

# The Use of Critical Incident Technique for Teaching the Cultural Content to EFL Learners at Al Imam Mohammad Ibin Saud Islamic University

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**Abstract** - The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of critical incident technique for teaching the cultural content to EFL students at Al Imam Mohammad Ibin Saud Islamic University. The subjects of the study consisted of 65 male EFL students allocated in two sections, which were randomly selected out of four and were randomly assigned to both experimental and control groups. The subjects of the study were pretested at the beginning of the study to make sure that they were equivalent and homogenous. The experiment took place in the first semester of the academic year 2010/2011. The researcher taught the first five units of the intended material according to the critical incident technique. Afterwards, the experimental group was taught the cultural items according to the critical incident while the control group was taught via the traditional method (definitions and translations). At the end of the experiment, the two groups sat for the same cultural achievement test. The findings of the study revealed statistically significant differences in favor of the experimental group who was taught according to the critical incident technique. In the light of these findings, the researcher presented some conclusions and recommendations.

**Keywords:** critical incident, cultural content, EFL learners, cultural learning, traditional method

## I. INTRODUCTION

WHAT is culture? According to Brown [1] "Culture is what binds (people) together." Culture is all the accepted and patterned ways of behavior of a given people. It is that facet of human life learned by people as a result of belonging to some particular group; it is that part of learned behavior shared with others. Not only does this concept include a group's way of thinking, feeling, and acting, but also the internalized patterns for doing certain things in certain ways. This concept of culture also includes the physical manifestations of a group as exhibited in their achievements and contributions to civilization. Culture is our social legacy as contrasted with our organic heredity. It regulates our lives at every turn.

Of what value is culture to second language learning? For the foreign language teacher, the reasons are many. Culture shapes our view of the world. And language is the most representative element in any culture. Any item of behavior, tradition or pattern can only be understood in light of its meaning to the people who practice it. A knowledge of the codes of behavior of another people is important if today's foreign language student is to communicate fully in the target language. Without the study of culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete. For foreign language students, language study seems senseless if they know nothing about the people who

speak it or the country in which it is spoken. Language learning should be more than the manipulation of syntax and lexicon [2].

Humanistically, the study of different cultures aids us in getting to know different people which is a necessary prelude to understanding and respecting other peoples and their ways of life. It helps to open our students' eyes to the similarities and differences in the life of various cultural groups. Today, most of our students live in a monolingual and monocultural environment. Consequently, they become culture-bound individuals who tend to make premature and inappropriate value judgments. This can cause them to consider the foreign peoples whose language they are trying to learn as very peculiar and even ill-mannered. In 1980, the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies stated, "Foreign language instruction at any level should be a humanistic pursuit intended to sensitize students to other cultures, to the relativity of values, to appreciation of similarities among peoples and respect for the differences among them [3]

What type of culture should be taught in the foreign language classroom? Brooks [4] has identified five meanings of culture: growth; refinement; fine arts; patterns of living; and a total way of life. He believes that patterns of living should receive the major emphasis in the classroom. It is patterns of living that are the least understood, yet the most important in the early phases of language instruction. He labels this meaning of culture as culture 4 and defines it as follows:

"Culture 4 (patterns of living) refers to the individual's role in the unending kaleidoscope of life situations of every kind and the rules and models for attitude and conduct in them. By reference to these models, every human being, from infancy onward, justifies the world to himself as best he can, associates with those around him, and relates to the social order to which he is attached [4]."

From the point of view of language instruction, culture 4 can be divided into formal culture and deep culture. Formal culture, sometimes referred to as "culture with a capital C", includes the humanistic manifestations and contributions of a foreign culture: art; music; literature;

architecture; technology; politics. However, with this way of looking at culture, we often lose sight of the individual.

The most profitable way of looking at culture is to see what it does. Deep culture, or "culture with a small c," focuses on the behavioral patterns or lifestyles of the people: When and what they eat; how they make a living; the attitudes they express towards friends and members of their families; which expressions they use to show approval or disapproval. In this sense, culture is a body of ready-made solutions to the problems encountered by the group. It is a cushion between man and his environment. If we provide our students only with a list of facts of history or geography and a list of lexical items, we have not provided them with an intimate view of what life is really like in the target culture [4].

Traditional methods of teaching culture in the foreign language classroom have been focused on formal culture and passive learning. Students do need both a geographical and historical perspective in order to understand contemporary behavior patterns but this can be done with "hands on" activities. Beginning foreign language students want to feel, touch, smell, and see the foreign peoples and not just hear their language.

