

DEMOCRATIC AND POPULAR REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF ABOU BAKR BELKAID-TLEMCCEN

FACULTY OF ARTS, SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES  
FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT  
ENGLISH SECTION

**Socio-Cultural Background in Reading EFL Literature: A Case Study of  
Algerian Students**

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Foreign languages  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Magister in Applied Linguistics and Didactics.

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Academic Year: 2007-2008



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كلية الآداب و اللغات  
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## Declaration

“I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my own investigation and that due reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary to the work of other researchers.”

Date: November, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2008

Signature:

## Dedication

This research is dedicated to my beloved parents, who have given me constant support and encouragement; and my father in particular who has always given me his precious advice whenever I needed it.

FASLA Zahia  
&  
FASLA El Habib

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## Abstract

This study is an exploratory case study in EFL reading comprehension, and in foreign literature reading in particular. It tries to investigate the place and value of socio-cultural acquisition in the literature taught to Algerian EFL university students throughout their four years' studies. For so doing, a group of twenty students enrolled in the Fourth Year American Literature course was administered a test in reading comprehension essentially culturally oriented. This design for introducing culture allowed us to examine two variables: target culture comprehension and task sequencing. In addition, we administered a questionnaire to the same group of Fourth Year EFL university students and an interview was given to a focus group of four students as well as to three American literature teachers. The present work is composed of four chapters:

The first chapter presents the different research findings concerning the reading comprehension process in comparison to the different reading models issued from literary criticism. It also describes the place culture has within language learning and education in general. Special attention is drawn to critical reading, a skill for which cultural background knowledge is necessary.

The second chapter concerns the research methodology chosen for the present work. It presents the design of the data collection methods and the reasons behind their selection as well as their manner of administration.

The third chapter deals with the results and their interpretation, as well as the answers to our three research questions.

The fourth chapter contains some implications the teachers of literature and cultural studies of the EFL teaching degree course (in the English Department at the University of Algiers) could find useful.

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## General Introduction

At the university level students are normally expected to read extensively. Reading involves interpreting text and constructing meaning in the light of the reader's background knowledge. As a matter of fact, background knowledge plays a crucial role in the reading comprehension process. This is true for any text and more particularly for a literary one. The role played by background knowledge in comprehension is explained in a theoretical model known as schema theory. For Lyons (1996), in schema theory understanding a text is influenced by the reader's 'schemata' or prior knowledge. The schemata are divided in two: the linguistic schema (knowledge of language) and the content schema (knowledge of the world). Therefore, quality reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world. Gray (1960) in Alderson (2000) has identified different levels of understanding for the reading skill: for the lower level the reader concentrates essentially on his linguistic competence, whereas the deeper the interpretation the stronger is the need to have a cultural awareness about the text background.

Therefore, without a knowledgeable reader in the target culture, the meaning of a text remains incomplete. For Grabe (1991), cited in Alderson (2000), the target cultural background knowledge a reader needs to understand a text is necessary even at the very primary level of understanding.



For him it is precisely the target cultural background knowledge which bridges the gap between deciphering the printed text and thinking about what is being read. Furthermore, Grabe (op-cit) states that it affects the quality and quantity of reading as well; the target cultural background knowledge allows the reader to recognise most of the information rapidly but also to identify which information is important in the text. Cloonan (1991), who dealt with the role of cultural input in EFL reading comprehension, joins this viewpoint in saying that at both beginner and intermediate levels target cultural knowledge is useful in the sense that it can compensate for learner linguistic deficiency. Readers understand a text by analysing it according to their schema, i.e. an internal organisation of past personal experience. In fact, more information is contributed by the reader than by the print on the page as the reader never comes without his/her background knowledge.

Also, the reading comprehension process becomes more challenging when the students are faced with literary texts which are highly difficult because of the cognitive strategy of elaboration that is more necessary than in ordinary texts. To begin with, language use in literary texts is quite specific causing the work to relate to its context in an artistic way, which is meant to bring about questioning, puzzlement or even perhaps a reaction of shock on the part of the reader and not to find a clear-cut or straightforward meaning. As a matter of fact, in addition to containing highly abstract vocabulary, complex syntactical patterns and a sophisticated style which make the reading painful even for an educated native reader, literary texts present a cultural dimension that will block the non-native reader right at the outset. Moreover, Widdowson (1975), who is in favour of a stylistically oriented analysis of the literary text, admits that text study is not and will never be literature study.

The target cultural background knowledge issue draws attention to the importance of literature teaching in a University programme that represents an academic intellectual community. As a matter of fact, the central role of teaching literature, especially at the university level, is above all educational. Indeed, it is essential that students gain intellectual consciousness about their direct environment as well as its position or its interaction with the rest of the world. It is indeed the main goal in literature study to discover what circumstances brought a novel to be written, in reaction to what and to which audience it was addressed. As stated by Graff (1996), students should become 'critical thinkers' and 'reflective citizens'. We are concerned with reading literary texts in an academic context and therefore the ultimate objective of literature teaching at the university will settle if there is predominance of teaching 'ideas' over 'words' in order to teach students how to freely respond to literature and express their feelings as well as their views.

In consequence, cultural background knowledge is viewed as a complex and difficult skill to be used with care as it implies the manipulation of political issues for instance. According to Obediat (1997), the Universities in the Arab world have long disfavoured the teaching of literature of Anglo-Saxon origin and therefore, of its culture, in contrast to teaching language skills (limiting culture teaching to the minimum ways and habits of everyday life).

The issue at stake, Obediat (ibid) suggests, is that the literature of the English speaking countries is culturally distant, thus challenging and perhaps even threatening. Graff (1996) on the other hand, claims that American University teachers struggle with literature teaching because of the complexity encountered in heavy multicultural texts.

In addition, in an EFL university programme, teaching literary texts which are foreign culturally can be difficult when the students' incomplete knowledge of the language is coupled with a limited knowledge of the world. Very much aware of the students' hindrances, the English Department of the University of Algiers introduced the cultural studies module to fill the 'cultural gap' but the result obtained is not unanimously acknowledged as many fourth year literature teachers declare that students do not seem to have gathered much cultural background knowledge of the western civilisation, at least not enough to succeed in their literature classes. In an age of globalisation that values efficient communication it can be difficult for students to perceive the ultimately educational role of literature study and how this will be of any use to them.

The difficulties EFL students encounter when facing target literary texts bring about the core problem of our study: What effect does a lack in appropriate cultural background knowledge have on the comprehension of literature texts by university students in an EFL classroom context?

Can the lack in target cultural background knowledge restrain the EFL students from the attainment of an academic reading competency, as suggested by Bruner (1960) cited in Burden & Williams (1997)? Bruner who is an advocate of Piaget, an important figure in cognitive psychology, says that skills such as synthesising the information of the text, connecting the information to unstated ideas, and producing a criticism or a personal interpretation are all related to the reader's background knowledge. We will also research the extent to which the educational value of literature teaching may not be appreciated by the 'culturally non-proficient' reader and whether this will exclude him/her from a greater dimension of knowledge.

This dissertation will eventually discredit the advocates of simplification in language and in literature teaching. Consequently, three research questions have been elaborated:

**RQ 1:**

- What is the role of Target Cultural Background Knowledge in EFL students' interaction with a literary text, and how does it affect the reading comprehension quality?

**RQ 2:**

- Has the cultural studies module helped the students to build bridges between existing knowledge and new knowledge?

**RQ 3:**

- How can teachers help students build bridges between existing knowledge and new knowledge?

We suppose that lack in cultural background knowledge hinders the students' comprehension of literary texts. Thus our hypotheses of research are as follows:

1. Our first hypothesis is that the problem met by our students is due to the lack in sociocultural competency they suffer from.
2. We also suppose that the cultural studies module can help our students get academic reading competency.
3. Our last hypothesis is that teachers play an important role in scaffolding students' knowledge.

In order to answer the above research questions and to verify our stated hypotheses, three data collection instruments will be used: a test in reading comprehension which has been elaborated following the levels of understanding by Thomson (1987) in Amer (2003). A questionnaire was given to the Fourth Year students concerned by the above cited test, and the interviews; one was addressed to a focus group of four students who were concerned with the test and the questionnaire and the other interview to Fourth year literature teachers. For the test in reading, the informants are 20 students randomly selected out of the list of fourth year students enrolled in the American literature class. This test is intended to answer the first research question and therefore to evaluate the role the Target Cultural Background Knowledge plays within the reading process as well as its impact on the quality of reading. The questionnaire of the students concerns the pedagogical significance of literature class and the role played by the Cultural Studies module along with the other modules in the students' academic training. The interviews addressed to the teachers inquire about the teachers' responsibility in providing students with the necessary cultural input and whether they consider that Cultural Studies has had any impact on the teaching of literature itself. Both interviews are also intended to investigate the difficulties tackled in the literature class because of the students' cultural hindrance.

