# Algerian EFL Learners 'Attitudes toward the Culture of English as Foreign Language: The Case of First-Year Pupils at Chaalel Messaoud Secondary School in Guelma

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## *Abstract:*

*The aim of the current study is to investigate Algerian first year EFL( English as foreign language) learners' attitudes toward English culture in secondary school Chaalel Messaoud, Guelma, Algeria. A quantitative research approach was employed, and data were collected through a questionnaire administered to a sample of thirty-two (32) secondary school learners. Results of the current study indicate that EFL learners have positive attitudes toward English cultural aspects. The results further indicate that EFL learners demonstrate an awareness of the pivotal role that culture plays in the process of learning English. We recommend that Algerian English textbooks should be designed to include both local and target cultural aspect to help learners develop intercultural communicative competence.*

*Keywords: Attitudes; Culture; EFL learners; EFL Textbooks.*

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# - INTRODUCTION

The status of the English language plays a significant role in helping people from different backgrounds to communicate and express opinions and thoughts. Because English is widely spoken and used in different fields such as education, technology, and science. English language breaks linguistic barriers and promotes understanding among people from different languages. For this reason, the question of what and how to teach English becomes a critical question in the field of foreign language teaching. In this regard, extensive research was conducted concerning the issue of teaching the 'target culture' alongside the teaching of language to enable EFL learners to become fluent and effective speakers of target language. According to (Ryan E. B., 1982), culture is embedded in language system and is conveyed explicitly or implicitly through the meaning of words. In other words, culture is conveyed through both connotative and denotative meaning of words. Therefore, language and culture are two interconnected concepts, and the need to integrate culture into language teaching is important.

In the Algerian educational context, English is taught as a foreign language with the goal of enabling learners to communicate effectively. However, English language teaching is not limited to linguistic competence alone; it also involves the transmission of cultural knowledge and awareness. The inclusion of foreign cultural elements in EFL textbooks is intended to enhance learners' intercultural understanding and promote positive attitudes toward the target language and its speakers.

Despite the integration of the foreign cultural elements, it remains uncertain how Algerian secondary school learners perceive and respond to the foreign cultural content integrated into their English textbooks. Some learners may show interest and openness toward foreign cultural aspects, while others might show negative attitudes due to differences between their local culture and the English-speaking world. Such attitudes can significantly influence learners' motivation, engagement, and their language achievement.

Accordingly, it is important to investigate learners' attitudes toward English foreign culture in Algerian secondary school textbooks and to identify appropriate pedagogical strategies that can help foster more positive cultural perceptions and attitudes.

Thus, the aim of the current research study is to explore Algerian EFL learners' attitudes toward foreign cultural elements in Algerian secondary school textbooks, and to identify positive and negative attitudes toward local, international, and English cultural aspects, including traditions, customs, food, arts, beliefs. This study also investigates how cultural content is represented in Algerian EFL textbooks.

Based on the issues discussed above, the current study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are learners' attitudes towards English foreign cultural aspects in secondary school?
2. What are the possible suggestions to help learners build positive attitudes toward the English foreign culture?

Accordingly, we assume,

H1: Learners with positive attitudes toward the English target culture will achieve higher language learning outcomes.

H2: Effective teaching strategies and culturally rich textbooks will help learners develop positive attitudes toward the English foreign culture.

## 1. Literature Review
### 1.1 Definition of Attitudes

English is a widely spoken language in almost all countries. Almost every country integrates the English language into its educational system, whether as a native or a foreign language.

Many aspects, including motivation, age, anxiety, personality traits, and attitudes, affect foreign language learning. Attitudes are a key element that determines success in the EFL context, as they influence learners' classroom engagement and language acquisition process. Accordingly, attitudes are defined as "the feelings people have about their language or the languages of others"[1]. Language attitudes are the perceptions and feelings speakers have about their own and foreign languages. According to language attitudes are "any affective, cognitive and behavioral index of evaluative reactions toward different language varieties or speakers".[2] Language attitudes are a comprehensive concept that involves both personal and societal aspects.

