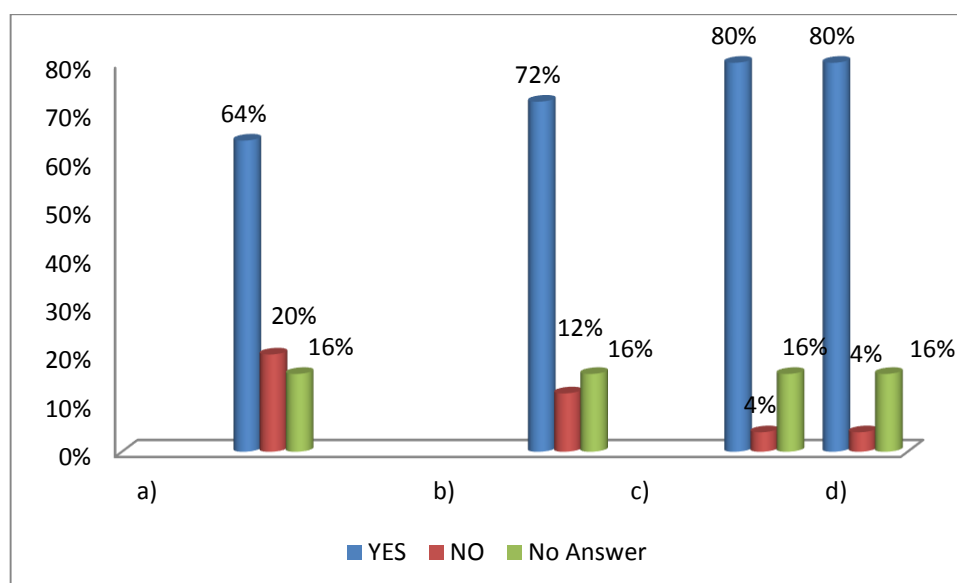
In the second part of this question, students were asked to name some travel blogs that are following. Most students did not answer this part of the question and the remain students have listed some such as; Nikki Vargas, Lili's travel plan, Dan flying solo, Went Yonder, and around the world "I".

Section Six: Travel blogs and Cultural Awareness

Question 23: Do you think travel blogs help you in?

Table 23: Student's views about travel blogs advantages

Statement	YES	NO	No Answer
a) Providing you opportunity to interact with English native speakers	16 (64%)	5 (20%)	4 (16%)
b) Examining critically your own and others' cultural values	18 (72%)	3 (12%)	4 (16%)
c) Comparing and contrasting similarities and differences between your native culture and the target culture	20 (80%)	1 (4%)	4 (16%)
d) Enhancing attitudes of readiness and openness to cultural diversity	20 (80%)	1 (4%)	4 (16%)