The aim of this research is to identify the effects of a lack in appropriate cultural background knowledge on EFL students' reading comprehension. In addition, we intend to research whether the implementation of cultural background knowledge in language teaching independently of the level of language proficiency can be justified, as stated by Cloonan (1991).

## Chapter One: Review of Literature

### 1.1-Introduction:

The issue of cultural background knowledge and its impact on the comprehension of literary texts have guided us towards the different analyses of the reading process from a linguistic point of view to the different models of interpretation present in literary theory. As a matter of fact, the background knowledge issue is presented in reading theory with the schema theoretic reading model, in literary criticism with the reader-response movement, and in educational theory with the humanistic approach. Moreover, if the cultural background knowledge is necessary for understanding any text it is all the more valuable in the study of literature as it permits students to fulfil a requirement: critically analyse the texts and confront their own viewpoints to the opinions of others present in their readings. Clearly much of the reading that is carried out in an academic context is done in a perspective that forces the student to see something in the outside world, and this causes pedagogical problems when the student is not academically equipped to do so. Throughout this chapter we will put forward the issue of interdisciplinary collaboration necessary in foreign literature teaching pedagogy. Therefore, we will see that not only literary texts are culturally specific, but that language teaching is inextricably linked to culture too. Finally, we will see that in foreign language acquisition the teaching practice has established a linguistic structural basis for language teaching causing the place of culture teaching to remain vague.

## 1.2-Reading Comprehension Process:

Modern reading theory in Applied Linguistics considers the process of reading rather than its product to be insightful for understanding what exactly occurs during the act of meaning creation. The text is no longer considered to enclose meaning that must be discovered by the reader. As explained by Anderson and Wilson (1986:32):

“We now possess more subtle and precise evidence that the knowledge a reader brings to a text is a principal determiner of how that text will be comprehended, and what may be learned and remembered.”(Anderson & Wilson, 1986:32)

It is thus believed that the reader with his background knowledge contributes considerably to making sense of what he reads. Alderson (2000:03) describes the reading process as follows:

“Not only is the reader looking at print, deciphering in some sense the marks on the page, ‘deciding’ what they mean and how they relate to each other. The reader is presumably also thinking about what he is reading: what it means to him, how it relates to other things he has read, to things he knows, to what he expects to come next in texts.” (Alderson, 2000:03)

Within this perspective, the capacity of a reader to make meaning out of a text will depend on his prior knowledge of content (also stated as knowledge of the world) and of language. Accordingly, different levels of understanding are accessible to the reader.

“We would claim that in natural language understanding a simple rule is followed. Analysis proceeds in a top-down predictive manner. Understanding is expectation-based. It is only when the expectations are useless or wrong that bottom-up processing begins.” (Alderson, 2000:94)

The top-down principle is presented by Alderson as the proficient reader’s process of interpreting text. In fact, when a reader has sufficient knowledge to make sense of a written work, he does not exclusively rely on the language cues at hand but is confident enough in what he knows about the text to extrapolate hidden meaning and to reach higher order levels of understanding. Barnett (1989:52) citing Korminsky and Graetz (1986) adds that in such a case, the reader is in a position to remedy to weaknesses he may have such as language proficiency:

“...first language readers with weak knowledge read from the bottom up, relying on language cues. Second language readers with good background knowledge read from the top down, whereas those with poor knowledge read in a fragmented fashion, unable to control either language or topic.” (Barnett, 1989:52)

It transpires that the use of bottom-up reading procedures to make meaning out of the text is the sign of a lack of prior knowledge on the part of the reader. As a matter of fact, the reader will stick to the words in the text instead of inferring meaning from what he already knows of its content; he will remain at a literal meaning of the text or will draw inferences from the text. The prior knowledge a reader brings to the text affects how much he understands of a text but also the manner with which he will understand it, that is to say the strategies he will use while processing the text; a concept that is very much supported within cognitive psychology.



### 1.2.3-Cognition and Reading Skills:

Basing himself on cognitive psychology, Alderson (ibid:41) divides the reader's schemata in four components:

- Formal schemata (knowledge of language),
- Knowledge of genre/text type,
- Content schemata (knowledge of subject matter/of the world/Culture),
- Metacognitive schemata (knowledge of strategies).

Here, Alderson shows that for schema theory the reader's active understanding of a text depends on the situation of the reader's knowledge and on the strategies that he uses when processing text. Duffy *et al* (1987) in Alderson (op-cit), declare that the reader is not only active, but also has an awareness of the role he plays in the act of interpretation of the text: he is aware of the role of the text content and the need to be strategic. In this respect, Grabe (1991) in Alderson (op-cit:13) identifies six skills in reading:

“-automatic recognition skills

-vocabulary and structural knowledge

-formal discourse structure knowledge

-content/world background knowledge

-synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies

-metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring”

(Grabe, 1991 in Alderson, op-cit:13)

The content/world background knowledge is here placed right between the decoding of words, sentences and the structure of language (mere detecting and matching skills) on the one hand, and the critical skills on the other.

If cognitive psychology evokes the importance of the role of prior knowledge in the development of a reader's skills acquisition, it nevertheless limits the reading product to a 'correct' meaning that is to be reached by the reader. It is this absence of choice for the reader that is the main criticism that can be made to reading comprehension theory, particularly concerning the literary texts where 'personal interpretation' is demanded. This is a major issue in metaphor study which, as far as Glicksohn & Goodblatt (2002:428) are concerned, is viewed as being related to cognitive psychology. They consider that one single metaphor should be understood within a larger context. They state: "Comprehending a metaphor is then akin to problem-solving and in its most creative form (productive thinking) involves an act of perceptual and semantic restructuring." Glicksohn & Goodblatt (2002:428) For this reason, different models of interpretation of literature have appeared in literary criticism.

### 1.3-Models of Interpretation of Literature:

Over the past twenty years literary theory of interpretation has known drastic changes in the sense that it saw an evolution in the appearance of different schools of thought that take gradually more into consideration the reader, the text and the environment responsible for the act of interpretation; a progress that literature study and teaching do not seem to follow. McCormick (1996:292) argues:

"Readers are no longer thought to be mere blank slates but social beings who approach texts with rich and varied backgrounds. Similarly, texts are not so widely depicted as static containers of meaning but rather as capable of being read differently, depending on the reading context and the reader's background." (McCormick, 1996:292)

Literary criticism brings here great change in literary interpretation; the text does not 'confine' a particular meaning, but it is the reader, with his background knowledge, who gives the text 'his' elucidation. This was not applied in the very beginning of literary studies, which were conventionally and strictly focused upon the text.

### 1.3.1-Traditional Approaches:

In traditional approaches to literature interpretation, the reader was considered to have the responsibility to 'decode' the meaning held in a literary text. For Karolides (1999:18), the traditional approaches of literary interpretations function according to three principal assumptions:

- the author's intention is the key to ascertaining what the work means and this meaning can be identified;
- the text is an object that has a determinate meaning of its own;
- the text can be analysed through objective, close scrutiny of its formal structure and techniques to establish the meaning.

It is clear that for the traditional approach there is one and only one meaning possible. This is where the new approaches to literary interpretation cause a revolution: multiple interpretations of meaning.

### 1.3.2-Reader-Response Approach:

Alderson (ibid: 299) presents the reader-response movement as revolutionary in literature teaching:

“It was not until the reader-response movement of the 1970’s when Louise Rosenblatt’s pioneering work of the 1930’s finally received the recognition it deserved\_ that the study of reading in the United States was brought actively into the area of university and high school literature teaching.” (Alderson, op-cit:299)

For the expressivists, who gave the reader the freedom of interpretation or multiple interpretations, the text is only a projection of the reader. In fact, the reader is free to ‘respond’ to the text in an authentic and personal way. In the reader-response approach, it is even believed that a subjective response to texts leads to cognitive understanding, although this point is criticised by the cognitivists for whom the development of understanding skills requires at first hand awareness of the interaction on the part of the reader.