Students' attitudes toward learning foreign languages can be either negative or positive. Such attitudes are constructed in their minds from personal life experience. [3] In this respect assert that students' attitudes are the most influential aspect of learning foreign languages and have a great impact on the learning process states that "across all schools, the greatest obstacle to expanding language learning is seen as pupil attitudes". [4] It emphasizes that learners' attitudes are considered as the primary challenge in the foreign language teaching and learning context.

## 1.2 Language Learning Attitudes

Compared to acquiring a first language, learning a foreign language is a challenging process. Language learning success is not merely transmitting knowledge but rather developing learners' attitudes and interest toward foreign language learning. In the EFL context, the overall success of language learning is influenced by the positive attitudes of both learners and teachers, these attitudes foster motivation and engagement; in contrast, negative attitudes hinder the process of learning and prevent learners from achieving their learning goals[5]. asserts that effective language learning will not take place if learners do not exhibit positive attitudes toward foreign language content, classes, teachers, and environment.[6]

The relationship between motivation and attitudes is essential, as it influences foreign language learning outcomes. Attitudes and motivation are two interrelated concepts that both determine success in foreign language learning. The attitudes that learners hold toward a foreign language greatly affect their motivation to learn and their level of engagement in the learning process. This relationship is best explained by Gardner and Lambert's socio- educational model (1972) which divides motivation into integrative motivation, a desire that enables learners to assimilate with the target culture, and instrumental motivation, which represents learners' interest in reaching practical and tangible results, for example, finding a job. [7] Thus, learners' positive attitudes toward the target culture increase learners' integrative and instrumental motivation that contributes to effective learning outcomes.

## 1.3 Components of Attitudes

The multidimensional view of attitudes distinguishes between three components of attitudes; cognitive, affective and behavioral.

### 1.3.1. Cognitive Components

The cognitive components refer to individuals 'thoughts and beliefs toward the foreign language itself and beliefs about native speakers of the target language. In language learning, the cognitive aspect of the attitude of learners is reflected in learners' knowledge and understanding of the target culture. In addition, cognitive components refer to the link between individuals' beliefs about the world and the relationships between objects of social significance. For example, status jobs in any society often match with judgments favoring standard language varieties, like jobs in law and academic contexts generally link to the standard language proficiency, influencing societal status[8].

### 1.3.2. Affective Components

The affective component encompasses learners' emotional reactions and feelings toward the target language, its community of speakers, and its associated cultural norms and practices. They refer to emotions of likes and dislikes of individuals toward a person or an object, feelings of love and hate toward language as well. For instance, the affective aspect of attitude is represented in learners' liking of the target language itself and feelings toward the circumstances of learning this language[9].

### 1.3.3. Behavioral Component

It refers to persons' tendencies to act in certain ways toward other objects or persons. The behavioral components are expressed in learners' actual behaviors and reactions toward the target language and the learning situation. Learners' positive or negative attitudes toward a foreign language will determine their readiness and efforts to learn the new language. The behavioral attitudes are often consistent with a person's cognitive and affective judgments. For instance, learner's attitudes toward English as foreign language, the cognitive components here are reflected in his/her belief that learning English language will result in understanding English culture, the affective

components are his/her excitement and readiness to read English literature, the behavioral components are then his/her efforts in saving money to register in English classes [10].

The Alignment of attitudes components, cognitive, affective and behavioral is not always apparent and operates in an independent way. [11] argues that the degree of agreement between attitude components may vary from one situation to another. In this vein, Breckler conducted two experiments on people's attitudes toward snakes, in the first one the snake was physically demonstrated to subjects where a moderate interconnection between attitude components, cognitive, affective and behavioral existed, whereas in the second one, they were just asked to imagine a snake and it resulted in high correlation between attitude components. Thus, the way the study is conducted determines to what extent attitude components correlate together.

## 1.4. The Importance of Language Attitudes

Understanding students' attitudes toward English culture plays a crucial role in the process of teaching and learning, in order to decide on some actions and practices in the classroom. Students' attitudes are worth to investigate because they determine students' language proficiency, since having positive attitudes toward English language and its speakers will have positive effect on students' learning outcomes[12]. Moreover, many studies on students' attitudes investigated the different - internal and external- factors that affect students' attitudes.