Numerous authors [5],[2],[6],[7] highlight the impossibility of learning English language without learning its culture. Whether culture is consciously or unconsciously part of the teachers' pedagogic aims, the transmission of culture is unavoidable. According to these authors, the content of what we teach will always be in some way linked to culture, as Valdes [5] points out that "every lesson is about something and that something is cultural". He also remarks that if culture is an unavoidable part of language teaching, then recognizing the cultural lessons to be learned for what they are and making the most of them enhances the learning experience.

If language and culture are interlinked and inseparable then we need to try to teach culture in a systematic way, as we try to do with other aspects of language such

as reading, writing, listening and speaking. Learners and teachers should be aware of the cultural aspects of foreign language and they need to be able to interpret these on both national and individual levels. They also need to be

encouraged to view using a second language as a new cultural experience and be aware of their local culture and the target language culture as well. As Kramersch [7] points out that: “language teachers are so much teachers of culture that culture has often become invisible to them.” It has been recognized then that culture teaching is part and parcel of second language education.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate to foreign language teachers how they can incorporate the teaching of culture into their foreign language classrooms via using the critical incident technique. It was demonstrated that learning a foreign language culture is not equal to the learning of syntactic structures or learning new vocabulary and expressions. Furthermore, this study was an attempt to incorporate culture by means of considering the critical incident technique currently used in the learning of the cultural content in the EFL classroom.

The critical incident technique is one of the effective methods for teaching culture. Critical incidents are descriptions of incidents or situations which demand that a participant in the interaction makes some kind of decision. Most of the situations could happen to any individual; they do not require that there should be intercultural interaction between the native speaker and the EFL learner. Critical incidents are descriptions of incidents or situations which demand that a participant in the interaction make some kind of decision. [8].

Since EFL students live in a monolingual and monocultural environment, they are culture bound. For this sake, culture has become an increasingly important component of English language teaching in recent times. Byram [2] believes that learning about the culture of another country is the highest purpose of language teaching. Culture learning, in general terms, involves a comprehensive description of the way of life of a particular society which is intertwined with the teaching of language. Therefore, there is a need to direct the attention of curricula designers and textbook writers to the importance of learning the cultural content in EFL classrooms. Accordingly, the researcher felt the necessity to explore the effect of such a technique on the learning of the cultural content by EFL students.

#### *A. Literature Review*

It is divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to the theoretical literature on cultural teaching and the second part deals with the research studies conducted in this area.

##### *Theoretical Literature*

It is noticeably evident that many educators and scholars in the field of education such as Kramersch [7], Stern [9], Kurogi [10], Rivers [11] and Hammerly [12] have demonstrated the relevance of the cultural content to second language learning and provide appropriate suggestions for incorporating both formal and deep cultures into foreign language classrooms. Thus, language study seems senseless if foreign language students know nothing about the people who speak that language or the country in which it is spoken.

Brooks [4], Rivers [11], Kramersch [7], and Kurogi [10] report that because of the interconnectedness between language and culture, applied linguists and language teachers have recently become increasingly aware that foreign language can rarely be learned or taught without addressing and understanding the culture of the community in which it is used. For them, in order to display appropriate communicative competence and proper language behaviors, learners have to have substantial degree of understanding and knowledge about the second culture, especially in its semantic and pragmatic senses. Lack of this understanding has been observed to lead to violation of cultural norms of appropriateness in interactions, pragmatic failures, breakdowns in communications and stereotyping of nonnative speakers.

Fries [13] asserts that when reading a foreign language text, there are three levels of meaning: lexical meaning, grammatical meaning, and socio-cultural meaning. The lexical and structural meaning can be looked up in a dictionary by the students. But the socio-cultural meaning is difficult for the foreign or second language learners to penetrate as it implies the values, beliefs and attitudes of the speakers of the target language.

Nostrand [14] suggests that understanding language alone is not sufficient for good intercultural communication. The cultural aspects of language and the

cultural backgrounds of speakers of that language have to be understood as well. He adds that in addition to native language skills, intercultural communication requires the ability to handle the target language and some insight into the culture and society of speakers of that language.

Hendon [15] states that introducing culture in foreign language classes increases students' interest in foreign language instruction. He believes that most students are curious to know more about the foreign people and their way of life which increases students' motivation to learn the language. He believes that students like activities based on the target culture, including singing, dancing, role-playing, skits, doing research on countries and people as effective sources for motivating students.

