

# Contributions of Cultural Diversity in the Teaching and Learning of French Case of Cycle 4 in the Burundian Context

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**Abstract:** Our study explores the contributions of the integration of cultural diversity in the teaching-learning of French in cycle 4 in Burundi. Overall, a school characterized by cultural heterogeneity implements specific teaching practices to motivate students in their learning. Based on an observation made in said class, the results show that the integration of varied cultural elements promotes student engagement and improves their understanding of the language. However, needs in terms of training and educational resources have been identified. This study calls for an intercultural approach in the teaching-learning of French in Burundi.

**Keywords:** Culture, Diversity, Teaching-Learning, French, Burundi.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning of a foreign language, particularly a widely spoken international language such as French or English, is at the heart of contemporary educational issues, particularly in a context of globalization and growing cultural diversity. In Burundi, the teaching of French is essential for access to education, employment and social mobility. However, Burundian students are confronted with heterogeneous educational backgrounds, marked by great cultural and linguistic diversity. In this context, it is pertinent to consider the role that culture plays in the teaching-learning of French, and more specifically how the integration of varied cultural elements can influence the motivation and commitment of pupils to their learning.

The cycle4, a foundational period in the construction of learning, is an ideal field in which to study this question. Indeed, it's at this age, from 12 to 15, that children undergo the greatest development of their representations of the world, their identities and their language skills, Inhelder and Piaget (1955). Research in foreign language didactics has shown that integrating culture into teaching/learning can boost student motivation, enable them to feel valued and develop intercultural skills. It is therefore legitimate to ask whether the integration of varied cultural elements representative of the diversity of cycle4 students in Burundi can improve their learning of the French language.

For the purposes of this study, we chose to focus on the Buyenzi basic fundamental school. By observing two cycle4 classes made up of pupils from different socio-cultural backgrounds, we sought to understand how the integration of cultural elements into pedagogical activities could influence pupil motivation and commitment.

A preliminary hypothesis, which will be explored further in the course of this study, is that students from different cultural backgrounds are more motivated when the content offer reflects their own culture. Indeed, by recognizing themselves in the proposed activities, students may feel valued and more involved in learning. This hypothesis is based on the idea that culture plays a central role in the construction of identity, and that the school must enable each student to feel recognized in his or her cultural singularity.

## II. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The teaching of French in Burundi is part of a complex historical and socio-cultural context. While the French language is widely used in administration, education and the media, teaching it in primary schools remains a challenge. School curricula, although reformed several times, give pride of place to basic linguistic skills (reading, writing, oral expression) to the detriment of cultural aspects. This

orientation, inherited from a pedagogical tradition focused on grammatical aspects of language mastery, does not take sufficient account of the intercultural dimension of language learning.

And yet, the cultural diversity of Burundian pupils, particularly in schools such as the fundamental school in Buyenzi<sup>1</sup>, is a considerable asset when it comes to learning French. Exposure to different cultures develops intercultural skills, stimulates curiosity and encourages open-mindedness. However, this cultural richness is often under-exploited in teaching practices. School textbooks, for example, tend to focus on decontextualized content that has little to do with students' real-life situations. Classroom activities are often language-centric, and don't allow students to project themselves into authentic communicative situations. Our study is part of this context.

Focusing on one class in cycle4, we seek to analyze the pedagogical practices implemented and assess the impact of integrating varied cultural elements on students' motivation to learn. Our aim is to show that taking cultural diversity into account can be a powerful lever for improving the quality of French language teaching and fostering the success of all students.

### III. READING POINTS

Research in foreign language didactics has amply demonstrated the importance of culture in second language learning. Indeed, language and culture are closely linked and mutually influence each other. Numerous authors have emphasized the importance of integrating cultural elements into pedagogical activities to foster learner motivation, commitment and success.

Byram (1997) is one of the most influential theorists in this field. He has developed a model of intercultural competence that emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity, knowledge of other cultures, the ability to interact with people from other cultures and cultural criticism. Byram's work (1997) can be used to design pedagogical activities that foster the development of this competence in learners of French.

The influence of culture on the learning of French in Burundi, although widely recognized by researchers such as Bigirimana et al. (2024), remains a relatively under-researched area. These authors emphasize the need to take into account the cultural dimension, however vast and complex, in order to better understand the dynamics of language teaching and learning. This work can help us to better understand the challenges and opportunities

associated with integrating culture into pedagogical practices.