### 1.4.1 . Learners 'Awareness of the Importance of English

It is believed that the more EFL students are aware of the importance of English as a foreign language, the more their academic achievements will improve. The degree of awareness is reflected on how students behave and react toward English language. For instance, showing great interest in reading scientific papers in English, learning about English culture, applying for jobs that require mastery of the English language abroad[13].Thus, students' awareness about the value of English enables them to reach high proficiency levels.

### 1.4.2 Factors Related to Educational Context
### 1.4.2.1 Teacher -Related Factors

The teacher's role in the teaching and learning process is crucial. Teachers' decisions concerning the selection of suitable instructional methods that effectively support classroom pedagogy, foster meaningful communication with learners, and align with pedagogical objectives can have a significant impact on students' academic achievement, either positively or negatively. In addition, a good relationship and communication between teachers and students create a positive attitude toward foreign language [14]. Another important aspect is teachers' personalities that might motivate or demotivate learners to acquire the target language. Teachers' sense of humor creates a friendly atmosphere in the classroom and helps students to develop positive attitudes toward foreign language[15].

### 1.4.2.2 Learners' Personality

Learners' personality including self-esteem, self-confidence and anxiety has a significant role in affecting learners' success in foreign language acquisition. Learners with self efficacy have a strong belief in their capacities to succeed in foreign language learning. High self efficacy increases learners' motivation to persist in achieving challenging tasks in a foreign language [16]. Learners' preferences and learning styles have an impact on learners' attitudes. [17] believe that learning styles and teaching methods, and tools affect learners' perception of target language tasks thus decreasing learners' motivation and resulting in negative attitudes toward foreign languages.

### 1.4.3 Sociocultural Factors

According to [18], learners who are in constant contact with the target language and its users -usually through intercultural exchange- have a positive attitude toward the target language. Additionally, family members' and peers positive attitudes toward the target language encourage learners to engage in learning a foreign language. The environment that surrounds learners contributes to building learners' positive attitudes, if society holds positive perceptions and views about foreign language, its culture, and its users, it helps EFL learners to develop positive attitudes and the vice versa.

## 1.5 Definition of Culture

Culture is a complex concept that encompasses the beliefs, values, customs, traditions, and social behaviors shared by members of a particular society. It shapes individuals' ways of thinking, communicating, and interacting with the world around them. According to (Brown, 2000), culture can be seen as the "glue" that connects a society together through shared experiences and meanings. It influences how people interpret reality and express themselves through language, art, and social practices. Therefore, understanding culture is essential for interpreting human behavior and fostering mutual respect among different societies.

## 1.6 Language and Culture

Language and culture are two interrelated concepts. Language serves as a medium through which culture is transmitted, preserved, and expressed. As (Kramsch, 1998) notes, language is not only used for communication but also a symbol of cultural identity. In the context of foreign language learning, understanding the target culture enhances learners' communicative competence and intercultural awareness. When students are exposed to the cultural aspects of the target language, they develop the ability to interpret meaning more accurately and to communicate more appropriately across various cultural contexts. Thus, integrating cultural elements into language instruction helps learners go beyond linguistic knowledge to achieve a deeper understanding of the people and the different cultural aspects related to languages.

## 2. Research Methodology

The aim of the current research study is to explore Algerian EFL learners' attitudes toward foreign cultural elements in Algerian secondary school textbooks, and to identify positive and negative attitudes towards local, international and English cultural aspects including, traditions, customs, food, arts, beliefs … and verbal and non-verbal communication.

In order to accomplish the objectives of the study and answer the research questions, a quantitative research design has been implemented throughout the study. As a research tool, the questionnaire is widely used to collect data from a large number of participants. In the current study, the questionnaire aims at collecting

data about learners' attitudes toward English cultural aspects. This questionnaire contains eighteen (18) questions, which are in turn divided into three sections. The first section contains four (4) questions about learners' background information. The second part encompasses five (5) questions that ask learners about their motivation and interest in the English textbook. The third section is divided into nine (9) questions to obtain information from learners about their attitudes towards English cultural aspects in textbooks.