In the cognitive model of reading, the focus is on the text and the reader’s need of a prior knowledge to decode the text, whereas in the reader-response approach, instead of focusing exclusively on the cultural background of the text for meaning creation, the attention is shifted towards the natural response of the reader and the impact this can have on the interpretation of the text. This is an approach that we assume to be closest to achieve the objective of teaching literature: give the reader a voice. But in the expressive model of reading, allotted to ‘reader-response’, the attention is drawn only to the reader and his need to freely react to the text.

In neither of the two models do we deal with the social context of the interaction between the reader and the text: Based on the cultural studies movement, what follows is the social cultural model of interpretation necessary to full understanding of the reading act.

### 1.3.3-The Social-Cultural Model:

The social cultural movement tends to relocate the reader as well as the text in their respective socio-cultural contexts to enhance, for instance, effective cross-cultural reading act. This model goes even further than the cultural studies model it is issued from. The sociocultural model puts the reader in charge of not only identifying the sociocultural context of the text for its good interpretation but also to master this knowledge in order to infer meaning from the text as well as from his native point of view which influences his manner of interpreting it. Alderson (ibid: 303) describes it as follows:

“This approach marks a distinctive break with the impoverished sense of social context found in both cognitive and expressivist models of reading...to be a critically literate reader is to have the knowledge and ability to perceive the interconnectedness of social conditions and the reading and writing practices of a culture, to be able to analyze those conditions and practices...” (Alderson, op-cit: 303)

If the reader is able to identify the sociocultural environment of the text as well as the sociocultural environment to which he belongs as a reader, he will be more critical not only about the information stored in the text, but also about his proper interpretations of this text. He will then be qualified to reach a critical and evaluative level of his understanding of the text.

Nonetheless, Alderson highlights a difficulty in respect to this view: the cultural specificity of literary texts creates a cross-cultural short-circuit as the foreign readers will 'wrongly' react to them. They will make use of their prior knowledge, which is culturally inappropriate, in order to give their interpretation of the text. In describing the literature reading process Alderson (op-cit: 66) presents the study of Halasz (1991) as follows:

"Halasz (1991) showed that the literary text he studied exerted a strong influence on readers because it evoked multiple and often idiosyncratic cues and meanings...the reader is not only reminded of personally significant events and emotions but also of other literary texts he may have read." (Alderson, op-cit: 66)

For the cognitivists, who dominate reading theory, the cultural feature of a literary text or incidentally of any text, remains the main obstacle for a reader to overcome. We assume in our study that this is a problem that concerns the Algerian case at the level of the university.

We will try to inquire whether this is due to lack of explicit teaching of the target cultural knowledge in the language and the literature classroom or to the reticence of the teaching practice to connect to the students' native culture and thus to their personal viewpoint; which is all the utility of cross-cultural reading.

#### 1.4-Cross-Cultural Reading:

Learning a language and its culture is certainly not a simple task; in the view of Furstenburg (2003:75) this puts at risk the reader's vision and way of thinking:

“Reading between the cultural lines is indeed difficult, because it requires a double kind of translation: first a literal translation of the text and then the ability to transpose oneself and one’s imagination into the author’s or speaker’s foreign world. It is a difficult skill to acquire, yet an essential one for the purpose of developing true literacy in a foreign language. It requires accessing, seeing, reaching the embedded layers of emotions, judgements, and implicit connotations...” (Furstenburg, 2003:75)

Reading in a cross-cultural context presents a double difficulty since the reader is not reading in his native language with his native cultural references and landmarks, but also because he must juxtapose his vision onto a particular sociocultural environment with specific historical references to which the text is related. Reading in an EFL context is therefore a culturally challenging task coupled with linguistic difficulties. This complexity in the reading interaction has caused teaching methods to focus on the textual cues present in the text rather than to help students understand the connexion that can exist between the text and its sociocultural background.

#### 1.4.1-Culture and Language:

For Barnett (op-cit: 55) the importance of culture in language learning is almost as important as language itself. He declares:

“Good first language readers whose second language skills are relatively weak understand more of what they read if they activate their predictions about text contents ...the linguistic ceiling is only one determinant of reading comprehension.” (Barnett, op-cit: 55)

Barnett shows that the cultural background knowledge helps the reader at a beginner level in language learning to make meaning out of a text, and this particularly when the linguistic cues are out of reach for him.

This focus on the appropriate cultural background knowledge without any concern for the reader and *his* cultural background knowledge in reading literature is the main criticism that can be addressed to reading theorists concerning issues such as culture acquisition.

#### 1.4.2-Culture Acquisition:

When a given text is dealt with in a reading comprehension class, it is understood that it is the cultural environment appropriate to the text which must be explored to uncover the hidden meaning. Following Kramersch (2000:57), the act of reading which materialises the encounter between a reader and a text is never really dealt with. He states:

“Text meaning is seen as identical with the semantic signs it is composed of: text explication is used to retrieve the author’s intended meaning, text deconstruction explores the associations evoked by the text. In both cases, however, neither what happens in the mind of the readers nor the social context of reception and production are taken into consideration”. (Kramersch, 2000:57)

In an EFL context, equipping students with the appropriate target cultural background knowledge remains necessary as it implies that there is a certain ‘correctness’ in what they understand of a text. Quite oppositely, the target cultural background knowledge is the main means of access to the interpretation of a literary text, although more attention should be granted to the circumstances of its use. Karolides (op-cit:18) specifies:

“The transactional theory of literature does not reject the relevance of such biographical, historical, cultural, or formal considerations in the process of developing and enhancing insights to literature. Recognizably, such data can provide necessary background for understanding textual situations or for exploring alternative viewpoints. The issue is when these should be introduced and how they should be projected.” (Karolides, op-cit: 18)



In the present study we agree with this viewpoint also sustained by an empirical study (Cloonan, 1991). Cloonan discovered that cultural acquisition does not necessarily follow language acquisition and that in order to take place effectively, cross-cultural reading must be supported by additional cultural explanation. In our research, we assume that language and culture are two independent variables in reading comprehension. Lado (1964:30) adds:

“The student learns the target culture not from scratch as he learned his native one, but with the experience, meanings, and habits of his native culture influencing him at every step. The native culture experience will facilitate learning those patterns that are sufficiently similar to function satisfactorily when transferred.” (Lado, 1964:30)

Therefore, if the EFL culture learning is not dependent on language learning it is nonetheless necessarily influenced by the learner’s native culture. For Lado (*op cit*), the new target culture learned is like a second layer that superposes itself on the native culture of the learner. For Gadamer (2000), the father of Hermeneutical Philosophy cited in Rees (2003), there is more to the act of reading than merely the juxtaposition of two cultures, or an act at the crossroad of the native culture the reader brings with him and the environmental culture reflected in the text. For him, it is the ‘fusion of the horizons’ where the two cultures are combined to collaborate in the creation of a new meaning; reading becomes ‘transcultural’. Rees (2003: 3) explains:

“This fusion is dynamic and self-transcendent, and creates new perspectives and rules that are used to make up a new horizon. Fusion is not the same as empathy for the other, nor is it synthesis with the other. It occurs as a result of the strange, for it is exactly what is different that causes a new comprehension. The different or, in other words, the voice of the other is respected in the fusion of horizons.” (Rees, 2003: 3)

Transcultural reading then, challenges prejudices. A reader projects a meaning for the text he is reading, consequently knowledge in the target culture helps him to adapt his expectations to what the text can possibly be meant to say. Thus, the vision an EFL reader has on a text is twice as rich except when a problem of acceptance appears, as shown by Niederhauser (1997:09):

“Korean attitudes toward foreign languages and cultures also influence student motivation. Most middle and high school students receive only limited amounts of information about the history or current affairs of other countries. At the college level, courses that focus on understanding other cultures also are relatively scarce. In consequence, many students adopt the image of foreigners portrayed by the South Korean media...” (Niederhauser, 1997:09)

Niederhauser here shows clearly that a clash between native and target culture can appear when nothing is done to steady the incoming target culture. The least that can be done, according to Niederhauser (*idem*), is to supervise its presentation to foreign learners when their environment is hostile: a prerogative that was given to Cultural Studies. Fish (1995:78) citing Brantlinger (1990:16) explains:

“Cultural studies aims to overcome the disabling fragmentation of knowledge within the disciplinary structure of the university, and...also to overcome the fragmentation and alienation in the target society which that structure mirrors.” (Brantlinger, 1990:16 cited in Fish, 1995:78)

Cross-cultural reading involves the awareness of one's cultural community at first, and to compare it with the foreign one studied. It also causes the acceptance of the fact that others view things differently from and most probably defiantly to one's perception of the world. What follows is a definition of cultural background seen as sociocultural context by Kramersch (*ibid*:08):

“These two layers of culture combined, the social (synchronic) and the historical (diachronic), have often been called the sociocultural context of language study. There is, in addition, a third essential layer to culture, namely, the imagination...These imaginings are mediated through the language, that over the life of the community reflects, shapes, and is a metaphor for its cultural reality. Thus the city of London is inseparable, in the cultural imagination of its citizens from Shakespeare and Dickens.” (Kramsch, op-cit: 08)

Understanding the culture of a community is to understand the literature the community considers a patrimony along with the representations the readers of that community have in common. Nonetheless, the difficulty when dealing with a foreign literature, is to relate to that literature as the reader has his own sociocultural origin, and also because the sociocultural dimension is ever changing. Furthermore, according to Kramsch (ibid), cultures are ‘heterogeneous’, this is why contemporary readers have difficulty with past written works. At any rate, culture teaching is a pre-requisite in any context, as far as reading is involved.