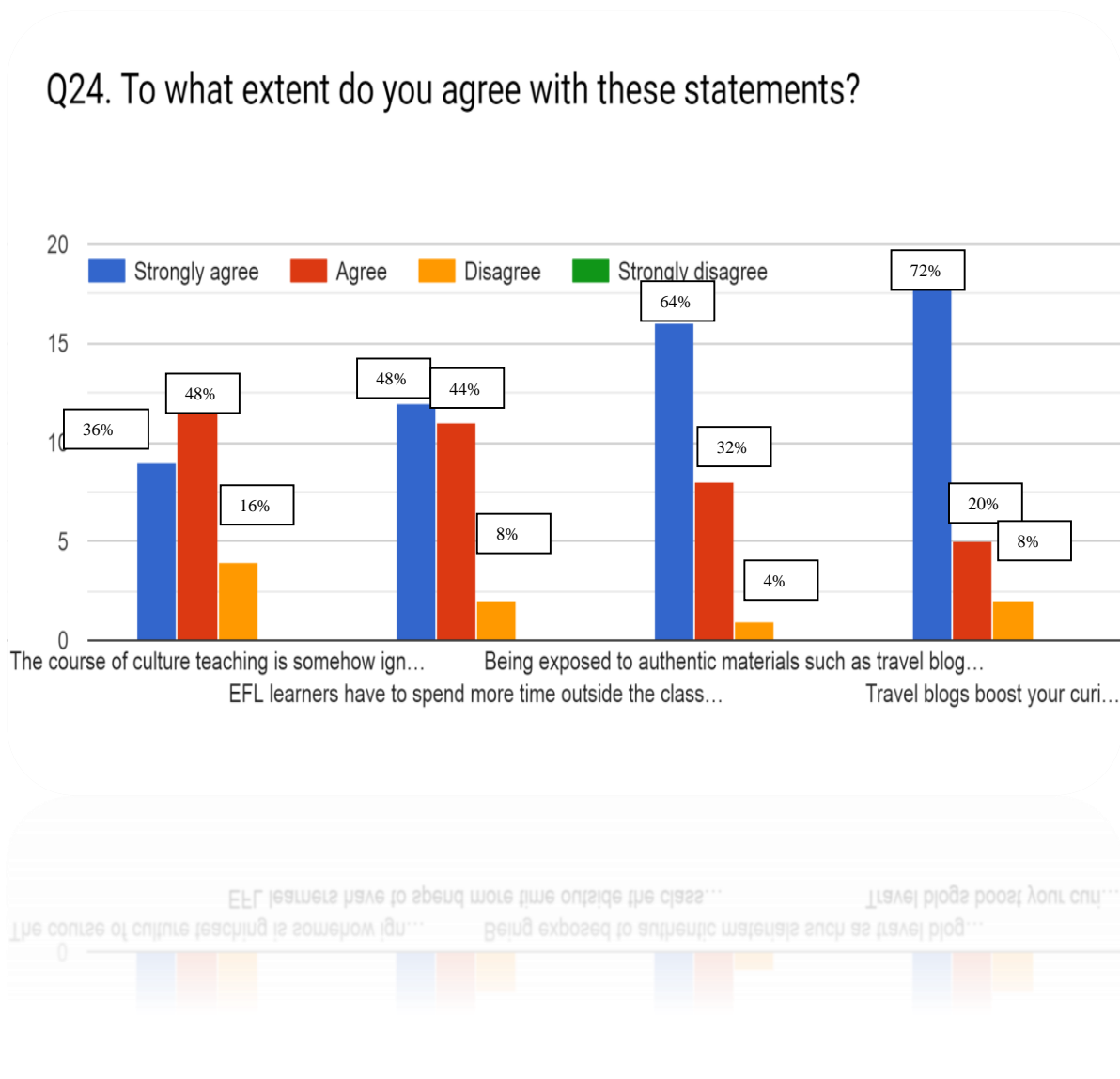


Graph 23: Student's views about travel blogs advantages

Statistically speaking, 64% of students agreed that travel blogs provide an opportunity to interact with English native speakers; however, 20% of students said ‘No’ and a lower rate of 16% did not answer. The second statement was examining critically your own and others’ cultural values, 72% of students answered by “Yes”; however, 12% of students said “No” and 16% of them did not answer. Moreover, the third statement was

comparing and contrasting similarities and differences between your native culture and the target culture: a higher percentage of 80% of students answered by “Yes” followed by 16% of students who did not answer and 4% of them said “No”. The last statement was about enhancing attitudes of readiness and openness to cultural diversity, the highest percentage of students (80%) agreed and answered by “Yes”, 16% of them did not answer; however, 4% of them said “No”.

Question 24: To what extent do you agree with these statements?



Graph 24: Students views about the importance of cultural awareness and travel blogs.

Table 24: Students' views about the importance of cultural awareness and travel blogs

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) The course of culture teaching is somehow ignored in the University of Biskra.	9 36%	12 48%	0 0%	4 16%	0 0%
b) EFL learners have to spend more time outside the classroom to develop skills and strategies that enable them interpret and understand different cultural behaviours and worldviews.	12 48%	11 44%	0 0%	2 8%	0 0%
c) Being exposed to authentic materials such as travel blogs help EFL learners to acquire knowledge about social groups of English speaking countries.	16 64%	8 32%	0 0%	1 4%	0 0%
d) Travel blogs boost your curiosity to discover new cultures and respecting others from different cultures.	18 72%	5 20%	0 0%	2 8%	0 0%

Statistically, it is shown from the above table (24) that 48% of students agree that the course of culture teaching is somehow ignored in the University of Biskra, followed by 36% of students who strongly agree with this statement, then 16% of them disagree, and no one strongly disagree. The second statement was EFL learners have to spend more time outside the classroom to develop skills and strategies that enable them interpret and understand different cultural behaviours and worldviews; 48% strongly agree on this statement, followed by 44% who agree, then 8% disagree, and no one of them is strongly disagree. The third statement was; being exposed to authentic materials such as travel blogs help EFL learners to acquire knowledge about social groups of English speaking

countries; the highest percentage (64%) strongly agree, followed by 32% of students who agree on this statement, and a lowest rate (4%) disagree; whereas, 0% of students are both neutral and strongly disagree. The last statement is travel blogs boost your curiosity to discover new cultures and respecting others from different cultures; most students are strongly agree with a high rate of 72%, followed by 20% who agree, then 8% who disagree with this statement; while, 0% are both neutral and strongly disagree. As a result, most students agree and strongly agree in all statements.

Question 25: We would greatly appreciate any further suggestions or comments to develop EFL learners' cultural awareness?

The majority of the respondents did not really add any comment; the remaining students mentioned the importance of self-efforts on raising their cultural awareness outside the classroom through the following suggestions:

- ✓ Talk to native speakers as much as you can.
- ✓ Cultural awareness starts by encouraging learners to recognize their cultural identity in relation to other cultures.
- ✓ The taught modules in our university should be more updated.
- ✓ Developing cultural awareness through being exposed to authentic materials.
- ✓ Travelling is the best teacher of culture, and travel blogs would be the best course.
- ✓ The use of social media (Facebook, twitter, blogs) to interact with natives and know more about their cultures.

Findings

From the analysis of the data gathered with respect to students' responses, we generally noticed that there are a variety of situations and opinions related to cultural awareness and travel blogs in EFL context.

Although Master One students are highly motivated to know about the English language and appreciate the foreign culture (English), they need and they have to improve their cultural awareness. Moreover, Master One students are aware of the importance of culture and being culturally aware and its impact on the usage of language.

Furthermore, students recognized the role of travel blogs in enhancing their cultural awareness and they showed their acceptance in order to start following and using some of them.

Teachers' Interview

Teachers' sample

A structure interview was designed as a gathering data tool for teachers at the field of English at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra. The interview was conducted with 5 teachers who are experienced in the area of study and who teach courses related to our research. The participants were chosen randomly from a whole population of 36 teachers of the English division (Applied Linguistics).