Furthermore, the work of language didactics researchers such as Cummins (1986), has highlighted the importance of valuing minority languages and cultures in the classroom. According to Cummins (1986), learners from linguistic minorities can take advantage of their mother tongue to develop their second-language skills. This approach, known as "translanguaging"<sup>2</sup>, may be particularly relevant in a context such as Burundi, where linguistic diversity is high.

Finally, the work of researchers in anthropology and sociology can also shed interesting light on the links between culture, identity and learning. Authors such as Bourdieu (1977) have emphasized the importance of cultural capital in academic success. By integrating a variety of cultural elements into educational activities, it is possible to foster the personal development of all students, whatever their initial cultural capital.

### IV. METHODOLOGY

To explore the link between culture, diversity and language learning in cycle4, we opted for a case study in a culturally diverse fundamental school in Buyenzi. This choice is in line with the work of Yin (2003), who emphasizes the value of case studies for exploring complex phenomena in their natural context. Indeed, by focusing on a specific classroom, we were able to observe social interactions and learning processes in all their complexity.

Our methodology was based on participant observation, a preferred qualitative method for studying social phenomena (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). By immersing ourselves in the classroom, we were able to closely observe the interactions between students, teachers and teaching materials. This method enabled us to grasp the nuances of pedagogical practices and understand the meanings that actors attribute to different learning situations. Participant observation also enabled us to collect rich, detailed data on the activities proposed, the resources used and the students' reactions. In parallel with participant observation, we conducted semi-structured interviews with four cycle4 teachers and ten parents. This method, widely used in the social sciences (Goffman, 1961), enabled us to gather their perceptions of the integration of culture and diversity into learning. The interviews were designed to encourage the free expression of the participants and to explore their representations and experiences in depth.

Finally, we completed our data collection by analyzing pedagogical documents. This method, complementary to the previous ones, enabled us to identify the school's

<sup>1</sup> Buyenzi is a neighborhood that embodies the richness and complexity of Burundian society. Its cultural diversity is a major asset, but it can also pose challenges in terms of social cohesion. A better understanding of this diversity is essential to fostering intercultural dialogue and strengthening social cohesion.

<sup>2</sup> This is a promising approach to language learning in Burundi. By valuing linguistic diversity and enabling pupils to use all their linguistic resources, this approach can help improve academic success and boost pupils' self-esteem.

pedagogical orientations and situate the practices observed within a broader framework.

## V. SEARCH RESULTS

The results presented in this study are based on an in-depth analysis of data collected from a variety of stakeholders. We cross-referenced information from interviews with five teachers and ten parents with our own classroom observations in two parallel cycle4 classes, each with over 50 pupils. This triangulation of data gave us a more complete and nuanced view of the reality observed, taking into account the perceptions of the various players involved in the educational process.

### A. Description of Respondents' Answers

The survey focused on three main themes: (i) pedagogical practices implemented to integrate cultural diversity, (ii) the impact of these practices on student motivation and learning, and (iii) teachers' and parents' representations of the integration of cultural diversity. For teachers, we asked about the types of resources they used, the difficulties they encountered and the training they received. The interview with parents focused on their expectations in terms of cultural activities and their perception of the impact of these activities on their children's motivation. The questions asked were adapted to each parent's specific role.

#### ➤ Teaching Practices Designed to Integrate Cultural Diversity

##### • For Teachers

To the question *"How do you integrate cultural elements into your daily teaching activities?"*, 3/5 of the teachers surveyed had no difficulty integrating a cultural element. Their strategy for integrating cultural elements into lessons is as follows:

One teacher in five (1/5) tries to incorporate cultural elements right from the introduction to the lesson. For example, when introducing a new topic in French, they often start with a traditional tale or folk song. This allows students to familiarize themselves with the language in a rich cultural context, and to create an emotional bond with the subject. Then, during the lesson, they can use images, videos or objects that illustrate cultural diversity.

One teacher in five (1/5) tries to link grammatical notions to concrete examples drawn from everyday life, such as idiomatic expressions or wordplay. They organize group activities in which students present aspects of their

own culture, encouraging sharing and respect for diversity.

One teacher in five (1/5) makes extensive use of holidays and cultural events to liven up their lessons. For example, in the run-up to Christmas, they read Christmas stories in different languages, decorate the classroom and organize a tea party where each pupil brings a dish typical of his or her neighborhood. This creates a festive atmosphere and raises awareness of different cultures.

Two out of five teachers (2/5) have difficulties. They don't even seem to understand what a cultural element is, as evidenced by the consecutive answers they gave to our question *"It's a good idea to integrate cultural elements, but I don't always know how to go about it"*, *"I'm already busy following the program and don't have much time to prepare additional activities. What's more, I'm not sure that all students are interested in cultural differences. I prefer to concentrate on the lesson proposed in the material"*.

