

## The Impact of Culture on Teaching: A Study of the Impact of Teachers' Cultural Beliefs and Practices on Students' Motivation

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**ABSTRACT:** In the context of education, culture is considered the heart of our beliefs and practices; it has an effect on how we think, behave, perceive and communicate, all of which affect how we teach and learn. That is, cultural differences produce different beliefs and practices in the field of teaching, which affects students' motivation either positively or negatively. This study examined the impact of culture on teaching in the Moroccan context, how it shapes teachers' practices in the classroom, and the extent to which this affects students' motivation. 26 high school students and 10 high school teachers participated in this survey. Data was collected using a questionnaire research method for both students and teachers. The results revealed that students put the blame on their teachers and teaching methods for the lack of motivation, whereas teachers still use the traditional teaching methods in the classrooms.

**KEYWORDS:** Culture, Teaching, Learning, Collectivist Culture, Individualistic Culture, Motivation.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Since culture is about all those cultural norms, beliefs and practices that are shared among the members of a society, it is considered the framework that guides and shapes teacher's behaviour in the school because teachers don't enter the classroom with an empty mind. They bring all their cultural beliefs and practices with them, which affects their teaching practices (Obanya, P, 2005). These cultural beliefs and practices differ from one society to another, which produces different teaching philosophies depending on the role that is assigned to the teacher by these cultural principles (Kumar, 2013). For example, the western societies are characterized with an individualistic culture that fosters independence, students' learning needs and styles, creativity, autonomy, critical thinking, students' motivation and freedom in the learning process (Forrest E. Mcfeeters, 2003). However, the non-western societies such as the Moroccan society are characterized with a collectivist culture that fosters a traditional teaching in which teachers use their authority to overcontrol their students and the teaching practices in the classroom, whereas students are passive, demotivated and dependent (Kumar, 2013). Besides, since cultural beliefs and practices are taken for granted and deeply ingrained in people's minds, teachers, in the collectivist culture, resist any new ideas and behaviours that can threaten their authoritarian behaviour in the classroom. That is to say, most of teachers consider any attempt to reform education as a threat to their supreme position and to their central and authoritarian role in the learning process that is culturally and socially constructed, which makes them refuse reassigning some of their long-established authority and duties to students (Femke, Meijers & Wardekker, 2007). Thus, the main aim of this study is to investigate the impact of cultural beliefs on teaching in the Moroccan context and how they shape and guide teachers' practices in the classroom, and how this affects students' motivation. The present study addresses the following research questions:

1. Do teachers in the Moroccan context hold negative beliefs about student-centered learning methods?
2. Do teachers in the Moroccan context hold positive beliefs about teacher-centered teaching methods?
3. Is there a link between learning strategies and students' motivation?

To facilitate the analysis and the understanding of the findings in this study, the following section will explain theoretically the term culture and how it affects teachers' practices in the classroom in more details.

## **1.1 DEFINING CONTEXT**

### **1.1.1 CULTURE**

There is no simple answer to the question of what is culture because it is a complicated phenomenon to understand. Also, different definitions of culture reflect different theories or understandings, making it difficult to pin down exact definitions of the concept. For example, Emile Durkheim considers culture as social facts that consist of ways of thinking, behaving and feeling that are imposed on the individual by the society in which he lives. These social facts work as a framework that shapes the individual's behaviour and controls it (Emile Durkheim, 1895). Besides, according to the scholar and anthropologist of the 18th century, Edward Taylor, culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Taylor, 1924(origin 1871)). So, based on this definition, culture depends heavily on society. It is, in a way, a collection of ways and course of doing things, which is an end result of human interaction with one another, and, as time moves on, culture changes and grows more complex than it was before. Moreover, John Storey defines culture as a way of life of a group of people. This is a social definition which means that culture is how ordinary people of a certain society live, think and behave. These behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols are unquestionable and taken as they are because they are considered the sacred rules that shape people's behaviours and make them acceptable (Storey, 2001).