Furthermore, Lyons [16] suggests that it is through language that human experiences and culture itself are constructed. Culture and language are interwoven in an independent way that culture (with all it involves of beliefs, assumptions, conceptions, thoughts, patterns of thinking and reasoning, worldviews and understandings of world's realities) cannot be communicated and understood without language.

In this regard, Sihui [17] emphasizes the interaction between language and culture. He believes that culture must be fully incorporated as a vital component of language learning and language teachers should identify key cultural items in every aspect of the language that they teach. For him, it is crucial to teach cultural aspects when teaching language in the EFL classroom.

Duranti [18] was amongst those who have dilated upon the affinity between language and culture. He argues that language is not an 'autonomous construct' but social practice both creating and created by "the structures and forces of the social institutions within which we live and function. According to him, language cannot exist in a vacuum; but there is a kind of "transfusion" at work between language and culture.

Jiang [19] believes that without language, culture would not be possible. Language simultaneously reflects culture, and is influenced and shaped by it. In other words, culture is the symbolic representation of a people, since it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds, as well

as their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking.

Peck [20] voices out that culture shapes our view of the world and language is the most representative element in any culture. He believes that any item of behavior, tradition or pattern can only be understood in light of its meaning to the people who practice it. He believes that a knowledge of the codes of behavior of another people is important if today's foreign language student communicates fully in the target language. He argues that without the study of culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete.

To conclude, it is apparently obvious that language and culture are inseparable because learning another language leads to learning another culture either explicitly or implicitly. They are woven together so that they cannot be divorced. Moreover, students should be guided to develop a deeper knowledge of the language and its culture. As can be seen by the critical incident technique, it goes far beyond the superficial instruction of the cultural content. Such technique when being employed in the foreign language classroom, it would gain importance and relevance to EFL students as concrete expressions for improving EFL learners' cultural proficiency.

### *B. Experimental Studies*

The effect of the critical incident technique on the learning of the cultural content has not been studied at all on the international and local levels, mainly for EFL students. The following research studies differ widely from the current study. All the research studies have been conducted on different cultural teaching strategies, whereas the current study has been conducted on using a new cultural teaching strategy which is critical incident. Besides, the following research studies differ widely from the current study, due to a variety of factors such as the design of studies, the sample of the study, and the length of time during which students were exposed to the different cultural teaching strategies. On the other hand, the present study investigated the effect of critical incident technique on the learning of the cultural content by EFL students, aiming to find out if using such a technique would improve the students' learning of the cultural content, when training is

provided and when the participants were exposed to the critical incident over a period of time.

Johnson [21] investigated the effectiveness of the cultural origin of a prose passage on the reading comprehension. The subjects were Iranian intermediate advanced ESL students at the university level. The findings indicated that cultural background knowledge had a significant effect on ESL reading comprehension.

Floyd and Carrell [22] examined the effect of cultural background knowledge on reading comprehension. The results showed that the students who were given reading materials related to the target culture had greater reading comprehension than those who were provided with reading materials based on their own culture. The students' reading comprehension was facilitated. These researchers stated that by exposing students to pertinent cultural information, their performance increased significantly. These results, in fact, support the notion of the inseparability between language and culture.

Stroller [23] studied the use of visual approach using photographs and video use of advancing technology such as interactive media to present audiovisual materials. He pointed out that visual approach enhances cultural understanding. Furthermore, it links linguistic performance, communicative and cultural awareness in the classroom. But, using films and videos as teaching tools require careful selection, purposeful planning and extensive teacher preparation.

Hennessey [24] investigated the use of foreign films as a procedure for teaching the target culture. He pointed out that a class may study a certain foreign country or a piece of literature. In this case, the teacher may use a film that illustrates the geography, the people, the history or the customs of the target country. The result of the study is that students may develop a positive attitude about the culture the film illustrates which in turn enhances the students' language learning.

Ryan [25] investigated the ways in which foreign language teachers perceive the nature of culture and the relationship between these perceptions and behavior involving instructional tasks in teaching English as a foreign language. The findings showed that EFL teachers

expressed strong views about the importance of culture in foreign language instruction and about the inseparability of culture and language.

Abu-Shomer [26] investigated the techniques which EFL teachers employ while teaching literature to secondary stage students. The findings of his research showed that teachers are most likely to attempt techniques which are essential to promote cultural awareness for both the text and the students. They have also revealed statistically significant differences which are due to the experience variable concerning the techniques related to cultural awareness and background information. The difference is in favor of teachers whose experience ranges between 5 to 10 years.