For the question *What types of resources do you use to address cultural diversity in the classroom?* It's interesting to note that although some teachers seem less familiar with the concept of cultural elements, they also mentioned the use of songs in their teaching practices. Indeed, all the teachers surveyed (100%) use a variety of practices to integrate cultural elements into their lessons. The most common practices include the use of stories, songs and cultural objects. At the same time, teachers rely on more traditional resources such as textbooks, as well as digital resources such as the Internet

To the question *What training have you taken to help you integrate cultural diversity into the classroom?* The question of training to integrate cultural diversity elicited a wide range of responses. While 3/5 of teachers had benefited from specific training, others (2/5) expressed the need for further training. Respondents stressed the importance of ongoing training to keep abreast of diversity issues and develop new teaching skills. They also mentioned the need for more practical training, enabling them to implement what they have learned directly in their classrooms.

##### • For Parents

For the question: *What cultural activities would you like to see offered to your children at school?* With the following choice options: (i) activity highlighting family cultural realities, (ii) activity highlighting openness to the world, (iii) lucrative activities and (iv) cultural learning is not learned at school, four main trends emerged.

Table 1 Parent Preferences for School Cultural Activities

Response Option	Number of Parents	%
Activity highlighting family cultural realities	6	60
Activity promoting openness to the world	2	20
Profit-making activities	1	10
Cultural learning can't be learned at school	1	10

- ✓ 60% of parents expressed a desire for their children to discover and value the cultural realities present in their homes. They would like the school to offer activities linked to family traditions, such as songs, prayers or traditional recipes. This approach highlights cultural diversity and the importance of passing on cultural roots to children.
- ✓ 20% of parents stressed the importance of a broader cultural outlook. They want their children to be exposed to cultures different from their own, to develop their curiosity, tolerance and understanding of the world.
- ✓ 10% of parents emphasized the professional aspect of cultural activities. They feel that the school should offer activities that could provide professional outlets for their children, such as music or dance.
- ✓ 10% of parents expressed the view that cultural transmission is first and foremost a family responsibility, and that schools should not replace parents' role in this area.

All these responses illustrate the diversity of parents' expectations when it comes to cultural activities at school. We believe it's important to take these different perspectives into account, in order to develop a rich educational offering that's adapted to the needs of all students.

#### B. The Impact of these Practices on Student Motivation and Learning

##### ➤ For Teachers

To the question *Do you observe a difference in student motivation when you offer activities linked to their culture of origin?* It's undeniable that offering activities linked to students' culture of origin has a significant impact on their motivation. When students have the opportunity to share a part of themselves, their traditions and their stories, they feel valued and engaged in their learning. This personal connection to the subject matter creates a bridge between their familiar world and that of the school, reinforcing their interest and involvement.

The results of teacher surveys confirm this trend, with 100% of teachers reporting a significant increase in student motivation when invited to explore their native culture. This motivation translates into active participation, palpable enthusiasm and a strong desire to share their knowledge with their peers. Each child then becomes a "true expert" on his or her culture, ready to testify to its customs, languages and values.

##### ➤ For Parents

To the question, *have you noticed any change in your child's interest in the French language since attending this school? If so, to what do you attribute this?*

- 20% of respondents emphasized the role of teachers in their child's progress in French, highlighting their competence and adapted teaching methods.
- 10% attribute their child's progress to his/her personality:

he/she is curious, motivated and has a natural talent for languages.

- 10% consider reading to be an essential part of learning French, contributing to vocabulary enrichment and comprehension.
- 40% link their child's progress to his or her interest in French culture. School allows them to discover new aspects of this culture and to feel more immersed in the language.

#### C. Perceptions and Representations

##### ➤ For Teachers

To the question: *In your opinion, how important is it to integrate culture into the learning of the French language?* We feel it's vital to stress that integrating culture into the learning of the French language is of the utmost importance, and was unanimously endorsed by the teachers surveyed (100%). Indeed, language and culture are closely linked and influence each other. Immersing learners in Francophone culture promotes deeper, more meaningful language acquisition.

Beyond the linguistic aspect, cultural integration helps *preserve and enhance the intangible heritage* of the French-speaking world. By discovering the traditions, arts, literature and history of French-speaking countries, learners develop a sense of belonging to a wider community, and contribute to safeguarding French cultural identity. On a socio-economic level, this approach also encourages *openness to the world and international mobility*. A good command of the French language and culture is a major asset for accessing higher education, high-level jobs and international professional networks.