Description of the teachers' interview

The interview is composed of 11 questions. It is preceded by a small introduction which includes the aim of the study and the purpose of the interview and some instructions. The two first questions are related to teachers' degree and work experience. The third

question was designed to have information about teachers' views about culture teaching. Question 4 and 5 are concerned with teachers perception to "cultural awareness" and how it influences intercultural communication. The sixth question aims to explore teachers' evaluation of the level of their students' cultural awareness. The seventh question deals with the teachers opinions and views towards the reasons behind the lack of cultural knowledge among the learners. Question 8 deals with teachers views about EFL learner's autonomy and if they try to rely more on external sources in their learning process. In question 9, teachers are asked about travel blogs. Question 10 was designed to know teachers opinions about travel blogs and their role on enhancing EFL learners cultural awareness. The final statement invites teachers to make some suggestions and further comments.

Data Analysis

Question01: what is your educational degree?

Teachers answered as follow:

Teacher 01: Magister degree.

Teacher 02: Magister degree.

Teacher 03: Doctorate degree.

Teacher 04: Doctorate degree.

Teacher 05: Doctorate degree.

The responses of the teachers indicate that they have a high educational degree, 3 of them have Doctorate degree, and the remaining teachers have Magister degree.

Question 02: How long have you been teaching English?

Teacher 01: 20 years

Teacher 02: 5 years

Teacher 03: 12 years

Teacher 04: 6 years

Teacher 05: 07 years.

The data obtained indicate that all teachers have experienced teaching English and culture for different time periods between (5 years) and twenty years (20 years). The responses demonstrate that all our participants are experienced teachers. Therefore, we are able to collect varied and reliable views and opinions which can sustain us to reach our objectives.

Question 03: What is your understanding of culture teaching?

Teacher 01 believes that culture teaching is related to teaching different elements related to both local and global issues including social norms, traditions, and beliefs.

The second teacher sees that culture teaching is imparting culture within knowledge, and within language because we cannot separate culture from language, they go in parallel. However, when teaching culture, we should filter what is coming with a language especially we are dealing with a language spoken in the west and it carries some western culture values, notions, and views to life. Those views and values are included implicitly even if we did not pay attention; however, we should make them clear and distinguish them in order to make a good transformation of culture and knowledge from the west to the east. The third teacher believes that teaching culture is concerned with teaching how

people of the foreign culture think, eat, dress, and behave. Teachers 4 and 5 define teaching culture as introducing students to the artistic achievements of the foreign society and how their values and norms can influence the way in which language is used.

Question 04: How would you define cultural awareness?

Teacher 01: Cultural awareness is the intellectual faculty that allows you to identify the cultural boundaries and established mutual growth between one's own culture and the other culture.

Teacher 02: To make students aware that language cannot survive in isolation away from its natives; thus, its cultural behaviour and all about how do people live?

Teacher 03: It is the one's understanding and familiarity with the cultural related elements existing in the language context, i.e. some cultural issues must be paid attention to when speaking or thinking in the target language.

Teacher 04: Cultural awareness is being aware and having conscious and enough knowledge of what is going on in the society being it foreign or local and how people live, talk, think, and also being aware of all what constitute culture.

Teacher 05: cultural awareness is the knowledge of the socio-cultural knowledge of the English language and the ability to comprehend and produce discoursed. Also, to understand words, utterances, and idiomatic expressions related to the target culture.

Question 05: In which ways cultural awareness influences intercultural communication?

Teacher 01: The more a learner is knowledgeable and familiar with the language cultural background, the more he can be fluent.

Teacher 02: It allows you to have more understanding and to prevent any misunderstanding which may arise whenever there is an encounter with English speaking people.

Teacher 03: The more aware you are, the better you successfully communicate your ideas especially with natives or other speakers of English. Braking down in communication will not happen if you consider the other cultures.

Teacher 04: cultural awareness influences intercultural communication through the use of language, style, and vocabulary related to that culture religion, life style, customs and the ability to understand and communicate others appropriately.

Teacher 05: when students are culturally aware and know the norms, beliefs, assumptions and all the aspects of each society and the reasons why someone would behave in certain situation, as a result they would be better communicators and prevent communication breakdowns.

The data obtained demonstrates that cultural awareness is very important to EFL learners and they need to master it in order to develop high proficiency in English and to prevent communication break downs with both native speakers and English speakers.

Question 06: To what extent do you think EFL learners are culturally aware?

Teacher 01: It is a big problem concerning this case; most learners are linguistically competent but culturally are not. They lack the foreign language culture.

Teacher 02: Through the years of my experience, I can say that EFL learners are not competent culturally.

Teacher 03: Most students are not linguistically competent, so how can they be culturally competent?

Teacher 04: EFL learner's cultural awareness is very limited because they still attached to their local culture.

Teacher 05: EFL learners' cultural competence is limited and they lack cultural awareness to a great extent.

The teacher's responses above clearly reveal that EFL learner's (and specifically Master one students) awareness of the foreign culture is poor. They are not competent culturally which may prevent them to accurately and appropriately comprehend and use the foreign language. Also, they cannot manage successful communication in particular context.

Question 07: In your opinion, what are the reasons behind the lack of cultural awareness and cultural knowledge among EFL learners?

Teacher 01: The Canva, the syllabus, and many other factors.

Teacher 02: Students laziness, lack of reading, hostility to whatever clashes with one's identifying features.

Teacher 03: Lack of exposure to language with authentic and real contexts and the syllabus does not focus on culture. i.e. the major focus is on language.