Kurogi [10] investigated the practice of culture teaching in secondary Japanese language classes, in order to explain the present condition of teaching culture. A multiple case study at two high schools was conducted. The data were collected through class observation, teacher interviews, and a student survey. The results of the study revealed that culture teaching was seldom practiced by the two teachers in the study. Teaching about culture was not highly prioritized in their practice. He concluded that students should acquire cultural competence in order to effectively communicate in a foreign language.

Martines-Gibson [27] investigated the effect of using television commercials on the students' ability to observe cultural differences between their culture (Spanish) and the target culture (American). Furthermore, her study attempts to assess how the procedure to view the commercial affects the quality of the students' writing in terms of content. The findings showed that the experimental group who was given cultural information through watching T.V. commercials performed well in their writing. They were able to make comparisons using information from both cultures.

Herron, Corrie, Cole and Dubreil [28] investigated whether students enrolled in French course (Fr. 102) learn culture embedded in a video-based second language program. Beginning-level French students watched 10 videos as part of the curriculum. To measure the effectiveness of teaching culture through video, a pretest and posttest were administered. A questionnaire analyzed

students' perceptions of how well they learned about the foreign culture. The results showed significant gains in overall cultural knowledge. Thus, using video to teach culture is beneficial.

Dubreil [29] investigated the use of video and the Internet to enhance culture learning in the intermediate – level foreign language classroom. He pointed out that authentic documents are excellent sources for teaching culture. The findings indicate a significant gain in cultural knowledge with posttest scores significantly higher than pretest scores and a greater gain in products. Results support using video and the internet to enhance cultural understanding and suggest that their respective use differ according to lesson objectives.

Hamdan [30] tried to identify the EFL teachers' techniques while teaching the cultural content found in language and literature to the secondary-stage students. The findings of her research showed that teachers have employed various techniques while tackling the cultural content found in the text. Also, teachers have emphasized cultural background information, for it plays an important role in helping the students understand the cultural assumptions underlying the reading and literary texts.

As indicated from the previous literature, the researcher found out that many studies have been conducted on the usage of cultural teaching strategies as effective tools to teach the cultural content in EFL classrooms. Nevertheless, there are no experimental studies that focus on the critical incident technique as such a technique is quite new to language instructors and researchers. This is especially so in Saudi Arabia as there seems to be no experimental studies at all (to the best knowledge of the researcher) on the usage of the critical incident technique as a tool conducted among students in EFL classrooms. Therefore, this study aimed at filling this gap.

#### *C. Statement of the Problem*

EFL instructors usually complain that they are unable to deal with the cultural content in the foreign language classroom. Because there is no well clear methodology for teaching culture. Moreover, EFL teachers depend mostly on

traditional methods which are mainly definitions, explanations, direct teaching, and translations.

Consequently, teachers tend to make students read aloud in order to help them understand the meanings embedded in the text. Abu-Shomer's [26] found that most of EFL teachers ask students to read a certain paragraph either aloud or silently to obtain information from it. Thus, the application of the definition and translation techniques in English as a foreign language classrooms did not produce a positive effect on enhancing students' cultural competence; for the culturally-based strategies are almost neglected in general and the critical incident technique in particular in EFL classrooms. As Kurogi [10] remarks that culture learning in language education is an untouched area and there is a gap between theory and practice.

Herron, Corrie, Cole, and Dubreil [28] point out that "although much discussion has revolved around what culture to teach, the issue of how to teach culture remains largely unexamined". Therefore, the researcher carried out this study to experiment the critical incident technique hypothesizing that this technique could be an efficient way to improve EFL instructors' ability in dealing with the cultural content in comparison with the traditional methods used by most EFL instructors.

#### *D. Research Questions*

The present study attempted to answer the following question:

1. Are there any significant differences in the students' achievement in the pos-test due to the method of teaching (the critical incident method and the traditional method)?

#### *E. Research Hypothesis*

The major null hypothesis of the study would be that there would be no statistical significant difference in the EFL learners' cultural performance between the experimental exposed to the critical incident technique and the control group taught according to the traditional method in favor of the experimental group.

#### *F. Purpose of the Study*

This study aims at investigating the effect of critical incident technique on the learning of the cultural content by the first level of EFL students at Al Imam Mohammad Ibin Saud Islamic University.