### **1.1.2 TEACHING**

Many education researchers define teaching as an art through which a teacher invests his/her teaching professionalism in the classroom to create an inclusive environment where all students can be eagerly involved in the learning process. It is always defined as a set of events, outside the learners which are designed to support internal process of learning (Sequeira, 2012). These outside events are that teachers should Have high expectations, acknowledge individual differences, use a range of pedagogies, monitor progress and providing feedback, encourage student responsibility, master the content, provide a safe environment and create positive relationships.

### **1.1.3 LEARNING**

Learning is not only nurturing the mind with theoretical knowledge. It is considered as a process through which a learner acquires both theoretical and practical knowledge that can help him/her in his/her life. It is also defined as a *process* that leads to *change*, which occurs as a result of *experience* and increases the potential of improved performance and future learning (Ambrose, et al, 2010).

### **1.1.4 MOTIVATION**

Motivation has too many different definitions, but it is important to focus on those that are related to education. It is considered as a key factor that pushes a student to act or do a certain task enjoyably in the classroom. This need and desire energize and direct students' behaviour towards a positive participation in the learning process (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015). Besides, motivation is defined as voluntary uses of high-level self-regulated learning strategies, such as paying attention, connection, planning, and monitoring (Emily R. Lai, 2011). This means that motivation plays an important role in the learning process. That is to say, when students are highly motivated, they can be actively engaged in the learning process and set for themselves the learning strategies that can help them learn better. They also can take the initiative and the responsibility for what occurs in the classroom through selecting, managing and evaluating their own learning strategies.

## **2 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

### **2.1 COLLECTIVIST CULTURE**

Since culture is defined as a pattern of shared values, beliefs and behaviours of a group of people (Anneli, 2003), these shared values, beliefs and behaviours differ from one society to another because the term culture is used to describe the variety of forms of life and differences between people when discussing the history of mankind (Schoenmakers, 2012). These cultural differences may value and encourage different patterns of behaviours within different societies (Hermine, 2001). For example, in the collectivistic culture that is characterized with unequal power distribution, people behave in accordance with the cultural norms and beliefs in which they live, and punishment is used as a tool to establish order in society and correct the delinquent behaviours. This means that, in the collectivistic culture, sanctions are needed when people do not follow the norms

(Triandis, 2001). Besides, collectivists feel interdependent with members of their group and are willing to subordinate personal goals to those of the group (DeCapua & Wintergers, 2004). This means that the collectivists repress their personal goals for the sake of the whole group, which kills their autonomy, independence, self-reliance and creativity because creative ideas are often deviant and most people are reluctant to express them (Goncalo & Staw, 2005).

## 2.2 INDIVIDUALISTIC CULTURE

Individualistic culture is characterized with less power distribution. In other words, people are more autonomous and their behavior focuses on their personal goals and choices. That is to say, they are free, independent and encouraged to detach themselves from the social norms and pursue their personal goals in society without any cultural hindrances. This helps them to be self-reliant, autonomous and ready to bear responsibilities depending on their personal choices (Amrita & Noman, 2015). Besides, individualistic culture welcomes creativity. That is to say, unlike the collectivist culture that rejects all the new ideas and principles that don't conform to its principles, the individualistic culture is open for the innovative ideas that can help develop societies (Goncalo & Staw, 2005).

## 3 THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Since culture is about all those cultural norms, beliefs and practices that are shared among the members of a society, it is considered as a framework that guides and shapes teacher's behaviour in the school. That is to say, culture has an impact on how people think, perceive, act and communicate, all of which influence how teachers teach and how students learn (Chafi, 2017). These cultural norms and practices that are transmitted to school by teachers shape their teaching practices because the cultural patterns of a society guide its educational patterns (Obanya, 2005). That is to say, the cultural principles that a certain society holds about the teacher and teaching decides on what role this teacher should play and how he should treat and teach his students in the classroom because the quality of teachers is related to how country cultures are defining the role of teacher in the education process (Wursten & Jacobs, 2016). Besides, since cultures differ from one society to another, cultural principles of teaching differ from one society to another too depending on the role that is assigned to the teacher by these cultural principles (Clarke, 2003). This means that cultural and social conditions generate the methods and techniques of teaching in a powerful manner (Kumar, 2013). That is to say, in the collectivist culture, teachers use the traditional approach of teaching in which they are the centre of the learning process. In other words, they control the learning process through imposing on students what to learn and how to learn it, whereas students are passive and dependent (Post, 2008). Besides, in the collectivist culture, sanctions are needed when students do not follow the norms (Triandis, 2001). That is to say, punishment is used as a controlling tool to keep order in the classroom and correct any deviant behaviour that doesn't fit the social norms.