Teacher 04: The materials used in EFL classes and the number of sessions that are dedicated to culture teaching is not enough

Teacher 05: From one hand, the university program and from the other hand, the learners are not motivated and curious to learn about the foreign language culture.

The teacher's responses clearly reveal that the reasons behind the lack of cultural awareness vary and differ from the syllabus, program, and materials to the learner's laziness, lack of reading, and lack of motivation.

Question 08: Do you think EFL learners are more autonomous and rely on external sources in their learning journey?

Teacher 01: He answered that students must reach autonomy as soon as possible especially with the use of ICT's.

Teacher 02: He argued that it depends on the learners himself, sometimes yes and sometimes no.

Teacher 03: He stated that once often are autonomous especially with the help of technology (social media)

Teacher 04: He described that language cannot be limited inside the classroom and with the notion of technology; EFL learners are more autonomous nowadays.

Teacher 05: He answered by; since the advent of Internet and the widespread of social media, most EFL learners become more autonomous and they like knowing new things and enjoy discovering new information.

Through the data shown above, we can say that students are more autonomous nowadays especially with the well spread social media.

Question 09: Do you know what a travel blog is? If yes, have you ever used one?

Teacher 01: I know about travel blogs; however, I did not use it before.

Teacher 02: The idea of blogs is familiar to me; however, I have no idea what a travel blog is.

Teacher 03: I heard about the concept of travel blog but I am not into technology.

Teacher 04: I have no idea about travel blogs.

Teacher 05: I use to travel a lot, so travel blogs are familiar to me and help to a good extent.

We notice that teachers of English at the English field at Biskra University do not use travel blogs and they are not up to date with technology.

Question 10: In your opinion, does travel blogs boost EFL learner's curiosity to discover new cultures and respecting others from different cultures?

Teacher 01: I agree with this statement since travelling is always a good opportunity to discover different places and meet other people from different cultures.

Teacher 02: For sure, it is like a window through which we discover the world.

Teacher 03: He said that he has no idea.

Teacher 04: Travel blog is a good strategy to facilitate communication and to have ideas and world views about different societies and cultures.

Teacher 05: Since travel blogs provide an opportunity to discover new places, new customs, food, traditions...etc. as a result, they are beneficial to improve cultural awareness and respect cultural diversity as well.

All the teachers respond positively to this question, they think that travel blogs enhance cultural awareness. They supported their answers by saying that, they facilitate communication and they help to discover new cultures and different social groups.

Question 11: We would greatly appreciate any further suggestions or comments.

Teacher 01: He did not suggest anything.

Teacher 02: He suggested that we should give priority to cultural awareness and it should be taught as a module at Biskra University.

Teacher 04: We are shifting from the teacher centred to the learner centred in which learners should have a great responsibility of their learning. They should be active, curious, and autonomous because we are in the age of technology.

Teacher 05: I think the idea of travel blogs is new researchable and they would help as a tool to foster our students cultural awareness.

Findings

The results obtained from teachers' interview are very important to reach the objectives of our current study. After analysing teacher responses, we conclude the following points:

- Although teachers are conscious of the great importance of culture teaching and its influence on communicative competence and language use, the situation and the conditions of teaching culture at the Department of Foreign Languages at Biskra University is not really good.
- EFL learners lack cultural awareness.
- Raising EFL learner's cultural awareness will help them to prevent communication breakdowns and be fluent.
- EFL learners are more autonomous nowadays especially within the well spread of technology and social media.

- Travel blog is a good strategy to foster their cultural awareness and open their minds and visions on different cultures and different beliefs and assumptions.

The Focus Group

This data collection tool was mainly designed to address students' views and perceptions about the use of travel blogs as an autonomous learning strategy to foster their cultural awareness. 21 Master One students volunteered and gave the hand of help and they have participated in the focus group in order to obtain more information which contributes in acquiring clear answers and more insights to our research questions, also to put them in the context of the subject study.

Structure and content

We had randomly chosen 21 master one students in the focus group. Then, we created a closed group on Facebook in which all the participants are members in it. Referring to the statement stated by Dornyei (2007) which argues that:

In any research project, the standard practice is to run several focus groups. In this process we can decrease any type of idiosyncratic results that may occur because of some unexpected external or internal factors which affect the dynamics of the group. Therefore, for achieving depth of information, it is often recommended that a project involves at least 4 to 5 groups and if possible we can add few more (p. 145).

We have provided them with 4 travel blogs from around the world in the period of two weeks in order to have the sufficient time to check them, their content and have an idea about the kind of information those blogs deliver. Taking into consideration the results and the findings of the questionnaire, we tried to spot the light on the aspects of culture they lack.

After confirming that all participants have reviewed all the travel blogs, the participants were divided to three subgroups to (07) participants per group and we have asked them to have a meeting at university in their free time in order to conduct the focus group. The first focus group was undertaken with 6 participants on Sunday (3 March 2019) at (11.20), the second was conducted with 7 participants on Monday (4 March 2019) at (13.10) and the last one was with 5 participants on Wednesday (6 March 2019) at (09.40). The duration of the focus group was around One Hour for all the groups. The members of the focus group were introduced in details to the way the focus group works though we had explained before the whole process online. Under the title of using travel blogs as an autonomous learning strategy outside the classroom to enhance EFL learners' cultural awareness, the researcher raised 8 different questions and they were as follows:

- 1) What was your first impression using travel blogs?
- 2) Why the British people tend to be indirect?
- 3) Is there anything in English culture is considered rude in your culture?
- 4) What customs from the British culture do you think should be included in your culture?
- 5) Do you think “when in Rome do as the Romans do” is always a good advice?
- 6) What kinds of cultural aspects and information you have learned most using travel blogs?
- 7) What are the advantages of using travel blogs?
- 8) To what extent do you think travel blogs may foster your cultural awareness?