### *G. Significance of the study*

The findings of this study may be significant to the first level of EFL learners as it represents an attempt to overcome the shortcomings in teaching the cultural content in English language by offering a teaching cultural strategy based on using the critical incident technique in EFL classrooms. It also provided the experimental group with the overall benefits of peer interaction and collaboration via using the critical incident technique. Meanwhile, this study could lead to the verification and testing of new methodologies in cultural instruction. It may also be significant to EFL teachers and curriculum developers as it introduces them an easy way to incorporate the cultural content represented in the use of the critical incident technique in EFL classrooms encouraging cooperation and group work among EFL learners.

### *H. Procedural Definitions*

**Cultural Content:** It is any information in the reading texts that refers to the cultural aspects which was employed by the critical incident technique. They are the following: social, historical, economic, political, geographical, man-woman relationship, values, beliefs, feelings, arts, etc [4].

**A Strategy:** It is a conscious plan employed to make learning more effective, easier and effortless. "A strategy is potentially a conscious plan for solving what to the individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular goal" [31].

**Critical Incident:** Critical incidents are of the effective methods for teaching culture. Generally, the procedure with a critical incident is to have students read the incident independently and make individual decisions about what they would do. Then the students are grouped into small groups to discuss their decisions and why they made them the way they did. Then all the groups discuss their decisions and the reasons behind them. Finally, students have to be given the opportunity to see how their decision and reasoning compare and contrast with the decisions and reasoning of native members of the target culture. In this case, learners are presented with some cultural information but they are on the horns of a dilemma. For example, in reading a narrative on marriage ceremonies, they are expected to assess manners and customs, or appropriate or

inappropriate behavior, and to employ various critical thinking techniques. Critical incidents are very good for arousing affect (emotional feelings) about the cultural issue [8].

**Traditional method:** This definition refers to the traditional techniques employed by EFL instructors in teaching the cultural content. Those techniques are translation, explanation, direct teaching and giving definitions and wordlists.

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

### *I. Limitations of the Study*

The over generalization of the findings of the study will be restricted by the following factors:

- 1- This study is limited to the first five units of the English textbook Interactions 2 by Kirn & Hartman [32] which was taught in the first semester of the academic year 2010 \ 2011.
- 2- This study is restricted to the critical incident technique and the traditional method of learning the cultural content.
- 3- The cultural achievement test was designed by the researcher.
- 4- The population of the study was limited to the first level of EFL students at Al Imam Mohammad Ibin Saud Islamic University during the academic year 2010/2011.

## II. METHODS

This section discusses the methodology which the researcher followed in the present study. It includes subjects, research design, variables, instruments, materials and procedures of the study.

### *A. Participants*

The subjects of this study consisted of (65) EFL students allocated into two sections in the college of languages and translation at Al Imam Mohammad Ibin Saud Islamic University. The subjects consisted of two groups: One male control group and one male experimental one which was subjected to the treatment. As for the experimental group, it was taught through employing the critical incident technique. The control group was taught in the traditional way using the traditional methods and

procedures such as definitions, explanations, direct teaching, and translation to students' native language.

#### *B. Research design*

This study utilized a pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design.

In this design the researcher used an experimental group and a control group. Both groups took a pre-test to measure their cultural performance before conducting the experiment. During the experiment, the experimental group was taught the cultural content via employing the critical incident technique, and the control group which was taught in the traditional way using the traditional methods and procedures for teaching the cultural content as manifested in the Teacher's Guide Book. After the experiment, the same test was administered as a posttest to investigate any significant differences in the cultural performance between the two groups.

#### *C. Variables of the study*

The present study included the following variables:

1. The independent variable: The critical incident technique
2. The dependent variable: The dependent variable of the study was EFL students' performance of learning the cultural content.

#### *D. Instruments*

To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher used the following instruments:

##### **1. The cultural achievement test**

The main aim of the cultural achievement test was to test the hypothesis of the study, so that the effect of the critical incident technique on learning the cultural content could be revealed. The researcher developed the cultural achievement test to measure the students' cultural performance before and after conducting the experiment. The test was conducted for the experimental and control groups. The early version of the test was given to a number of EFL specialists in the field to referee its suitability to the aims of the study, content, and clarity of instructions. The early version of the test was modified according to their suggestions and comments and the items of the test were reduced from 50 multiple choice questions to 40 items due to the deletion of inappropriate ones for they were difficult

and lead to serious misunderstanding between the home and target cultures. They suggested introducing different types of questions like introducing critical incident questions, what would you say in the following situations, true and false questions, match the cultural items with their appropriate answers and multiple choice questions. Their comments and suggestions were taken into consideration. In addition they were unfamiliar to students' social background and did not arouse their cultural awareness. Finally, they were not effective in enhancing students' thinking skills such as guessing, solving problems, comparing and contrasting between the two cultures. After modifying the cultural achievement test, it was administered to a pilot group of EFL students in an intact classes of the population of the study that were excluded from the sample. The cultural achievement test was given twice to this group, with an intervening time of fourteen days. The internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha reliability for the test instrument was determined to be 0.80 which is statistically accepted for the purpose of the study.