## 3. Findings and Discussions
This section presents the results of this study, discusses, and interprets the main findings of the current study.

**Table 1.** Learners' background information

| Question items | Answers |
|---|---|
| Q1 Gender | -15 Males. 17 Female |
| Q2  Age | -Ranging from 15 to 17 years old |
| Q3 How long have been studying English | - 84.37% - 5 years<br>- 9.37%  6 years<br>- 6.25 %  7 years<br>- |
| Q4 Stream of study | - Scientific stream |

**Source:** Created from questionnaire results

Results from Table 1 above indicate that the majority of participants are females, with a percentage of 53.12% and male participants represent 46.87% of the sample. Participants' age ranges from 15 to 17 years old indicating that they are secondary school scientific stream learners , and they are in crucial education stage where attitudes toward a foreign culture is supposed to be develop . Results indicate that the majority of participants have been studying English for five (5) years, with a percentage of 84.37%. While 9.37 % of participants studied English for 6 years, and only 6.25% studied English for 7 years. This indicates that learners have enough exposure to the language and its cultural aspects, which enables them to express different attitudes toward English foreign culture.

**Table 2:** Learenrs' interest in textbook

| Question | Very interesting | Interesting | Not interesting |
|---|---|---|---|
| Q5 Current English textbook is interesting | 3.12% | 68.75% | 28.12% |

Participants have been asked about their degree of interest in the current English textbook. Results show that a big majority, 68.75% of learners, consider the textbook as ''interesting ''and 3.12% as "very interesting'', indicating that the textbook content contains topics and themes that are relevant to learners' needs. However, only 28.12% of participants select "Not interesting", showing that not all learners are ready to engage with the current English textbook.

These findings indicate that most learners have positive attitudes toward the current English textbook, likely because textbook content meets their learning needs. The high percentage of learners who find the textbook interesting indicates that its content engages learners and supports motivation in the EFL classroom. However, the percentage of learners who view the textbook as not interesting highlights that the textbook content has to be more culturally diverse to capture the attention of all learners and enhance their overall learning experience.

**Table 3:** Motives to learn English

| Question | Vocabulary | Grammar | Pronunciation | Culture |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q6 Study English to learn about | 12.5% | 0.00% | 34.37% | 53.12 % |

As Table 3 presents, learners have been asked about what motivates them to learn English. The obtained results show that the majority, 53.12% of learners, are motivated to learn English to know about its culture. This may indicate that learners are aware of the important role of culture in learning a foreign language. Conversely, Grammar, which receives 0.00 % of responses, is not selected by any participant. This indicates that learners do not perceive it as a strong motive to learn a foreign language compared to other motives.

The results indicate that learners are primarily motivated by cultural aspects of English, suggesting they view language learning as a way to access and understand English-speaking societies. In contrast, grammar is not seen as a motivating factor, highlighting the importance of integrating meaningful cultural content into teaching to sustain learners' interest and engagement.

**Table 4:** Motivation to learn English compared to their previous learning experience

| Question | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| Q7 More motivated to learn English  Compared to previous experience | 87.5% | 12.5% |

Results from Table 4 display learners' responses on whether their motivation to learn English increased or decreased compared to previous experience. Results show that the majority, 87.5 % of learners' motivation is increased towards learning the English language due to learners' growing awareness about the importance of English in the future. In contrast, only 12.5% of learners' responses report a decline in motivation to learn English.

This finding suggests that most learners hold positive attitudes toward learning English, due to their recognition of its importance for future academic and professional success. The small percentage showing decreased motivation may be linked to personal or instructional factors that make it harder for learners to maintain their motivation .

**Table 5:** Reasons to Study English

| Options | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Study purposes | 50% |
| To get job | 56.25% |
| Valuable social status | 40.62 % |
| Understanding foreign culture | 59.37% |

Table 5 shows learners' responses to the multiple-choice question about the main reasons that drive them to learn English. The

majority of participants, 59.37% declared that understanding foreign culture is a strong reason to study English, while 56.25% of participants believe that job opportunities are the main motive to study English. Results also show that 50% of participants believe that the main reason behind studying English is to fulfill their future academic purposes, suggesting that learners are aware of the value of the English language in future opportunities. The lowest selected option is valuable social status with 40.62%, which may indicate that participants perceive that social status is determined by the degree of language proficiency.