### 1.5-Culture:

Culture teaching is a delicate issue in reading comprehension, and this is certainly due to the complex nature of culture itself. As a matter of fact, culture represents simultaneously what groups people into a cohesive society as well as precise references belonging to the historical background of that society which may concern various domains such as literature, science or ethnography. Here is a general definition of culture by Hinkel (op-cit: 01):

“It may not be an exaggeration to say that there are nearly as many definitions of culture as there are fields of inquiry into human societies, groups, systems, behaviours and activities...Similarly, Flowerdew and Miller (1995) refer to ethnic culture, local culture, academic culture when they discuss the specifics of academic demands on non-native speakers of English (NNS) faced with a second language (L2) medium of instruction.” (Hinkel, op-cit: 01)

The main issue in second language teaching, following Hinkel (1999), is then to clearly identify the teaching objectives in order to be pertinent about what aspect of culture to present learners with.

### 1.5.1-What is culture?

According to Lado (1964:24), the culture of a given society is a fixating and unifying material through which people with a common historical past identify and interact with each other. He states:

“From the beginning, man has been a social being and has lived in societies. In so doing, he has developed patterned ways of doing things and talking about them that facilitate the communication and interaction necessary for social living. When these patterned ways of acting, talking, thinking, and feeling become sufficiently uniform in a society and sufficiently different from those of other societies, they constitute a culture.” (Lado, op-cit:24)

With a commonly integrated code of values and references, people belonging to the same community interact with the feeling of being familiar to one another and dissociate themselves from people who come from other societies. Thus, communication is the main manifestation of their common culture, and this communication transpires through arts, education and all other acts of creativity present at every level of society. Williams (1958) in Gray & McGuigan (1993:07) explains:

“We use the word culture (...) to mean a whole way of life\_ the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning\_ the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind.” (Williams, 1958 cited in Gray & McGuigan, 1993:07)

The acquisition of a foreign culture then, allows the reader to reach a high level of understanding of that culture with the ability to be critical and analytical about the society it is issued from.

#### 1.5.2-Culture in the Language Classroom:

The first problem for the development of the students' cultural background knowledge especially at an early stage, Kramersch (1991) in Hinkel (op-cit:05) says, is the place given to culture itself within the classroom. She explains:

“In many language classrooms, culture is frequently reduced to “foods, fairs, folklore, and statistical facts...the impact of culture on language learning and use is far more complex than “the four Fs” and that research and language teaching need to link “the teaching of language to that of culture” (Kramersch, 1991 cited in Hinkel, op-cit:05)

This simplification of culture within the classroom walls is absolutely not representative of the place culture really has in the language of a society. In fact, language learning is already culture learning. Lyons (op-cit:04) explains:

“Most language utterances, whether spoken or written, depend for their interpretation\_ to a greater or lesser degree \_ upon the context in which they are used. And included within the context of utterance, it must not be forgotten, are the ontological beliefs of the participants: many of these will be culturally determined and, though normally taken for granted, can be challenged or rejected. ” (Lyons, op-cit:04)

Moreover, the content knowledge or knowledge of the world is forcibly cultural. Alderson (2000) argues that your knowledge of the world is also the knowledge of your world. Thus, the best way to enrich favourably a learner's background knowledge is to widen his perspectives from his world to the world. Gray & McGuigan (1993:212) add:

“...universalism is also a kind of awareness of the future in terms of what it is possible to become. This is part of heightened aspiration and the quest for wider significance and expanded identity. Universalism also gives some vision of the kind of socialness and human mutuality which might locate better and more expanded identities.” (Gray & McGuigan, 1993:212)

By introducing EFL literature students to a new culture without neglecting their own particularities, we obtain an enriching learning experience where the reader can situate himself in the world and bring his own personal contribution to this world, even if it is only by the thought. This is the core of the problem that this study is meant to inquire; the cultural background knowledge is a bridge between the student and his intellectual capacity, it restores to literature its educational function. Alderson (op-cit: 29) explains:

“Background knowledge should be recognised as influencing all comprehension, and therefore every attempt should be made to allow background knowledge to facilitate performance rather than allowing its absence to inhibit performance.” (Alderson, op-cit:29)

The cultural background knowledge can be a useful tool for analysing the relation between the novel and the reason for its writing or its place in the context as well as its value in time and what it can teach us. Moreover, in the view of Glicksohn & Goodblatt (op-cit:28), cross-cultural reading widely defined, in reality concerns every act of reading. They explain:

“We are in any case as strange to the Renaissance as the Renaissance is strange to us, and being critically alert to what they took for granted should help us question our own assumptions.” (Glicksohn & Goodblatt, op-cit:28)

Literature teaching therefore, has an educational role as it permits the confrontation of a reader with a text that reflects a reality that the reader does not belong to. The reader can thus experience, feel for, think about or simply appreciate a world that he would have never encountered otherwise. Bentley (1995:05) explains:

“The relations between fiction and culture are in some sense circular, but they are not tautological. My analysis is concerned with preserving the real uncertainty and mutability in fiction’s relation to the social world it represents. Literary scholars run the risk of lodging a tautology in our own critical practice when interpretations are determined in advance by an assumption that novels either irresistibly uphold or inherently critique the political force fields of the study they depict.” (Bentley, 1995:05)

Following Bentley, the interpretation of a literary text cannot be anticipated as the factors which determine the link between the text and the environment it is issued from are too numerous and varied. Cuddon (1991:154) adds that a literary text is composed of characters evolving in a narration sometimes with a plot: a pretext for opening a view on a certain reality in order to reflect it but without being that reality. The literary work is there to denounce it, describe it, perhaps even value it, but certainly not to reproduce it. He states:

“In structuralism the term code has acquired rather specific senses. It denotes a culture’s system of signification through which reality is mediated. The theory of structuralism is that all cultural phenomena are the product of codes or a code, and it maintains what is the relationship between the elements of such a system which gives it signification, and not the relationship between the elements and reality.” (Cuddon, 1991:154)

We obtain then a reading that is facilitated when the cultural content present in the text has been assimilated by the reader. For Cuddon (op-cit), if the literary text is not a means of communication between reality and the reader, it nonetheless exposes the reader to evaluate this same reality’s norms.

May these norms be culturally distant, the reader will need to be proficient in the culture of that literature.

### 1.6-Literature reading:

Literature reading appears to be an important tool for questioning the world around us, according to Carter and Long (op-cit:217):

“We should also recognize that there are some positive benefits in using the study of literature to promote greater understanding and knowledge of human behaviour and general appreciation of a writer’s artistry. To do this, it is important for students to know certain facts about the texts they are studying.” (Carter & Long, op-cit:217)

Therefore, if the reader is culturally proficient, he will be able to infer meaning with a weak possibility for misinterpretation; and this is the purpose of the following section which analyses the importance of the target culture in literature.