To the question *"What kind of support would you like to receive to improve your skills in this area?"*, the teachers surveyed expressed a variety of support needs to improve their skills in integrating culture and diversity into their teaching practices. Firstly, many of them would like to benefit from specific training. Such training would enable them to acquire new knowledge and develop key skills for designing effective intercultural activities adapted to their classrooms. Teachers also express an urgent need for diversified, high-quality teaching resources, such as specific manuals, videos or educational games. These tools would enable them to implement innovative teaching projects and enrich their practices.

Teachers are also keen to exchange ideas with their peers. They aspire to take part in working groups, seminars or professional networks to share experiences and best practices, and find solutions to the challenges of integrating cultural diversity. What's more, some teachers express the need for personalized support to help them implement new pedagogical practices in their own classrooms. Individualized support would enable them to adapt the proposed strategies to their specific context.



Last but not least, teachers show a marked interest in opening up to the outside world. They want to discover innovative school models, get involved in cultural projects with outside partners, and develop partnerships with local communities. These various avenues would enrich students' learning and foster a better understanding of different cultures.

#### ➤ For Parents

For the question, *In your opinion, how important is it to integrate culture into learning the French language?* The parents surveyed stressed the crucial importance of integrating culture into French language learning, putting forward the following main reasons

Firstly, they believe that culture provides an authentic context for language, enabling children to understand the nuances, idioms and cultural references that make French so rich. By immersing children in Francophone culture, they are given the keys to communicating more naturally and effectively. What's more, parents believe that culture fosters children's motivation and engagement by making learning more lively and interesting. By discovering the arts, literature, history and traditions of French-speaking countries, children are more inclined to make the language their own, and use it as a privileged communication tool.

Parents also point out that culture helps develop children's curiosity, open-mindedness and critical faculties. By discovering other cultures, children learn to put their own values into perspective and better understand the world around them. In this way, learning a language becomes a vehicle for education in citizenship and tolerance. Finally, parents believe that culture helps build personal identity. By confronting other cultures, children affirm their own identity and develop a sense of belonging to a wider community.

In short, the parents surveyed were unanimous in their view that integrating culture into French language learning is essential to enable children to become global citizens, capable of communicating, understanding and appreciating cultural diversity. They consider that this pedagogical approach fosters not only language acquisition, but also the development of key skills for success in today's society: creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness and critical thinking.

## VI. DISCUSSING THE RESULTS

The survey of teachers and parents revealed a strong consensus on the importance of integrating culture into French language learning. The results reveal a diversity of pedagogical practices, as well as a convergence of views on the benefits of this approach for student motivation and personal development.

In terms of pedagogical practices and resources used, the teachers interviewed put in place a variety of practices to integrate culture into their lessons, ranging from the use of stories and songs to the organization of group activities. These practices are part of a pedagogical approach that aims to make learning French more lively and meaningful for

students. However, some teachers have expressed difficulties in implementing these practices, notably due to lack of time and specific training. The use of diversified teaching resources, such as textbooks, digital resources and cultural objects, is common practice among teachers. This diversity of resources makes it possible to respond to the varied needs and interests of students.

In terms of impact on motivation learning, the survey results clearly show that integrating culture into French language learning has a positive impact on student motivation. By offering them the opportunity to connect with the language through cultural experiences, teachers foster deeper engagement and better memorization of learning. Students are more motivated to learn when they see meaning in what they learn, and when they can make connections between the language and their own lives.

Cultural integration also helps develop essential skills such as creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness and critical thinking. By discovering other cultures, students learn to put their own values into perspective and better understand the world around them.

When it comes to the perceptions and representations of teachers and parents, both share a common vision of the importance of integrating culture into learning French. They recognize that culture is an essential element of language, and that it plays a key role in student motivation and success. However, teachers expressed the need for further training to develop their skills in this area. It is important to offer training tailored to the specific needs of teachers, enabling them to implement innovative and effective teaching practices.

Parents, for their part, want the school to offer a variety of cultural activities, both linked to their children's native cultures and to wider cultures. They expect the school to contribute to their children's personal development by offering them enriching and diversified experiences.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The survey reveals that integrating culture into French language learning is a beneficial practice for students, teachers and parents alike. To reinforce this approach, we need to continue our efforts in teacher training, the development of appropriate teaching resources and collaboration between all those involved in education. By promoting an intercultural approach to language teaching, we are helping to train world citizens who are open to others and capable of adapting to the challenges of a globalized world.

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