After doing the correlation between the two administrations, the experimental and the control groups sat for the pretest on the first of November, 2010, a day before the beginning of the treatment. And the posttest was given to the two groups at the end of January, 2011, to measure the effect of the critical incident technique on the experimental group students' learning of the cultural content. The experiment lasted for three months. The two groups were given two hours to do the pre and post-tests each time. After pre- and post-testing the experimental and the control groups, they were collected by the researcher and given to two EFL instructors to be corrected out of 40; each question was given one mark. A zero was given to the wrong answer or unanswered question. Finally, the researcher used the t-test to analyze the collected data.

#### *E. The Instructional material*

Interactions 2 by Kirn & Hartmann [32] which is taught for the first level of EFL students was used. The course aims at introducing the basic skills of reading in the college of languages and translation. Thus, the experimental group learned the instructional material through implementing the critical incident technique.

### III. PROCEDURE

The researcher followed the following procedures to conduct the experiment:

The researcher reviewed the previous studies which were designed to investigate the effect of the critical incident on the learning of the cultural content of EFL students at the local and international levels. He found out that many studies have been conducted on different cultural teaching strategies at the international level while no studies at all have been conducted on the use of the critical incident technique at the international and local levels. He also found that EFL instructors suffered from inappropriate teaching methods in learning the cultural content in EFL classroom. The reason behind this suffering could be attributed to the fact that little emphasis was provided to effective teaching methods and techniques for tackling the cultural content in the FL classrooms. Moreover, most lecture time was given to explicit teaching techniques like definition and translation. Therefore, students were deprived from cultural teaching strategies and feedback necessary for learning the cultural content.

At the beginning of the course, the researcher gave an introductory lesson about cultural teaching strategies in general and the use of critical incident for teaching the cultural content to the experimental group. Members of the experimental group were trained on using the critical incident technique for learning the cultural content. They were divided into small heterogeneous groups or pairs to enable the weak students benefit from their classmates. Members of the experimental group used the critical incident for many applications in learning the cultural content like guessing, predicting, giving individual decisions, checking and making inferences and comments and getting feedback about them, and making critical incident comments on cultural aspects of the target culture.

Members of the control group studied the intended material through the traditional methods found in the Teacher's guide book. They studied the basic skills of reading activities, and received training on how to use different kinds of reading strategies like summarizing, skimming, scanning and brainstorming in dealing with the reading activities. They were also provided with a checklist

to edit peers' reading questions and answers on the reading activities. They were asked to answer questions on reading texts via employing the above strategies, and find and correct errors. Moreover, they were trained on how to use prediction and inference skills in dealing with the reading texts correctly. Finally, a post-test was administered to find the effect of using the critical incident for teaching the cultural content between the experimental and the control groups.

#### *A. Treatment*

To investigate the effect of using the critical incident technique for teaching the cultural content to EFL learners, the researcher trained the experimental group throughout all the sessions of the experiment by using the critical incident technique for learning the cultural items. The first session included training the experimental group on using the critical incident technique for learning the cultural aspects in the EFL classroom. In it, the researcher held a conference with the experimental group to discuss the cultural topics which are related to the critical incident characteristics, uses and benefits. The experimental group was also trained on how to use the critical incident technique in a cooperative manner to enable the weak students benefit from their classmates. Then, the researcher divided the experimental group into small groups with five students in each group and asked each group to use the critical incident technique for many applications in learning the cultural content like guessing, predicting, giving individual decisions, checking and making inferences and comments and getting feedback about them, and making critical incident comments on cultural aspects of the target culture. The students in each group were encouraged to brainstorm and generate ideas for the pro and con sides of the topic. On the other hand, members of the control group studied the intended material through the traditional methods and techniques found in the Teacher's book. By the end of the treatment, the researcher post tested the experimental group and the control group by using the cultural achievement test. The raters used the cultural achievement test to evaluate the cultural performance of the experimental group and the control group on the cultural posttest. The researcher compared and analyzed the data obtained from the pre-and post-tests.