#### 1.6.1-The Role of Target Culture in literature:

For instance, Bentley (op-cit:06) presents the role of “the school of Hawthorne” and how a set of writers chose not to be representative of their politics of the time. He states:

“The later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a flourishing literature of manners by writers from the United States. The three I examine most closely, Hawthorne, James, and Wharton, together produced what would amount to a small library of manners\_ innumerable volumes of travel writing, ‘international’ novels and short stories, notebooks of social observation, and critical essays on American life.” (Bentley, op-cit:06)



“Antislavery literature was primarily aimed at moralizing, with the use of black speech, about the humanity of the slave and the inhumanity of slavery, and it pointed primarily to a future where such speech would find legitimacy and where the black subject could reconstruct a family community.” (Handley, op-cit:03)

The message is that slavery is not a tragedy left behind, but part of the slave owners’\_ as well as the slaves themselves’\_ legacy to the American population. When a literary work is written, it will be identified to or classified with a particular literary current even though the writer did not write the work purposefully. Therefore, the meaning a work is given always over expands the original one which was intended for it. Eco (1992:67-68) explains:

“...When a text is produced not for a single addressee but for a community of readers \_ the author knows that he or she will be interpreted not according to his or her intentions but according to a complex strategy of interactions which also involves the readers, along with their competence in language as a social treasury. I mean by social treasury not only a given language as a set of grammatical rules, but also the whole encyclopaedia that the performances of that language have implemented, namely the cultural conventions that that language has produced and the very history of the previous interpretations of many texts, comprehending the text that the reader is in the course of reading.” (Eco, 1992:67-68)

When a literary work is addressed to a certain community of readers, it takes all its meaning once it is delivered to this same community, a meaning that stands apart, no longer being the property of the writer. Things become even more interesting once this work is read by an outsider; that is to say a reader who does not abide by the conventions of that community. In this respect, the reader and the cultural knowledge he is equipped with have a determinant role to play.

### 1.6.2-The Role of the Reader and his Cultural knowledge:

The reader plays an important role in the reading act, as he is the one to decide what meaning or meanings to give to the words deciphered. Apart from the literal meaning where no misunderstanding can occur, words have a plurality of meanings and can be interpreted differently depending on the choice of the reader. Furthermore, in respect to the deconstruction theory a text can be interpreted and reinterpreted several times and in different ways as Cuddon (1991:223) explains:

“Derrida shows that a text (any text\_ be it a polemic, a deconstructive criticism) can be read as saying something quite different from what it appears to be saying, and that it may read as carrying a plurality of significance or as saying many different things which are fundamentally at variance with, contradictory to and subversive of what may be (or may have been) seen by criticism as a single, stable ‘meaning’. Thus, a text may ‘betray’ itself.” (Cuddon, 1991:223)

Because the reader gives the meanings to the words he reads, it is an instrument in his hands. In the same spirit, Eco (op-cit:75) shows that the text is really meaningful during the act of interpretation and a new interpretation arises at every reading act. He explains:

“I have read critical analyses in which the interpreter discovered influences of which I was unaware when writing, but I certainly had read those books in my youth and I understood that I was unconsciously influenced by them.” (Eco, op-cit:75)

On the whole, it appears that literature teaching suffers from the lack of an adequate pedagogy where the learner and his aptitudes are in the centre of attention since he happens to be an important ‘subject’ in the construction of ‘meaning’.

The cultural background knowledge is implicitly dealt with in EFL literature classes. Teachers present students with texts of different origins that contain foreign cultural references. If the target cultural background issue is not explicitly presented and its role explained to students, there will be no progress in how these students handle literary texts; particularly when we expect the students to give a personal and critical interpretation and not that which conforms to the teacher's ideas.

### 1.7-Academia, critical reading:

Students at the university level should be able to present personal ideas about the literary works at the program. Nonetheless, it is also academically legitimate to expect a certain knowledge in literary criticism and the role it plays in literature study. Lado (1964:27) explains:

“To demand that a person learning a second language acquire the technical knowledge of a literary critic is unwarranted, but to demand a degree of appreciation of major literary works is justified.” (Lado, 1964:27)

Additionally, discrepancies between teachers' perspectives is an illustration of the confusion that can dwell in the students' minds when they are not equipped to discriminate between a position held by a teacher within the theoretical current of thought he is defending and all the different standpoints from which a text can be explored. Graff (1996:129) explains:

“Such discrepancies can be exciting for students who come to the university already skilled at synthesizing ideas on their own; others however, become confused and...try to protect themselves by giving each teacher whatever he or she seems to want, even if it contradicts what the last teacher wanted.”(Graff, 1996:129)

Students that are uninitiated to academic proficiency will dissociate themselves from their own learning process, losing their motivation as well as their affect. As a result, they will parrot their teachers’ ideas without any conviction. For Graff (op-cit) this will refrain students from reaching an academic level, but also from actually benefiting from a teaching that is interesting, challenging, and maybe even motivating. Graff underlines the importance of the cultural reading of a literary text which serves the students in reaching academic requirements.

#### 1.7.1-Culture and Critical Reading:

To be aware of different cultural communities is to understand other views, other principles of thought, but more importantly it gives the ability to be critical. The critical reading of a literary text is impossible without prior information concerning the sociocultural context the text is issued from. McCormick (1996:294) suggests:

“As one possible solution to this apparent absence of “critical reading”, students need to learn to locate the texts they read as well as themselves as reading subjects within larger social contexts...” (McCormick, 1996:294)

Thus, critical reading implies that the reader has enough background knowledge in order to back up his point of view and to confront the ideas of the author.

Chew (1996) in Pennycook (1999) adds to communicative competence and linguistic competence of Chomsky, critical competence which is the skill to decode not only the cultural background but also the “underlying ideological content”. Critical reading is the power to liberate the mind of ideology, as Bock (1993:06) explains:

“In a country like South Africa, where the education system has attempted to ‘coerce and control’, students need to be encouraged to be critical and independent thinkers and to set their own learning goals.” (Bock, 1993:06)

It is understood that the role of the “educated” is an important one. They have the skills to criticise, to inquire, and to denounce what they find wrong. But the most important for Maley (1998:185) is that they react to what surrounds them. He refers to the necessity of having ‘educated’ people in society. A view developed by Freire (1970) in Graff (2000), where the oppressive society is reflected in ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’. In any institution, when learners are not given the possibility to be the instigators of their learning in order to be aware of *what* they are learning but most importantly of *how* they are learning, then they are oppressed learners who will not react to the failings of society. In literature study, culture teaching amounts to give the readers the possibility to identify the skills they need in their learning process. As a consequence, their efforts will be more focused with the objective of becoming competent academically in order to attain the university requirements.

### 1.7.2-Culture and Academic Skills:

Reading in a foreign language represents a considerable difficulty as lack of the target cultural background knowledge not only hinders the reader’s interpretation of a text, but his/her academic skills as well; a view supported by empirical research (Tanaka, 2002).

In testing foreign students on different academic skills, Tanaka noticed that neither the students nor their teachers were aware of this deficiency. We think that the students' hindrance in literature study is related to a lack of the students' exposure to the target culture in practice. That is why at each level of understanding of the reading comprehension test we intend to give our subjects, there is a question where students focus on culture. Moreover, Alderson (op-cit) considers that a dialogue between specialists in cultural and literary studies with pedagogy practitioners could be a solution to the problems issued from literature teaching that has, for the time being, failed to develop a pedagogy of its own.

#### 1.8-Literature Teaching as an Educational Issue:

It is particularly true that at the university level where students are required to obtain specific academic skills in order to succeed; higher order skills such as synthesising, criticising, evaluating, connecting ideas and confronting views for instance are necessary. In addition, they all require autonomy in learning that cannot be developed without the learner centeredness advocated in the humanistic approach. The issue at stake according to Widdowson (1975:74-75), is that literature is not taught per se but in terms of language acquisition or without a specific method of resolution which neither promotes critical thinking nor academic learning; both necessary in literary study. In that context, he states:

“...literary studies have not generally been defined as a subject in such a way as to develop such a sensitivity, either in secondary schools or in universities. What tends to be taught is some critical orthodoxy, a set of ready-made judgements for rote-learning rather than strategies of understanding which can be transferred to other and unknown literary works.” (Widdowson, 1975: 74-75)

McCormick (op-cit) adds that the modern literary and cultural studies are actually largely influenced by the humanistic movements in educational theory. Here is a definition by Burden & Williams (1997: 30) of what humanistic teaching advocates:

“Humanistic approaches emphasize the importance of the inner world of the learner and place the individual’s thoughts, feelings and emotions at the forefront of all human development.” (Burden & Williams, 1997:30)

Humanistic teaching can make all the difference in an EFL context. It is only in accepting that their students might feel uncomfortable with or even annoyed by foreign texts that he or she will accept their personal reactions to the texts as correct interpretations. It is only in trying to understand better their students that the teachers will successfully achieve their teaching. Empathy is what humanistic teaching advocates. Furthermore, Widdowson (1983) explains that the reason why skills are not adequate is the ‘shift of paradigm’ in the educational system. The decisions made have always been extreme or oversimplified when the reality of things is complex. Moreover, Laouira (1999:41) refers to Williams, a theorist of the fifties, who viewed education as static and culture in constant mutation:

“Williams believes that we cannot discuss the relation between culture and education adequately without historical analysis. The past for him is contained in the present. Therefore Williams sees culture in a historical setting, in particular, he examines cultural change taking place over a long period of time. His analysis also, shows that educational change has not kept pace with social change and cultural change, and indeed that in his view, education has taken several false turnings.” (Laouira, 1999:41)

In ignoring the reality of the things taught, teaching becomes sterile and excludes students from entering the realms of learning in order to be part some day of the intellectual community.