However, in the individualistic culture, the learner is the centre of the learning process. That is to say, all students' needs, learning styles, attitudes and emotional factors are taken into consideration. This is due to the fact that the teacher considers the needs, interests, aptitude, attitude, inclinations and behaviour before teaching (Kumar, 2013). Besides, students freely participate in the learning process. That is to say, through the help and encouragement of their teachers, students rely on themselves to learn through working in groups or pairs. This helps them develop their communicative competence and learn different social and learning skills that they can use to construct and acquire new knowledge, strategies and skills for learning because the purpose of education in individualistic cultures is to learn how to learn through self-reliance (Forrest E. M, 2003).

### 3.1 THE EFFECT OF TEACHERS' CULTURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES ON STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

Teachers can affect the level of students' motivation either positively or negatively. For example, in the traditional societies that are characterized with a collectivist culture, teachers use the traditional culture of teaching that is not concerned with developing students' motivation. In other words, teachers overcontrol their students through imposing their hierarchical position in the classroom. They don't give their students the chance to freely participate in the learning process, and punishment is used as a strategy to correct the delinquent behaviours. This creates a negative teacher-students relationship, which negatively affects both students' motivation and the processes of teaching and learning because without a positive affective relationship motivation can't be enhanced (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015). Besides, since the choice of teaching strategy has an effect upon the motivation and interest of the student, most of teachers in the traditional teaching don't meet their student's differences and their learning style. That is to say, they use only the traditional teaching methods, which excludes the majority of students from being involved in the learning process, which kills their motivation, their interaction and makes the classroom boring (Charlotta, 2013). Moreover, the intellectual authority is one of the factors that negatively affects students' motivation. That is to say, in the traditional teaching, students are viewed as passive vessels, ingesting knowledge

for recall in tests, which affects their motivation negatively. In other words, teachers impose on students what to learn, whereas students are not given the right to bear the responsibility to construct knowledge and be creative in the learning process. They are considered just as knowledge consumers and knowledge reproducers through memorization, which kills their motivation, gets their self-esteem very low, and negatively affects the process of learning (Tengku & Tengku, 2014).

### **3.2 TEACHERS IN THE COLLECTIVIST CULTURE AND THEIR RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

Any educational reform in the collectivist societies is due to teachers' resistance because teachings that challenge teachers' beliefs are dismissed as theoretical, unworkable, or even simply wrong (Li, Xu, 2007). That is to say, most of teachers, especially in Morocco, feel that their professional identity is at stake because they consider this pedagogical reform as a threat to their supreme position and to their central and authoritarian role in the learning process that is culturally and socially constructed (Geijsel, Meijers & Wardekker, 2007). This drives them to resist any attempt to reform education and make it student-centred. In other words, any sudden or formidable change in the traditional role of teacher and student is likely to elicit some form of resistance by teachers so that they can keep their role and their supreme position that is culturally constructed (Koksal, 2013). Besides, because of the traditional beliefs they hold, most of teachers refuse to go down and create a friendly relationship with students. That is to say, they believe that maintaining a social distance between the teacher and his students is a good method to have students know their limits and to keep the teacher at the top and never reachable because, as they believe, a teacher remains a teacher and a student remains a student. These socially constructed beliefs that teachers hold are deeply rooted in their minds. They tend to be culturally bonded, to be formed early in life and to be resistant to change, which makes it difficult to change teachers' beliefs and make a positive change in teaching practices (Li, Xu, 2007).