Results suggest that learners view English as both a tool for communication and a means to achieve personal and professional growth. The lower interest in social status implies that learners associate the value of English more with practical benefits than with prestige or any societal considerations.

**Table 6:** Motivation to attend English classes

| Question | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| Q9 Will you attend English language programs to improve your level | 75% | 25% |

Participants are asked whether they are ready to attend English classes to improve their language proficiency or not. Results show that the majority of learners 75% are highly motivated to take extra English courses to develop their English language abilities, which reflects learners' degree of awareness about the essential role of English. Only 25% of participants report no interest and motivation to attend English language programs, suggesting that the classroom instruction they receive satisfies their learning needs.

The Findings indicate that most learners are motivated to take extra English courses, showing their awareness of the language's importance, while a minority feel that regular classroom instruction already meets their needs.

**Table 7:** Attitudes toward English culture

| Question | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q10 Teaching English culture in Arabic | 6.25% | 34.37% | 53.12% | 6.25% |
| Q11 Arabic helps understanding | 31.25% | 59.37% | 9.37% | 0.00% |
| Q12 including familiar cultural element | 25% | 56.25% | 12.5% | 6/25% |
| Q13 Culture improves English proficiency | 40.62% | 37.51% | 9.37% | 12.5% |
| Q14 the effect of target culture on attitudes | 18.75% | 81.25% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| Q15 Exposure to foreign culture | 40.62% | 34.37% | 18.75% | 6.25% |
| Q 16 Foreign cultural elements increase their motivation | 78.13% | 21.87% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| Q17 Preservation of Arabic culture | 31.25% | 53.12% | 12.5% | 3.12% |
| Q18 Arabs should dress only in their national clothes | 0.00% | 3.12% | 34.5% | 62.5% |

Results from Table 7 reflect learners' attitudes toward English culture and its integration in language learning. Participants' responses are divided into different opinions; the majority of responses, with 59.37% do not support the idea of teaching English cultural elements in Arabic language while 40.62 % of participants agree on teaching English cultural content in Arabic. Results from question 11 show that the majority of participants, 90.62 % agree and strongly agree that the use of Arabic helps in understanding foreign cultural elements, and only 9.38% disagree on the use of the mother tongue to facilitate understanding.

Participants' responses from question 12 also show that the majority 81.25% believe that familiar elements from local culture help understanding foreign cultural elements, whereas only 18.75% of participants disagree with the idea. This implies that learners'

preference for including Arabic cultural elements is considered as a strategy to understand the target culture. Furthermore, question 13 reveals that the majority of learners, 78.13% agree that knowing about the target culture improves learners' language proficiency whereas 21.87% disagree about the important role of culture in learning the target language. This indicates that culture and language should be taught together and increasing learners' cultural awareness helps them communicate effectively in the target language.

Results of question 14 demonstrate that all participants 100% strongly agree and agree that the target culture affects their attitudes and behaviors toward learning a foreign language. Question 15 also shows that the majority of participants, 74.99% agree on the importance of exposure to foreign cultural values and beliefs to enhance understanding of the target language, and only 25% of participants disagree on the importance of exposure to foreign culture. Seemingly, all participants 100% in question 16 do agree that foreign cultural values, lifestyle, customs, and beliefs increase their motivation to learn the foreign language. Although learners are in favor of integrating foreign cultural elements in language teaching, results of question 17 demonstrate that a big majority of participants, 84.37% agree to maintain Arabic culture while learning a foreign language to balance between Arabic and English culture. Similarly, results of question 18 show that almost all participants 96.87% disagree on the idea that Arabs should wear only traditional clothes, which may reflect learners' readiness to accept foreign cultural traditions and customs.

In conclusion, the results confirmed both research hypotheses, indicating that positive cultural attitudes and culturally enriched teaching textbooks contribute significantly to learners' success in English language learning.