### 1.9-Conclusion:

In this chapter we have tried to look at the literature underlying different reading theories. As the modern theories of reading in Applied Linguistics examine the process of reading rather than its product, they allow us to describe what exactly happens during the act of meaning creation. As a matter of fact, schema theory presents reading comprehension as the interaction between the reader, who comes with his background knowledge and a text. In cognitive psychology the cultural background knowledge is perceived as a tool for strategic reading that has a direct impact on the reader's quality of interpretation. However, reading for a literary purpose cannot be limited within reading theory; therefore: we have reviewed some literary reading models such as the reader-response approach, the social-cultural movement and the cognitive reading model. In addition, we have presented some literary critics' views that abide by the deconstruction theory. For them, the text becomes the property of the reader who, endowed with the necessary target cultural information, interprets it freely. We have finally dealt with the challenge of culture teaching in education in spite of the humanistic movement's development in teaching theory that sustains cultural enrichment. If foreign culture acquisition implies open-mindedness and the acceptance of other standards of thought, it nonetheless remains scarcely dealt with inside classrooms. All in all, we have been brought to think about interdisciplinarity, an issue raised by the place of cultural background knowledge in the literary pedagogy as this lack can hinder EFL readers' comprehension of literary texts.



## Chapter Two: Research Methodology

### 2.1-Introduction:

The present study is concerned on the one hand, with identifying the obstacles EFL students meet while they read foreign literary texts generated by their lack of target cultural background knowledge, and on the other to determine how this affects the students as well as the teachers in the process of literature study. Therefore, we have first selected a text of reading comprehension in American literature as our first data collection instrument. Given that the EFL students of the University of Algiers enrolled in the fourth year American literature course also happen to be big consumers of American culture (Hollywood movies, music, clothing etc.) in comparison to the English and African cultures, it seemed interesting for us to examine how such a massively spread out culture is viewed or understood. This test is meant to measure the weaknesses that fourth year EFL students present in target cultural knowledge and to discover how it impedes the reading process. Secondly, a questionnaire has been elaborated to obtain the students' impressions on literature learning as well as some questions on their learning styles. At last, an interview was given to both teachers and students in order to consolidate the information collected from the questionnaires.

We assume that the literature courses do not presently take enough into consideration the cross-cultural understanding issue, and that the role of culture in the literature classes remains at an informative level rather than being usefully implemented within text analysis explanation.

## 2.2-Description of the Situation Analysis:

The empirical phase concerns the American literature class of fourth year at the English Department of the University of Algiers. During the first three years of the licence, the students are taught the four skills, reading comprehension, written expression, oral expression, and listening comprehension in addition to a module in Arabic and the phonetics module. There are two content modules in the first year; these are linguistics and cultural studies. The linguistics module is accompanied by psycho pedagogy and didactics in the fourth year; but the module of cultural studies is stopped at the end of the first year to be replaced by the American and English literature and civilisation modules. In the third and the fourth year African literature and civilisation are taught to our students in addition to the English and American ones. Therefore, at the level of the fourth year students have to choose seven modules among which there has to be at least one literature module.

In fact, it is at the level of the fourth year that the literature course becomes problematic. Indeed, what is interesting to note is that the cultural studies module of the first year was originally implemented to serve the fourth year literature class purposes.

## 2.3-Informants:

This study presents two groups of subjects: the teachers and the students. Additionally, it is important to notice that their participations are complementary. In fact, although the teachers are more knowledgeable than the students, the latter are in a better position to describe what disturbs them in their own learning.

### 2.3.1-Students:

For our research we have selected a group of twenty (20) fourth year University students, all selected randomly out of the fourth year list of students enrolled in American literature class, to be submitted to a test of reading comprehension in American literature. These same students were also invited to answer a questionnaire. Finally, a focus group of four (04) students also randomly selected out of the group of twenty students (every fifth student was picked: S<sub>5</sub>, S<sub>10</sub>, S<sub>15</sub>, and S<sub>20</sub>) have been interviewed for a deeper investigation of the issue.

### 2.3.2-Teachers:

We have worked with three fourth year American literature teachers of the English Department of Algiers who accepted to cooperate with us in our research. As a follow-up to the students' test and questionnaire, we asked these teachers to grant us interviews. Regarding their small number, a questionnaire would not have been significant.

### 2.4-Data Collection Instruments Rationale:

Our data collection instruments are three: the test in reading comprehension, the questionnaire and the interview. We have opted for the 'triangulation of instruments' presented in Angers (1997), as the three instruments are complementary in function.

As a matter of fact, the test is here to determine what hindrances are caused by the students' lack of target cultural knowledge and the questionnaire to lead us toward an understanding of the causes to their lack of cultural knowledge such as their learning styles for instance. As for the interviews, they illustrate how this cultural gap can affect both teachers and students.

#### 2.4.1-The Test:

This is the core data collection instrument of this research study as the test is not only intended to measure the students' lack of target cultural background knowledge, but the effect such a hindrance can have at each level of the reading comprehension process. Therefore, the test has been elaborated in view of answering our first research question: What is the role of the target cultural background knowledge in the students' interaction with a literary text, and how does it affect the reading comprehension quality?

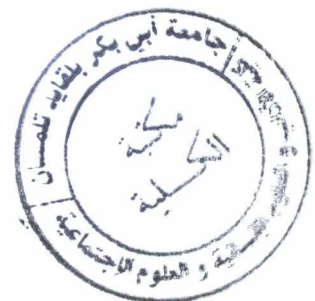
The text analysis appeared then as the adequate testing format since the test has been used for its informative function mainly as suggested in Alderson (2000:85): "...many studies have used language tests as their elicitation instrument..."

Therefore, the results obtained from the test were not judged as 'good' or 'bad', but were rather used to indicate whether there was a weakness in understanding due to a lack of cultural information, causing reading strategies such as matching, interpreting or even critical evaluating to be impeded. As for the choice of the test format, a series of questions referring first directly to the text and in a second time to reflect upon the text, it is justified by the fact that we are interested in the close examination of the readers' answers as they evolve throughout their reading process at every step.

This would not have been possible with the essay for instance. We already expected the students to fail to understand the text exhaustively because of their hindrance in the target cultural background knowledge, but the text analysis has allowed us to see which step of reading is more obstructed by a lack of cultural information. Nonetheless, if the text can give us a diagnosis of the lack of target cultural background knowledge and how it affects the reader's interaction with the text, it does not inform us about the causes of such a hindrance and how this is managed concretely in the learning and teaching practices both inside and outside the classroom. For this reason, we have elaborated a questionnaire for the students to answer.

#### 2.4.2-The Questionnaire:

The questionnaire appeared to be the appropriate follow-up instrument to the test in reading comprehension as it enabled us to collect the students' impressions about the place of target culture in literature class. It also puts into question the role played by the Cultural Studies module in enriching the students' target cultural background knowledge, as students were asked questions about their learning practices and class activity preferences, helping us to determine how deeply this cultural hindrance affects their accomplishment of the literature class requirements and to answer our second research question in the meantime: has the Cultural Studies module helped the students to build a bridge between existing knowledge and new knowledge?



### 2.4.3-The Interviews:

With the interviews we have reached a deeper level in our investigation. As a matter of fact, after having diagnosed the cultural gap with a reading comprehension test, we have then added a questionnaire for the students. In fact, the information issued from the questionnaire was intended to complete the test results obtained, the interviews were inserted to permit us to focus our questions to both students and teachers on the issues pinpointed at the level of both the test and the questionnaire. We have thus tried to gather thorough answers and explanations of a somewhat profound and delicate kind; the teacher/student relationship and the teachers' role in the students' culture acquisition. Therefore, with this data collection instrument we intend to answer our third research question: How can teachers help students to build bridges between existing knowledge and new knowledge?