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 PARTICIPANTS**

Participants of this study consisted of 26 high school students studying in the second-year baccalaureate and 10 high school teachers teaching the same level. Both students and teachers were selected from different institutions but in the same city. The method used in this study is a quantitative method. Both students and teachers had to answer a closed-ended questionnaire.

### **4.2 INSTRUMENTATION**

This study used one research method, which is a closed-ended questionnaire. Students had to answer a questionnaire that contained questions about their feelings and reactions about the way their teachers teach them and behave with them in the classroom. Teachers also had to answer a questionnaire in which there were some questions about their views and beliefs about teacher-centred and student-centred pedagogies. Data was collected over a week from three Moroccan high schools (Kacem Amine high school, Allal El Fassi high school and El Amir Molay Abdellah high school).

### **4.3 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

The data gathered was transcribed and analyzed using the SPSS software version 21. The two questionnaires were tested for reliability through the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha for Internal Consistency Reliability and for validity through Factor Analysis. The Cronbach's Alpha of the data is 0.688 which indicates that the survey data has good reliability.

## **4.4 RESULTS**

### **4.4.1 STUDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE**

Figure 1 is about whether students participate in the learning process or no. 73,08 % students say that they sometimes participate in the classroom. 23,08 % students say that they always participate in the classroom, whereas 3,85 % students express that they seldom participate in the classroom.

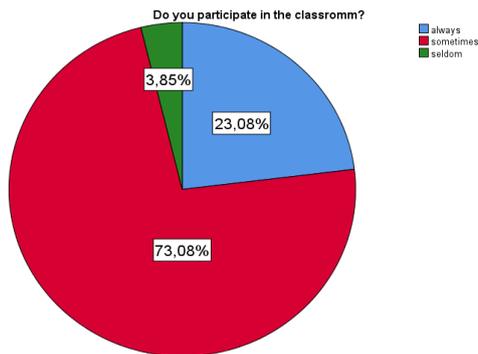


Fig. 1. Pie Diagram of Question Number 1

Figure 2 displays students’ feelings when they are in the classroom. 69, 23 % students say that they bored in the classroom, whereas 30,77 % say that they feel entertained and satisfied.

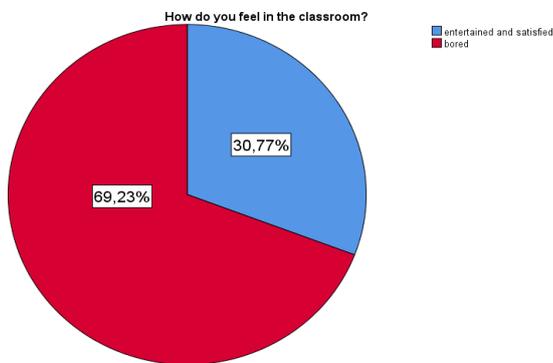


Fig. 2. Pie Diagram of Question Number 2

Figure 3 is about whether students work in groups. 73,08 % students say that they never work in groups. 23,08 % students say that they sometimes work in groups, and 3,85 % students say that they work in groups.

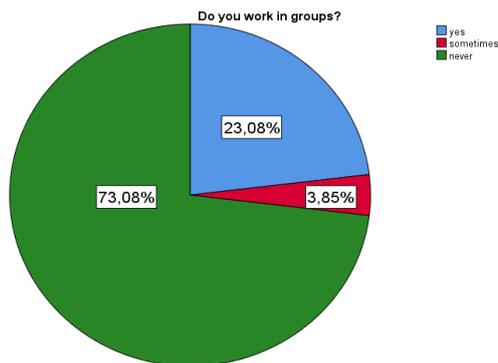


Fig. 3. Pie Diagram of Question Number 3

Figure 4 is about whether students like the way their teachers teach them. 57,69 say that they don’t like the way their teachers teach them, and 42,31 % students say that they like the way their teachers teach them.