Analysis of the Focus Group

Q1: What was your first impression using travel blogs?

The aim of this question is to see how students perceived travel blogs for the very first time.

Group 01: The participants of this group stated that when they first used travel blogs, they found them so interesting and useful. They added that they had no idea about blogs for such purposes existed because they have never thought of checking such blogs due to their interests with blogs of different concepts. The provided blogs were very interesting to skim over and they were surprised by both the language (in terms of style) and the amount of information that kind of blogs deliver.

Group 02: the participants of this group said that their first impression about travel blogs was just like” that is highly interesting and pleasing idea to be as a bridge that links between gaining knowledge, and at the same time learning more about the target language culture. We found travel blogs creative and new”.

Group 03: The participants of this group answered as follows; the first impression we have got when using travel blogs was positive. It is a great guide that allows you to know more about the target country culture you wish to travel to(including landmarks, food, traditions...etc.)

Q 02: Why the British people tend to be indirect?

This question was designed to assess students' perception and views toward the English people nature.

Group 01: The members of this group stated that; in a matter of fact, English or British people tend to be indirect than the Americans because of the impact of their culture and traditions on their personality. When they talk to someone they use such codes or embedded meanings to the listener and it seems somehow unclear especially if the listener is not a British one.

Group 02: the participants of this group stated that British people tend to be indirect because it is a part of their character and they try to avoid acting bluntly or give orders/ requests directly nor they like to hurt people straight forwardly (it is a part of politeness).

Group 03: The members of this group stated that the British tend to be indirect because of the factors of politeness that must be present in their language and overall cultures. They could criticize something harshly yet the language would still be very considerate and polite, and they think it is somehow rude so they use illusions and connotations.

Q 03: Is there anything in English culture is considered rude in your culture?

This question aims to ascertain to what extent students are aware of the differences between their own culture and the foreign culture

Group 01: The participants of this group noted that some English people tend to be racist and segregated to an extent which is very rude thing in our culture to make gaps

between people especially due to their skin colour or their religion; we Muslims do not do so. Our religion is more peaceful for such act.

Group 02: The participants of this group declared that having male friends might be considered as rude, or even unacceptable because of the Algerian Islamic background; otherwise, we were not captured by any behaviour which is considered rude in the Algerian culture apart from the ones against Islam.

Group 03: The participants of this group answered as follows; probably the English humour which tends to be often sarcastic but would be considered rude and over the top in the Algerian culture besides British have the habit to use “affectionate” names when addressing someone, so do not take any offense if they call you love, dearie, or darling. These are commonly used; however, in our culture it is considered as rude behaviour.

Q 04: What customs from the British culture do you think should be included in you culture?

The aim of this question is to investigate students’ perception to cultural exchange.

Group 01: the participants of the first group stated that the most attractive thing here was about poppies and remembrance for their soldiers, we think we should take this as an example to remember our martyrs not only in their national days as a kind of having a national spirit and respecting them for their sacrifice for a life time.

Group 02: The participants of this group noted that punctuality is one custom from the British culture which needs to be included within the Algerian community which in most of times we do not respect time.

Group 03: The members of this group answered that the customs of not asking about private and personal matters like the background, the profession... should be included in our culture. Those are the topics frequently discussed in most casual daily Algerian conversations.

Q 05: Do you think “when in Rome do as the Romans do” is always a good advice?

This question aims to ascertain to what extent do students adapt, and even adopt the foreign culture.

Group 01: The participants of this group noted that it is a good thing to adapt the other customs and cultures; however, we think it is not always a good advice due to the fact that people are different with so many various personalities and way of thinking. Some of them may think it is rude to do a certain thing or to behave in a certain way also religion takes a very crucial place here.

Group 02: The participants of the second group answered as follows; it is not always a good advice. The person should be cautious and try to respect the target culture in order not to offend its people; however, one should not just be a follower and do as the people of the target culture because it might lead to losing one's identity.

Group 03: The third group members answered as follows; it is not always a good advice because it may erase different peoples' original views, beliefs, traditions, and principals. They think it is better to be aware of the target culture traditions, beliefs, and lifestyle so that a foreigner would not hurt them, but in the same time one must stick to his roots and not change them because of others beliefs.

Q 06: What kinds of cultural information have you learned most using travel blogs?

This question aims to know the aspects of culture travel blogs treat most.

Group 01: The participants of the first group said that they have learnt various things about these cultures, it is interesting and attractive. And they said what they liked the most is the symbols of remembrance, the mother day, the most famous places like restaurants, museums, and their prestigious way of living is really interesting. They are so civilized and cultured people.

Group 02: The participants of this group noted that; using travel blogs helped them a lot to discover different British and American celebrations, holidays, etc. such as, Bank holidays, *Remembrance Day*. Also, they knew some information about the British Royal Family and its traditions.