### 2.5-Data Collection Instruments Design and Content:

#### 2.5.1-Test in Reading Comprehension:

##### 2.5.1.1-Test Design:

The test is a text analysis, presented under the form of a text followed by a series of comprehension questions. The test is a reading comprehension test designed following Thomson's Developmental Reading Model (1987) in Amer (2003), (see Appendix A p. 113) which is based on the Reader-Response Approach (see chapter one p.15). We have favoured this reading model as it is focused on literary texts in particular and enables the reader to give a personal response to the text; which is the expected outcome of the interaction between the reader and the literary text according to Bennett (1995:39) who declares:

“...all meanings are created through particular reading acts and interpretive strategies during the reader’s moment-to-moment experience of the text.” (Bennett, 1995:39)

In addition, the test we elaborated is a text analysis which implies that students are provided with a text to analyse during their time of examination (see Appendix B p. 114). Nonetheless, Alderson (2000:85) suggests that the testees will be involved in different strategies depending on whether the text is available or not. He explains:

“Being allowed to look back at the passage that is being tested appears to have a number of interesting effects...Strategies of searching and matching might be more prevalent if students are allowed to access the text whilst processing the questions, whereas only seeing and answering the questions once the text has been removed might engage in more background knowledge, or may require greater synthesising abilities, rather than mere matching.” (Alderson, op-cit:85)

In the light of this explanation, and because we aim at examining the effect the lack of target cultural background knowledge has upon the students’ reading strategies at each level of understanding, we have divided the test in three steps (see Appendices B (2/3) & B (3/3) pp. 115-116). The first two sections refer directly to the text, whereas the last section implies reflection and interpretation. For this third section then, the text was collected back from the students.

#### 2.5.1.2-Test Content:

The test in reading comprehension presents an extract taken from *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (Appendix B/1). This precise novel was selected as it belongs to the 1930’s, a period of American history that is at the program of fourth year American literature class (see Appendix K p.139). More essentially, this novel is one of the most emblematic of its era as it was written to symbolise ‘the conscience of America’. DeMott (1992) who writes the introduction of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), declares:

“If a literary classic can be defined as a book that speaks directly to readers’ concerns in successive historical eras, then surely *The Grapes of Wrath* is such a work” (DeMott, 1992:ix in Steinbeck, 1939)

Therefore, following DeMott we can say that never a book has come so close to reflect its time as *The Grapes of Wrath*. Furthermore, the extract chosen explains quite clearly its role: it deals with the forgotten people, the working force never mentioned, the outcast. When other novels question this ever changing world or put the ‘fashionable America’ forward, Steinbeck throws some light on the tenants of small farms having become destitute and poor during the Great Depression. Finally, Steinbeck denounces what no media says: there are two Americas, one successful and bright and the other scrapping dirt from the ground to survive. In the extract selected, the author compares the Okies, tenants chased from Oklahoma by the dust storm of 1933 which destroyed thousands of acres of crop in the South-West of the country, with Americans of cosy middle class California.

The test is composed of ten (10) questions which are separated in two sets; eight (08) questions referring directly to the text itself and two questions requiring reflection and analysis and a strong reliance on background knowledge. All the questions have been elaborated to integrate the six (06) levels of understanding by Thomson in Amer (op-cit: 69):



## I Reading Comprehension Questions:

### Level 1: Literal Understanding

Question 1: Circle the correct synonym,

Question 2: What are the Okies escaping from? Pick words for support from the text.

Question 3: What are they looking for?

Question 4: Where will they inevitably settle for the nights?

These questions refer to a literal understanding of the text. Students are asked to identify vocabulary and to narrate the story of the text in order to verify whether they have understood the sequencing of events.

### Level 2: Empathy

Question 5: Who does 'He' in the text refer to? What social status does 'He' belong to? Pick words from the text for support.

This question is intended to create empathy on the part of the reader toward the Okies. With the description of the Okies and their symbolic representation in the extract 'He', the students are supposed to gain conscience about this particular situation.

### Level 3: Analogy

Question 6: Pick the expression in the text that describes the Okies.

During their reading, as they search for the adequate expression 'barbarians' in the text, the students are expected to reflect on how the poor are treated and most importantly how they are described in the text.

Whether they find similarities or differences with real life situations, they question the state of things.

#### Level 4: Interpretation

Question 7: Who are Hoovervilles named after? For what reason?

Question 8: What do Okies represent in the American history?

The focus on the Hoovervilles is to connect the Okies, the characters highlighted in the passage, with their environment: the camps in rags.

Thus, students will become conscious about the destitute and their living conditions. This level is that of interpretation, thus we have chosen to ask the students to relate direct cultural references in the text to their socio-cultural background in real history. If they have the answers about who the Okies are and why we call the destitute camps Hoovervilles, they will adequately read the text and comprehend its message.

#### II Analysis and Reflection Questions:

##### Level 5: Evaluation of Fiction

Question 09: Why are the Californians compared with the Okies in the extract? What does the author want to uncover about the American people?

With this question we move from fiction to reality, to the realms of thinking and analysing the American system that the students should know about and be able to depict in accordance with the text.

## Level 6: Recognition

Question 10: What message or major information does the author present the reader with?

Here the students must be critical enough not only to understand but also to recognise the author's position or message directed to the implied reader. They should become aware of the distance that may exist between the implied reader and themselves as EFL readers and the richness of such a trans-cultural reading situation.

### 2.5.1.3-Scoring:

This test was presented to the fourth year students at the end of the first semester of the academic year 2007/2008 (in December). As the test deals with the cultural background of America in the thirties, *The Grapes of Wrath* reflects part of the American literature program which includes Modernism in American literature (see Appendix K p.139). For each correct answer, the students get two points; notwithstanding the difficulty of the question. In fact, all the questions are considered equal in value since each one of them permits the reader to gradually enter in a deeper understanding of the text. In case of an incomplete answer, the students will obtain half the mark.

### 2.5.2-The Questionnaire:

What was interesting to do after the implementation of the test, was to obtain causal information from the students themselves about their learning practices and the place of culture learning through extra readings for instance. Information of how students view the 'licence' programme can be insightful too.

Students were asked questions about their tastes in terms of literary studies and novel selection; we have been able to note a certain discrepancy between the teaching delivered and the students' expectations. Moreover, the questionnaire is an advantageous tool: it can be anonymous and administered to a group just like any standard testing practice that students are quite used to.

This presents an advantage if we consider that a majority of students may be too shy or otherwise reluctant to express their opinions orally or in public.

#### 2.5.2.1-The Questionnaire Content:

In order not to give the students the impression of being judged or considered in a negative manner, the questions proposed have been elaborated to be as neutral as possible. Following Zoltàn (2003), our questions aim at obtaining two types of data, attitudinal and behavioural data. Most of the questions seek for attitudinal data; students were asked to give their opinions on American literature class and its function and to evaluate the utility or the value of the Cultural Studies class as well as the interconnectedness between modules. Question five is the only behavioural question where students are asked to describe what they read for the American literature class requirements. The students' questionnaire is composed of eleven (11) questions as follows:

##### (i) Students' appreciation of the American literature class:

###### Question 1: Do you enjoy American literature class?

The objective behind this question is to enter progressively into an evaluation of how the American literature class is perceived by the students. Asking students whether they enjoy it is a first step to determine if something is going wrong.

(ii) Students' appreciation of American literature class components:

Question 2: What do you prefer about American literature class?

Question two aims at highlighting which part of the lesson is viewed positively by the students. In this way, elements that will be 'left out' could be dealt with ultimately at the level of the interview for instance.

(iii) Students' preferences between the three literatures taught at the licence:

Question 3: Which of the three literatures do you prefer?

This question aims at hinting to a possible hypothesis that we could eventually present as an outcome of this research on the culturally distant in cross-cultural reading. As a matter of fact, we could in a future work try to determine if the most distant culturally literatures pose more problems of comprehension and acceptance than literatures with more familiar cultural backgrounds. It is for this reason that we have presented the three literatures in a situation of comparison.

(iv) Justification of the students' choice of preference:

Question 4: Please justify your answer:

Concerning our direct interests this fourth question has helped us investigate whether the worldwide famous American culture was favourably appreciated by our students or if it suffered from any indication of unpopularity. Also, we examined whether the fact that our students are consumers of American culture, through the movies or music industry for instance, had any consequence on their appreciation of American literature.

(v) Students' task completion for the literature class requirements:

Question 5: For the American literature class requirements what do you read?

Question five is a behavioural question presented in Zoltàn (2003). Students are asked about their learning styles.

Because what they read influences deeply their efforts in terms of research, we have a way to identify their learning habits without causing them to feel guilty about them. As a matter of fact, if a student simply rereads his course notes, he will not make the same effort as one who surfs on the internet, must locate the appropriate information and discriminate between relevant and irrelevant sources.