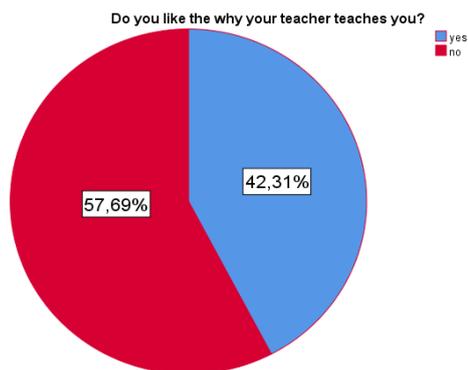


Fig. 4. Pie Diagram of Question Number 4

Figure 5 is about teachers' behaviour towards their students. 69,23 % students say that they don't like the way their teachers behave with them. 30,77 % students say they like the way their teachers behave with them.

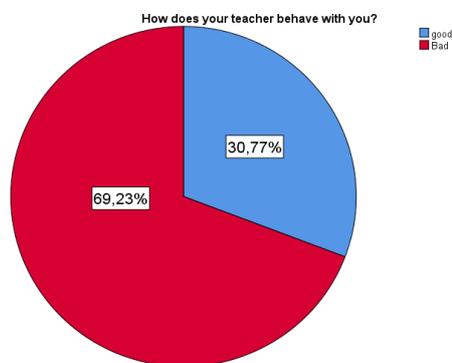


Fig. 5. Pie Diagram of Question Number 5

Figure 6 is about the suggestions that students give to their teachers. 50 % students say that they want their teachers to give them space to talk and participate. 38,46 % students say that they want their teachers to be good with them, and 11,54 % students say that they want their students the chance to work in groups.

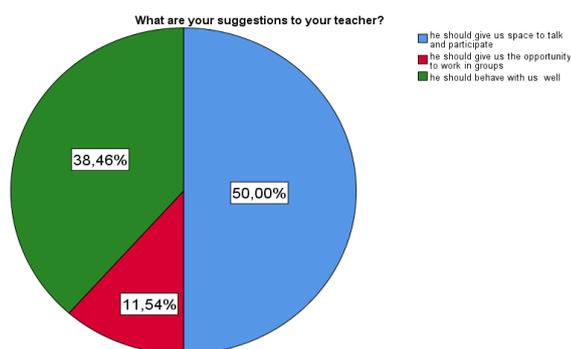


Fig. 6. Pie Diagram of Question Number 6

#### 4.4.2 TEACHERS QUESTIONNAIRE

Regarding teachers' questionnaire, it is about their views and beliefs about teacher-centred and student-centred pedagogies.

Table 1 describes how much teachers use activities that motivate students and make them active in the learning process such as work-group activities. 50% teachers say that they don't use work-group activities. 30% teachers say that they sometimes use work-group activities, and just 20% teachers say they use work-group activities.

Do you give your students the chance to work in groups?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	2	20,0	20,0	20,0
	No	5	50,0	50,0	70,0
	Sometimes	3	30,0	30,0	100,0
	Total	10	100,0	100,0	

Table 2 is about the type of relationship teachers maintain with their students. 50% teachers say that the type of relationship they create with their students is built on respect, love and collaboration, but the other 50% teachers say that in teacher-student relationship, the teacher should be the boss.

What type of relationship do you maintain with your students?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Good relation	5	50,0	50,0	50,0
	Teacher is the boss in his class	5	50,0	50,0	100,0
	Total	10	100,0	100,0	

Table 3 is about teachers' view about modern teaching pedagogies in which students are the leaders of the learning process. 40% teachers say that modern teaching pedagogies create chaos in the classroom. 30% teachers say that they motivate and encourage students for learning. 20% teachers say that they waste time, and 10% teachers say that the modern teaching pedagogies are demanding.