Group 03: The participants of this group noted that the cultural information they have learned most is that of memorial days, the most famous places in Britain and their history, some holidays and their ways of celebration. Moreover, they mentioned that the best one was in that American travel blog; it is the idea of how each state has its own favourite candy in the *Halloween!* This was new to some of them and what they know is that Arizona will be the state to celebrate trick or treat once one get there. The other one which grabbed their attention was the information about the history of the African-Americans with chicken, one of the participants said that she remember that she has watched a stand- up comedy about a joke which was about blacks and chicken and reading this information in the blog helped her to get a clear idea.

Q 07: What are the advantages of using travel blogs?

Group 01: The members of this group noted that; the advantages of using travel blogs is to learn new things about the target language cultures and customs, to have a background information, also it helps to enhance the learners of this language abilities during their learning process. The most beneficial side about it is that it works as a fuel that triggers their motivation towards learning a language, and it makes them even motivated and interested. Besides, raising their self-esteem to perform well in the classroom and the more knowledge they gain the better performance they would have.

Group 02: Participants answered that travel blogs gives pre-insights about certain area, learn more about certain culture, and helps people to plan their trip. Moreover, using a travel blog helps you to make like open minded friends and connect with people with similar interests to your own. Finally, they are a free source of learning, enriching vocabulary, and enhancing your background cultural knowledge by enabling blogs visitors to ask questions and find rare information about certain cultural aspects of a country.

Group 03: The participants of this group mentioned that there are plenty of advantages to experience such blogs like they prevent the traveller from behaving wrongly in other countries, provide them with recommendations about marvellous sights, and views, picturesque places to visit while being there. Moreover, and most importantly prepare them to not get in a cultural shock once they arrive and they contribute in introducing everything you need to know about the culture of the country you intend to visit and avoid any confusions.

Q 08: To what extent do you think travel blogs foster your cultural awareness?

Group 01: The participants of this group said that travel blogs foster their cultural awareness to a great extent especially if someone tends to learn a new language. It plays a significant role during the learning process of any language, because the more a student knows about the language customs, traditions, lifestyle, culture, and history the more s/he will be pleased, motivated, and interested about it. The key to have a good understanding to certain language while learning is to be motivated to learn it through having an eye vision among the folds of its culture, it paves the way for its learners to rise their ambitions and foster their desire to be able to take that step in it.

Group 02: The members of this group agreed that travel blogs foster their cultural awareness to a great extent. Travel blogs are such a creative and smart way to transmit cultural awareness in a subtle and fun way because they encompass many and various aspects of culture(food, sports, customs, history, monuments...etc.) that are crucial to be known by EFL learners.

Group 03: The participants stated that travel blogs participated to a very good extent in fostering their cultural awareness since most of them were not really interested with British culture; however, after experiencing the recommended blogs they knew that they were mistaken. They said that they were more into American culture and actually they are grateful for knowing this much of great surprising information about both cultures and especially the British one.

In brief the majority of students agreed that travel blogs could be very important tool and strategy to foster their cultural awareness and motivate them to know more about the target language traditions, customs, beliefs, and even history and geography in a very vivid way; in order to have that tolerance when dealings with people from

different backgrounds and cultures and prevent communication break downs or any kind of culture shock.

Findings of the focus group

Using the focus group was very important to address the utility of travel blogs through conducting interviews with them and obtain more information about their perception to the subject. The interview raised new information to the present study which gave us further insights and more clarifications.

It became clear that the majority of students have agreed on the importance of cultural awareness; however, students lack a cultural background that enables them to have a better communication, a wider vision to others cultures and differences in life styles, beliefs and so on. Regarding this point, students give more importance to the linguistic competence, because basically this is what they have been evaluated on for most of the time.

Another emphasis which was highlighted in the focus group was student's awareness about the similarities and the differences between both cultures; the Algerian one and the British one in order to know to what extent they are tolerant and accept others views and beliefs after checking the recommended travel blogs.

In the same vein and as mentioned previously, students were pleased and have reacted very positively using travel blog. They found them as a good strategy to enhance their cultural background and the idea of travel blogs in itself was very interesting in terms of structure, content, vocabulary and the vivid way in which the information are delivered.

To sum up, the focus group was a very useful instrument to approach the main concentration of the present study, since students are the most important substance in it. This tool allowed us to obtain students' views directly, which was more valuable and reliable in acquiring clearer answers to the questions of our research. Students found travel blogs a good strategy which helped them to foster their cultural awareness to a great extent and they will keep using them regularly to enrich their background culturally and even linguistically.

Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to the field work of the present study; it has dealt with three data collection tools; namely, student's questionnaire, teacher's interview, and the focus group. Throughout the interpretation and the analysis of the data obtained from the used tools, different results were demonstrated. Mainly, EFL teachers' and Master One students are aware of the importance of cultural awareness nevertheless learners do not have much background knowledge about this important aspect of language.

Moreover, EFL learners' poor cultural knowledge is mainly due to the syllabus, lack of authenticity, and students dependency to what is given only by their teachers. Thus, travel blogs are an efficient strategy to improve EFL learners' cultural awareness. The obtained data were analysed by statistical means and interpreted in a descriptive way. By the end research findings and results were discussed thoroughly in order to answer the research questions and validate the proposed hypothesis.

General conclusion

The current study has dealt with cultural awareness and travel blogs. The core of this study is investigation of the effectiveness of travel blogs to enhance to enhance EFL learners cultural awareness at the field of English at Biskra University. The research was served into two main parts: the theoretical part and the field work. The former includes two chapters, which are devoted for studying the two variables. The third chapter covers the analysis, description, and findings from the data accumulated from the students' questionnaire, teachers' interview, and the focus group.