IV. RESULTS

A pretest was used in order to ensure the equivalence of the two groups in their cultural proficiency at the

beginning of the experiment. The results of the pretest concerning the mean scores of the two groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*The T-Value of the Difference in the Mean Scores Between the Experimental Group and the Control Group on the Pre-Test*

GROUP	N	Mean	SD	T	DF	Sig.
Experimental	32	20.50	4.220	1.228	63	.224
Control	33	19.09	4.990			

assumed that the experimental and control groups were homogeneous and equivalent with reference to cultural competence between the two groups before conducting the experiment

After conducting the experiment, a posttest was administered to the two groups of the study on the students' cultural proficiency. The results of the analysis of the post-test scores are shown in table (2) below.

Table 1 shows that the mean score of the experimental group was 20.50 with a standard deviation of 4.220, and the mean score of the control group was 19.09 with a standard deviation of 4.990. It also reveals that the difference in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group was not statistically significant ( $t = 1.228, p = .224$ ). This indicates that there were no significant differences between the mean scores of the students' grades on the cultural achievement pretest. Therefore, it can be

Table 2  
*The T-Value of the Difference in the Mean Scores Between the Experimental group and the Control Group on the Post-Test*

GROUP	N	Mean	SD	T	DF	Sig.
Experimental	32	30.94	3.058	11.789	63	.000
Control	33	20.30	4.119			

\* Significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$

than those in the control group who were instructed according to the traditional method. Therefore, this finding supports the premise that the teaching technique employed in the study is far more important than the traditional teaching techniques.

V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study proved that there were statistically significant differences between the achievement of the experimental and control groups on the cultural achievement test due to the teaching procedure. The high scores of the experimental group indicated that the teaching procedure did affect the students' cultural proficiency. This claim is supported by the findings of Johnson [21], Kurogi

Table 2 indicates that the mean score of the experimental group was 30.94 with a standard deviation of 3.058, while the control group's mean score was 20.30 with a standard deviation of 4.119. It also reveals that the difference in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group was statistically significant ( $t = 11.789, p = .000$ ).

As it is clearly revealed in the table, there were significant differences among the mean scores of students' cultural performance in the control and experimental groups in favor of the experimental one. This means that students in the experimental group, who were instructed according to the critical incident technique, achieved better results

### *Conclusion*

The results of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the groups in their cultural achievement due to the instructional procedure and in favor of the experimental group. In addition, the study provides an unequivocal support for the efficiency of the teaching procedure in facilitating the process of learning the cultural content by EFL students. The researcher realized a great enthusiasm towards learning the cultural content on the experimental group students' side, who felt no fear of dealing with the cultural activities more freely. However, they felt that they wanted to express themselves in dealing with the cultural content although their willingness was hampered by their low cultural proficiency at the beginning of the experiment; still they were encouraged by the whole process and found it interesting. Thus, the use of the instructional technique in a friendly non-threatening atmosphere encourages the experimental group students to deal with the cultural content more efficiently.

Finally, it can be concluded that EFL learners' performance in learning the cultural content improves a lot through using the critical incident technique compared with the traditional procedures, techniques, activities, and methods used by EFL teachers.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions and recommendations are forwarded to future researchers in the area of culture learning, and EFL instructors.

#### **Researchers are recommended to:**

1. Conduct further studies concerning the use of other cultural strategies in teaching the cultural content such as role plays, proverbs, cultural clusters, simulations, cultural islands, cultural capsules, cultural mini-drama, and cultural consciousness raising.
2. Conduct further studies concerning the effect of other cultural strategies and techniques on various students' levels to reach more general findings and conclusions.

[10] and Hamdan [30]. Additionally, the finding of this study is in harmony with the findings of Hennessey [24]; Floyd and Carrell [22]; Stroller [23]; Kurogi [10]; Martinez-Gibson [27]; and Herron, et al. [28]. These empirical studies provided empirical evidence in favor of the experimental groups who studied the cultural content via the cultural teaching strategies. Nevertheless, those researchers acknowledged the usefulness of those cultural teaching strategies and recommended carrying out more research in this area. They advocated the utilization of other cultural strategies in teaching culture. They also emphasized the need for intentional and incidental culture teaching.

It is possible to account for this finding in the following way:

- 1) The subjects in the experimental group studied in a relaxed atmosphere, which was motivating for critical thinking, and supportive for solving critical incident situations.
- 2) They had an access to extra critical incident activities, which were found to be helpful for them.
- 3) Members of the experimental group became more dependent on themselves when they used the critical incident interaction among themselves.
- 4) The use of the critical incident technique in the classroom opened new prospects for the subjects, which motivated them for doing extra cultural activities inside the classroom.