What is your view about the modern teaching activities?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Motivate and encourage students for learning	3	30,0	30,0	30,0
	Create chaos in the classroom	4	40,0	40,0	70,0
	Demanding	1	10,0	10,0	80,0
	Waste time	2	20,0	20,0	100,0
	Total	10	100,0	100,0	

#### 4.5 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of culture on teaching, how it shapes teachers' beliefs and practices in the classroom, and the extent to which these cultural beliefs and practices affect students' motivation. Based on the empirical study I conducted in the Moroccan context in which the collectivist culture is cherished, it seems that students' motivation is negatively affected by teachers' cultural beliefs and practices. For example, most students say that they feel bored in the classroom because they are not satisfied with their teachers' teaching methods. Besides, most of them say that they are not given the opportunity to participate in the learning process because their teachers don't use some motivating activities such as group-work activities where they can collaborate, help and benefit from each other. Moreover, a large number of students say that their teachers don't behave with them well. When they are asked to give their teachers, some suggestions concerning their teachers' teaching methods, most of them say that they want their teachers to give them the opportunity to participate in the learning process and create a positive relationship with them.

Concerning teachers, half of the participants say that they don't use work-group activities in the classroom, whereas just 30% teachers say that they sometimes use work-group activities in the classroom. Besides, half of them say that there should be a distance between the teacher and his students so that that ideal image of the teacher as a boss in the classroom will not break down. Moreover, when they are asked about their views concerning the modern teaching methods, most of the them say that such teaching methods are demanding and create chaos in the classroom. This means that the traditional teaching practices still take place in the Moroccan context in spite of the pedagogical reform that was launched by the government. In

other words, despite all the pedagogical reforms implemented by the public authorities, the reality of classroom practice does not correspond to the highly advocated educational ideal set by the National Charter for Education and Training and the Strategic Vision 2015/2030. That is, still a lot of teachers rely on the traditional culture of teaching that kills students' motivation. They still use the pedagogical authority as a method to dominate the learning process and overcontrol their classes because they believe that losing control of the educational process is equivalent to losing respect. In other words, teachers still rely only on the traditional teaching methods in which students' differences, learning styles and needs are not taken into consideration. They still transmit knowledge to be regurgitated by learners who are expected to passively and unselectively copy and reproduce the conveyed information in its original, objective form. Moreover, the unequal power distribution in the Moroccan classrooms is still dominating. That is to say, most of teachers still impose their hierarchical position in their classrooms. This creates a negative teacher-students relationship in which students have to obey orders and follow the rules, which decreases students' motivation. This educational reform failure is due to teachers' resistance to change because teachings that challenge their beliefs are dismissed as theoretical, unworkable, or even simply wrong. In other words, most of teachers feel that their professional identity is at stake because they consider this pedagogical reform as a threat to their supreme position and to their central and authoritarian role in the learning process that is culturally and socially constructed. This drives them to resist any attempt to reform education and make it student-centred. This goes against the main goals of the effective teaching methods because the purpose of learning within the educational system is to change students in both the cognitive and affective aspects of their personalities to prepare them for practical affairs.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

Based on the study, it is seen that culture has a great impact on teaching. That is to say, culture works as a framework that guides and shapes teachers' behaviour in the classroom because teachers don't enter the classroom with an empty mind. They take their cultural beliefs and behaviours with them to the classroom, which shapes their teaching pedagogy. This culture differs from one society to another, which produces different cultures of teaching that affect both teachers' teaching practices and students' motivation either positively or negatively. Thus, to avoid the impact of culture, especially for teachers living in the collectivist culture like Morocco, they should first read about the individualistic culture to know how it motivates students, how it makes them the centre of the learning process and also how it makes them responsible for learning in the classroom. Second, they should attend different conferences and workshops to adopt new teaching skills and principles that can help them in their career. Third, they should keep a daily personal journal on which they write their teaching practices and action in the classroom so that they can reflect on them later. Finally, they should try as possible as they can to meet international teachers either in real life or online to benefit from them pedagogically and culturally. This can help teachers be in a better position to problematize the taken-for-granted aspect of their work and visualize alternative courses of actions that challenge and supplant some of their cherished beliefs and practices.

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