Moreover, the first chapter has been devoted to the theoretical aspects of the concept of culture. We have presented distinct conceptualization of culture proposed by different researchers and explored its characteristics while considering the various elements of culture. Additionally, we have shed light on the connection exist between culture, communication, and language. We have also emphasized some significant concepts like culture shock, acculturation, and Sapir and Whorf hypothesis.

The second chapter was divided into two sections, the first one concerned with the concept of blogs and travel blogs. We have started with the concept of ICT, and then we have presented definitions of related key terms such as Internet and travel. Moreover, we have studied the case of TripAdvisor travel blog and we have illustrated with many pictures from different travel blogs. As a final point, we have considered the impact of travel blogs on enhancing EFL learners cultural awareness. The second section was about learners autonomy, we have started with a definition of learner autonomy, its aspects, and levels. Then, we shed light on the idea of learners autonomy development in education as well as communicative approach and learners autonomy.

The field work of this study required three tools in order to confirm or dismiss our research hypothesis. A questionnaire has been distributed to a random sample of Master One LMD students, an interview that has been designed and managed with teachers who have a long experience in the field of study, and a focus group that has been done with 21 Master One LMD students.

The findings revealed a positive attitude regarding the use of travel blogs in EFL context. More precisely, it found that travel blogs are helpful in language learning during which they enrich the learners' cultural awareness, as they also develop the learners' language skills. As far as the teachers' views are concerned, they supported the use of such tool as an autonomous learning strategy, in which it presents new way of learning, simplify the information, and broke the routine for learners because it motivates and enhance their curiously to discover other peoples' cultures. The success and prosperity of travel blogs; however, depends on the learners' acquaintance and seriousness with the use of such tool and the appropriate selection of the topics in a way that guides them to meet their learning objectives.

To put in a nutshell, travel blogs play a significant role in the learning process of the foreign language. The revealed results have served the primary hypothesis, which is using travel blogs as an autonomous learning tool will enhance EFL learners' cultural awareness. The findings led to conclude that it is a relevant and reliable tool for enhancing EFL learners' cultural knowledge.

Recommendations

The EFL learners accurate and appropriate use of language necessitate that learners and even teachers should give as much importance to the cultural competence of the language as they do with the linguistic competence. As a matter of fact, cultural awareness allows the use of the English language accurately and appropriately. Accordingly, we propose some recommendations that may contribute in solving the problem related to learners' cultural awareness:

- ✓ It is necessary to provide more laboratories with easy Internet access for learners in order to encourage them use authentic materials in their learning process inside and outside the classroom.
- ✓ Teachers need to support and encourage EFL learners to develop their background knowledge of the socio-cultural dimension of the foreign language outside the classroom.
- ✓ Learners should be aware of the differences between their NC and the FC and respect it even if it contradicts their own traditions, rituals, or beliefs.
- ✓ EFL learners should be more autonomous and try to know more about the English culture by themselves through the use of the proposed strategy in this research which is travel blogs.
- ✓ EFL curriculum designers may give equal importance to both linguistic and culture teaching and learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Students' questionnaire

Dear Students,

This questionnaire is a part of a master dissertation. Which is undertaken to identify the role and the effectiveness of travel blogs as a tool or an autonomous learning strategy outside the classroom to enhance EFL learners' cultural awareness and thus, their communicative competence. The findings of this research are based on your responses. You are kindly invited to answer the following questions.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Instructions: Please, tick the appropriate box (or boxes) and make complete statements whenever necessary.

Section One: General Information. Please specify.

1. Gender:

a. Male b. Female

2. Age:

a. Less than 30 b- More than 30

Section Two: Language learning (you can tick more than one option).

3. Are you learning English because?

a- It is the first language in the world and the language of technology.

b- You want to gain knowledge about its speakers and their culture.

c- To use it in your job career.

d- You want to travel to an English country.

e – other

4. How do you see your level in learning English?

a- Average

b- Good

c- Very good

5. What does learning English mean most to you?(you can choose more than one)

a- Learning how to construct words and sentences

b- Learning the meanings of words and sentences

c- Learning the pronunciation of words and sentences

d- Learning about the culture of English speaking people

e- Other

Please, explain

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Section Three: Cultural Awareness.

6. Do you think that the linguistic competence is enough for the learner to master the English foreign language?

Yes

No

Justify your choice please,.....

.....

7- According to you, the word culture refers to:

a- The total way of life of a group of people

b- Products and contributions of a society

c- Both of them

d- Other

8. Do you think you have enough cultural background and information about the culture of your country (including all the regions of your country)?

Yes

No

9- Do you think it is necessary for EFL learners to know about the culture of English-speaking people?

Yes

No

Please, justify your answer

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.....
.....
.....

10. Cultural awareness is the knowledge of the similarities and differences of both, one's native culture and other peoples' culture.

a- Agree

b- Disagree

- Please, justify your answer

.....
.....

11- Have you ever experienced culture shock? With a foreign person or even with an Algerian person (like Tamazight person)

Yes No

- If yes, tell us about it briefly

.....
.....
.....

12. Which of the following aspects of the English culture you don't have enough background about? (you can choose more than one answer)

- a-History and geography
- b-Social organization
- c- forms of government
- d-economic systems
- e- Lifestyle
- f- Other

- Please, justify your answer.....
.....
.....

13. In your opinion, does cultural awareness influence intercultural communication?

Yes No

In both answers, justify your choice

.....
.....
.....
.....