The use of critical incident in this study created an interesting and nonthreatening atmosphere which motivated the student to depend on himself and work with other students to do many cultural activities through employing the teaching procedure. This also created an atmosphere of cooperation among the subjects who could work together via the teaching procedure. They could also exchange viewpoints and receive new ideas and comments about the subjects they discussed. Singhal [8] reported that the critical incident technique enabled students to interact in authentic situations with a variety of audiences, increase their levels of cultural input and output, and enhance motivation for working and willingness to learn collaboratively.

and confidence, which in turn help them to be better communicators of the language outside of class.

2. Instructors are encouraged to attend and participate in different training courses on teaching the cultural content. As Singhal [8] states that language teachers ought to receive both experiential and academic training, with the aim of becoming ‘mediators in culture teaching’.
3. Try to be creative and innovative in the use of various EFL teaching techniques. EFL instructors should try to be up-to-date in their knowledge of EFL teaching techniques and activities in dealing with the cultural content.

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3. This study was conducted on male students only. Further research is advised to measure the effect of cultural teaching strategies on female groups.

#### **Textbook Writers are recommended to:**

1. Develop and design special training courses and workshops for EFL teachers on the use of different cultural strategies.
2. Put down plans to establish language clubs for school cultural activities and assign qualified English as a foreign language teachers to take part in them. This will produce culturally proficient learners of the English language.
3. Integrate new stimulating cultural activities in all syllabuses of all levels. Cultural activities such as cultural islands, role plays, simulation, reformulation, cultural clusters, and cultural consciousness raising should have their share in the lesson.
4. Increase the time allotted to English classes, so that culture teaching receives its adequate time.
5. Introduce authentic sources from the native speech community that helps to engage students in authentic cultural experiences. These sources can include films, news broadcasts, television shows, web sites, photographs, magazines articles, newspapers, travel brochures and other printed materials. As Martinese-Gibson [27] states that today’s students are part of the television era and that visual aids help them with cultural awareness.
6. Culture teaching should be fully incorporated as a vital component of language learning. As Singhal [8] states: “Culture should be our message to students and language our medium. It should begin on the very first day of class and should continue every day after that”. This does not imply that linguistic constructs will be ignored. Many elements of culture are embedded within the language itself.

#### **EFL instructors are recommended to do the following:**

1. Instructors are recommended to believe in the usefulness of the different cultural activities in the syllabus, whether written or oral. They should believe that such cultural activities build students’ thinking

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# استخدام الطريقة النقدية في تعلم المحتوى الثقافي لطلبة اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية

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## الملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استخدام إستراتيجية الطريقة النقدية في تعلم المحتوى الثقافي لطلبة اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية. تكونت عينة الدراسة من 65 طالباً مسجلين في شعبتين تم اختيارهما عشوائياً من شعب القراءة الأربع المتوفرة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وبالطريقة ذاتها تم تحديدهما كمجموعتين تجريبية وضابطة. وقد تكونت المجموعة التجريبية من شعبة للذكور والمجموعة الضابطة تكونت أيضاً من شعبة للذكور. و قد خضعت المجموعتين عند بدء الدراسة لامتحان قبلي لقياس القدرة الثقافية للتأكد من كونهما متساويتان ومتجانستان. تم إجراء التجربة في الفصل الدراسي الأول من العام الدراسي 2010 / 2011. قام الباحث بتدريس الوحدات الخمس الأولى من المادة التعليمية المقررة لطلبة اللغة الانجليزية (المستوى الأول) من خلال استخدام إستراتيجية الطريقة النقدية. وفيما بعد دُرست المجموعة التجريبية المحتوى الثقافي تبعا لإستراتيجية الطريقة النقدية، ودُرست المجموعة الضابطة المحتوى الثقافي بالطريقة التقليدية (الترجمة والتعريفات). وفي نهاية الفصل خضعت المجموعات المختلفة (تجريبية وضابطة) للاختبار التحصيلي الثقافي. أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية لصالح المجموعة التجريبية التي دُرست باستخدام إستراتيجية الطريقة النقدية. في ضوء هذه النتائج قدم الباحث مجموعة من الاستنتاجات والتوصيات.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** الطريقة النقدية، المحتوى الثقافي، متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التعلم الثقافي، الطريقة

التقليدية