## Conclusion

This study investigated Algerian secondary school EFL learners' attitudes towards English cultural aspects. Research findings revealed that EFL learners have positive attitudes toward integrating English cultural aspects in foreign language learning, at the same time, learners emphasize maintaining Arabic cultural aspects to sustain a balance between local and target cultures. Such awareness illustrates learners' readiness to engage in an intercultural context while

preserving Arabic cultural values. In addition, research findings demonstrated that EFL learners appreciate their English textbook as teaching material that contains cultural topics, customs, and values from both cultures. In this regard, it is concluded that effective English language teaching requires engaging learners in foreign cultural situations and implementing some pedagogical aspects, like using familiar cultural elements to foster learners' intercultural communicative competence.

In conclusion, to enhance the integration of English cultural elements in foreign language teaching and to foster Algerian EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence, several pedagogical and curricular considerations should be taken into account. English textbooks should be designed to incorporate both local and foreign cultural elements, enabling learners to develop intercultural awareness while preserving Algerian cultural identity and values. Teachers, moreover, are encouraged to adopt and adapt appropriate instructional strategies that integrate familiar cultural aspects to facilitate comprehension and meaningful engagement. Equally important is the need to raise learners' awareness of their own cultural heritage in order to reinforce self-confidence when engaging with other cultures. Finally, providing teachers with professional training opportunities that focus on effective methods of integrating culture into English language teaching can further strengthen the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence.

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## - Appendices

### Appendix: Distributed Questionnaire

**Dear pupils,**

We are preparing a research on Algerian EFL Learners 'attitudes toward English foreign culture Case of first year secondary school Guelma. We would be grateful if you could answer these questions to help us in our research.

**Section One.  Background information.**

1. **Your gender**

    a.  Male                  b. Female.

2. **How old are you?**

    **…………………………..**

3. **How long have you been studying English?**

    a.  5 years

    b.  6 years

    c.  7 years

4. **Which stream do you study?**

    a.  Scientific stream        b. Literary stream

**B. Section two. Motivation to learn English**

**1. To what extent your current English textbook is interesting?**

    a. Very interesting             b. interesting.

    c. Not interesting.

**2. Which of the following motivates you to learn English.?**

    a. Grammar

    b. Vocabulary

    c. Pronunciation

    d. Culture

**3. Are you more motivated to learn English in comparison to previous year?**

    a. Yes

    b. No

    Why          for          both

    answers: …………………………………………………………

    ……………………………………

**4. You are studying English language because it will:**

    a. Help you in your studying carrier.

    b. Help you to get job easily.

    c.  Help you to have valuable social status

    d.  Help you to understand foreign culture.

    e.  **Others**…………………………………………………………

        …………………………………………………………………

        ………………………………………….

**5.  Will you attend English language programs to improve your language level?**

    a.  Yes

    b.  No

**C. Section three. Attitudes toward English culture.**

**10. English culture should be taught in Arabic mother tongue**

 a. Strongly  agree.          b. agree.          c. Disagree.

d. Strongly disagree

**11. Teachers' use of Arabic in explaining help you to understand the lesson.**

a. Strongly  agree.          b. agree.          c. Disagree.

d. Strongly disagree

**12. The use of familiar words from your local culture helps you to understand foreign cultural elements.**

a. Strongly agree.        b. agree.        c. Disagree.

d. Strongly disagree

## 13. To use English effectively you should know about its culture.

a. Strongly agree.        b. agree.        c. Disagree.

d. Strongly disagree

## 14. Learning about the target culture effects your attitudes

a. Strongly agree.        b. agree.        c. Disagree.

d. Strongly disagree

## 15. Exposure to the target culture values, customs and beliefs influence your attitude

a. Strongly agree.        b. agree.        c. Disagree.

d. Strongly disagree

## 16. Including foreign cultural elements increase your motivation in classroom.

a. Strongly agree.        b. agree.        c. Disagree.

d. Strongly disagree

## 17. It is important to enrich your knowledge about the Arabic culture while learning English

a. Strongly agree.          b. agree.          c. Disagree.

d. Strongly disagree

## 18. Arabs should dress only in their traditional clothes.

a. Strongly agree.          b. agree.          c. Disagree.

d. Strongly disagree


**Thank you for your collaboration.**