14. Which of the following aspects of English culture do you think you have good knowledge about?

- a- Customs and traditions
- b- Religion

c- Beliefs and superstitious

d- Arts and literature

e- All of them

Section Four: Attitudes Towards the English Culture

15. How do you find learning about others peoples' culture?

a-Very interesting

b- Interesting.

c- Not interesting.

16. Do you agree and support the concept of “learners’ autonomy” and rely on external sources like the internet in your learning journey?

Yes

No

_please, explain your answer

.....

.....

17. Do you try to learn more about the foreign language culture outside the classroom?

Yes

No

How?.....

Section Five: Blogs and Travel Blogs.

18. Have you ever communicated with English native speakers?

Yes No

If “yes” how?

- a- Through social media (blogs, Facebook, twitter...)
- b- Travelling abroad
- c- In University
- d- Other

19. Do you know what a blog is?

Yes No

20. To what extent do you agree with these statements?

	Agree.	Strongly agree.	Neutral.	Disagree.	Strongly disagree.
1. Blogs are an efficient method of learning as they can give instant support.					
2. Blogs are a more flexible method of learning as they can be done anytime, anywhere.					

3. Blogs improve communication between learners and native speakers.					
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21. Do you know what a travel blog is?

Yes

No

22. Are you following any travel blog(s)?

Yes

No

If “yes” name some

.....

.....

Section Six: Travel Blogs and Cultural Awareness.

23. Do you think that travel blogs help you in :

	YES	NO	No Answer
Providing you opportunity to interact with English native speakers.			
Examining critically your own and others’ cultural values.			
Comparing and contrasting similarities and differences between your native culture and the target culture.			
Enhancing attitudes of readiness and openness to cultural diversity.			

24. To what extent do you agree with these statements?

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The course of culture teaching is somehow ignored in the university of Biskra.					
EFL learners have to spend more time outside the classroom to develop skills and strategies that enable them interpret and understand different cultural behaviours and worldviews.					
Being exposed to authentic materials such as travel blogs help EFL learners to acquire knowledge about social groups of English speaking countries.					
Travel blogs boost your curiosity to discover new cultures and respecting others from different cultures.					

25. We would greatly appreciate any further suggestions or comments to develop EFL learners' cultural awareness?

.....

.....

.....

THANK YOU.

Appendix B

Teachers' Interview

Dear teachers,

This interview is a part of a research work. The main purpose of this interview is to identify the role and the effectiveness of travel blogs as a tool or as an autonomous learning strategy outside the classroom to enhance and develop EFL learners' cultural awareness. The information you provide will remain anonymous and contribute to the achievement of research objectives. You are kindly invited to answer the following questions.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

1. What is your educational degree?

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2. How long have you been teaching

English?.....

3. What is your understanding of culture

teaching?.....

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4. How would you define cultural awareness?

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5. In which ways cultural awareness influences intercultural communication?

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6. To what extent do you think EFL learners are culturally aware?.....

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7. In your opinion, what are the reasons behind the lack of cultural knowledge and awareness among EFL learners'?

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8. Do you think EFL learners' are more autonomous nowadays, and rely more on external sources in their learning journey?

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9. Do you know what a travel blog is? If yes, have you ever used one?

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10. In your opinion, does travel blog boost EFL learners' curiosity to discover new cultures and respecting others from different cultures?

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11. We would greatly appreciate any further suggestions or comments.

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THANK YOU.

المخلص

أحدث ظهور تقنيات الويب 2.0 تحديات وفرصاً جديدة في مجال تعلم اللغات الأجنبية. من بين جميع أدوات الويب 2.0 ، يمكن اعتبار مدونات السفر الأكثر شهرة. كانت هذه الدراسة محاولة لمعرفة مدى فعالية مدونات السفر كاستراتيجية تعليمية مستقلة خارج الفصل لتعزيز الوعي الثقافي لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. لا يمكن لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية التواصل باللغة بشكل مناسب بسبب قلة الوعي الثقافي. وبالتالي، يتم افتراض أنه إذا استخدم متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية مدونات السفر وأصبحوا متعلمين مستقلين، فسوف يعززون معارفهم الثقافية ويصبحوا محاورين أفضل. يهدف تحقيقنا إلى إثبات أهمية الوعي الثقافي واستكشاف الأسباب الكامنة وراء الخلفية الثقافية السيئة للمتعلمين في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، وفي نهاية المطاف نقترح حلاً هو "مدونات السفر". تتطلب طبيعة هذا البحث واختبار الفرضيات أدوات البحث هذه. أولاً، قمنا بتصميم وإدارة استبيان لـ 25 طالباً من طلاب برنامج ماستر واحد في اللغة الإنجليزية في قسم اللغات الأجنبية بجامعة بسكرة. ثانياً، أجريت مقابلة مع خمسة مدرسين يقومون بالفعل بتدريس المقررات التي تشارك في بحثنا والذين لديهم خبرة في مجال الدراسة. أخيراً، تم إجراء مجموعة تركيز تضم 21 طالباً برنامج ماستر واحد. بعد تحليل البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها من استبيان الطلاب، ومقابلة المعلمين، والمجموعة المركزة، تم تأكيد فرضية البحث لدينا واقتراح بعض التوصيات والحلول.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الثقافة، الوعي الثقافي، المدونات ، مدونات السفر ، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، استقلالية المتعلمين.