(vi) Literature class content adequacy with the test requirements:

Question 6: Do you consider the American literature class prepares you well for the exam?

In question five students are asked to evaluate how much the lesson content is coherent with what is required from them at tests.

(vii) Justification of the students' evaluation of the American literature class adequacy with the test requirements:

Question 7: Please justify your answer:

With this justification question we meant for the students to develop and state clearly what they expected to learn in their American literature class. What was interesting to do was to ask students at the level of the interview to identify some of the skills they thought to be needed at the test and to see how these are dealt with in the lesson.

(viii) Existing connexions between literature and other modules:

Question 8: Is there a link between American literature class and any other module or modules?

Question eight aims at checking whether the students are aware of the interconnectedness that can exist between modules and how this can be useful to them. This is also a good transitional question to move from the literature class to the Cultural Studies class.

(ix) Existing connexions between Cultural Studies and other modules:

Question 9: If yes, what module or modules is it related to?

Question nine is a follow-up to question eight. We wanted to check whether students ever viewed there was any link between Cultural Studies and the literatures taught at the 'licence'. This double formulation of the same question matter was to try to heave a certain awareness in the students' minds about the fact that literature study and Cultural Studies are interconnected; and also to prepare the students to the interview question about Cultural Studies class.

(x) Students' recall of the Cultural Studies class:

Question 10: Concerning the Cultural Studies module you were taught in the first year, how well do you remember the content of the course?

The objective behind question ten is to verify if the Cultural Studies class has left some reminiscence in the students' minds so as to assist them efficiently in their literary studies.



III-Let's talk about your teaching perspectives.

The sections in the students' interview:

I-Let's start with the American literature class.

II-Let's see how you analyse the cultural issue.

III-Let's turn to the cultural background of the novels you have at the program of American literature.

Another characteristic of the interviews is the order of the questions that range from the more distant to the interviewees to what concerns them more closely. According to Angers (op-cit), this process is necessary otherwise interviewees will feel agressed. We start asking the teachers about the students' lack in cultural background knowledge before turning to what they think to be possible solutions, until finally we come to question them about their proper role and responsibility in the cultural gap issue. As for the students, we deal with the atmosphere in American literature class, then we ask them to analyse the cultural issue, and at last ask them to evaluate themselves in cultural proficiency and to identify their difficulties. What follows is the series of questions of the teachers' and the students' interviews (every two questions belong to one of the interview sections aforementioned):

Teachers' interview questions:

1. Do the students present any lack in the target cultural background knowledge?
2. Is the target cultural background knowledge an important element in their training?



(xi) The objective of the Cultural Studies (CS) class:

Question 11: What is the objective of Cultural Studies?

We have chosen question eleven to be an open-ended question in order to have the students reflect upon the utilitarian/instrumental value of CS in the 'licence'. We have tried throughout the entire questionnaire and with this final question in particular to present the students a new and complete enquiry of the different elements necessary to literature study. If they had not thought of these precise aspects before, they were going to think about the question in a more detailed manner and were therefore well prepared for answering thoroughly the interview questions.

2.5.3-Interviews Content:

Both the interviews of teachers and students have been elaborated following the model in Angers (1997). There are three sections sketched under the form of a conversation with phrases that introduce the questions using expressions such as 'let's talk about...' or 'let's turn to...' making the interview flow naturally as in an informal chat. The objective is to make the interviewee feel simply questioned but not examined.

The sections in the teachers' interview:

I-Let's first deal with the students' cultural background knowledge.

II-Let's now turn to the possible causes to the lack of target cultural background knowledge issue.

3. What can be done to enrich the students' target cultural background knowledge?
4. What about Cultural Studies?
5. Is it challenging to teach American literature nowadays?
6. Is it the role of the teacher to develop their cultural background knowledge?

Students' interview questions:

1. How do you feel about American literature class?
2. Is any homework required from you?
3. What can be done to enhance your understanding of American literature?
4. What about the Cultural Studies module of first year?
5. How well do you know American culture?
6. Do you have difficulties with this 'cultural aspect' of the literatures you study?

2.6-Data Collection Procedure:

2.6.1-Test Administration:

The twenty (20) students selected were placed in one classroom for a session of about an hour and a half. In order to make the test more reliable some precautions were taken:

-A presentation of the reading test principles were given to the students so as to make sure they would not skip any question and that they would follow the order in which the questions have been constructed.

-Clear and direct instructions were specified to students, such as 'non-composition' and to make use of all the socio-cultural background information they possess on American history. The students have not been tested on their composition skills, but on how much target cultural background knowledge they had and could use. Therefore, they were asked to write in a simple manner and to interpret the text with a maximum of references to the dates and historical events they thought the chosen extract (see Appendix B p. 114) was connected to.

#### 2.6.2-Questionnaire Administration:

The questionnaire was administered to the same group of students after they were given the test in order to have them reflect on their literature study more seriously. As a matter of fact, this test format which is neither like their classical discussion essay composition, nor similar to the text analysis question they are used to, was formed of precise questions that divided the reading process step by step from the literal understanding to a deeper interpretation of the message. This had a double objective: analyse students' responses at each step of their reading process, but also to make them realise that these steps are necessary to reach the completed study of a literary work and to reflect on that while they answer the questionnaire. For this reason, the questionnaire administration could not be too long after the test administration and could definitely not precede it.

### 2.6.3-Interview Administration:

Both subjects, teachers and students, were interviewed individually. The questions were focused, in order to make the interview profitable and the least tiresome possible. Also, all the interview sessions were preceded by the reading out loud of the cover letter of the interview (see Appendix D p. 120) presented in Angers (1997) to introduce our present inquiry as well as to start the interview in a conversation-like flow.

### 2.7-Limiting Factors:

It would have been interesting to replicate the reading test in the other two literature classes: African and English literature; however at this level of research we have thought it interesting to first inquire in depth the problem of cross-cultural reading in American literature. But we do not diminish the value of our research as we have tried to tackle the issue thoroughly and further research can develop this.

### 2.8-Conclusion:

In this chapter we have presented a description of the underlying methodology of this study, and the reasons that lie behind it. In view of pursuing a qualitative inquiry, our research has two principle features: the small number of our informants and the triangulation of our data collection instruments. We took twenty students for our reading comprehension test because we wanted to detail the test correction and identify the importance of the cultural element in describing how its hindrance can impede the reading process. The questionnaire was also addressed to the same group of twenty students who were given the test in order to have them reflect upon their difficulties in EFL cultural knowledge.

As for the interviews, we took a focus group of four students in order to obtain their impressions. Three teachers were also solicited to complete the students' vision as these latter do not have the necessary knowledge or detachment to evaluate the situation. As for our data collection instruments, we aimed at obtaining three forms of qualitative data: the test identifies the nature of the difficulties caused by the lack of target cultural background knowledge, the questionnaire uncovers different themes related to the students' learning habits and their appreciations of the teaching delivered at the university. The interviews reveal the informants' emotional state, the degree of either their acceptance or the frustration caused by their ignorance of target cultural input. After the transcription of the data collected, we have proceeded to the data analysis. The results and their interpretation will appear in the next chapter.



## Chapter Three: Presentation and Discussion of the Results

### 3.1-Introduction:

In the preceding chapter we have presented three data collection instruments that were intended to be complementary in describing the hindrance the Algerian students from the English Department of the University of Algiers have in target cultural background knowledge. We proceeded to the data collection as objectively as possible in order to answer our research questions in a satisfactory manner and to check our research hypotheses. This chapter is divided in two sections; the first section exposes the results analysis procedure as well as the test results and the students' responses to the questionnaire. In the second one, we will discuss and compare the results adding important clarifications from the interviews of both teachers and students.

### 3.2-Results Analysis Procedure:

#### 3.2.1-Test Results Analysis Procedure:

Each test was corrected and marked out of twenty points following the test correction elaborated after discussions with fellow literature teachers. Two points were granted for each correct answer. If an answer was incomplete or did not contain a supportive word or phrase from the text when asked, the student was given half the mark.

### 3.2.3-Interview Results Analysis Procedure:

For the interviews we solicited a very little number of informants: a focus group of four students randomly selected out of the twenty testees who also participated in the questionnaire answering, and three American literature teachers who accepted to reflect upon our issue and to enlighten us with their experience. The results obtained were thorough, thus we have selected the declarations that best illustrate the themes identified in these interviews in order to support our argumentation in the discussion of the results.

### 3.3-Presentation of the Results:

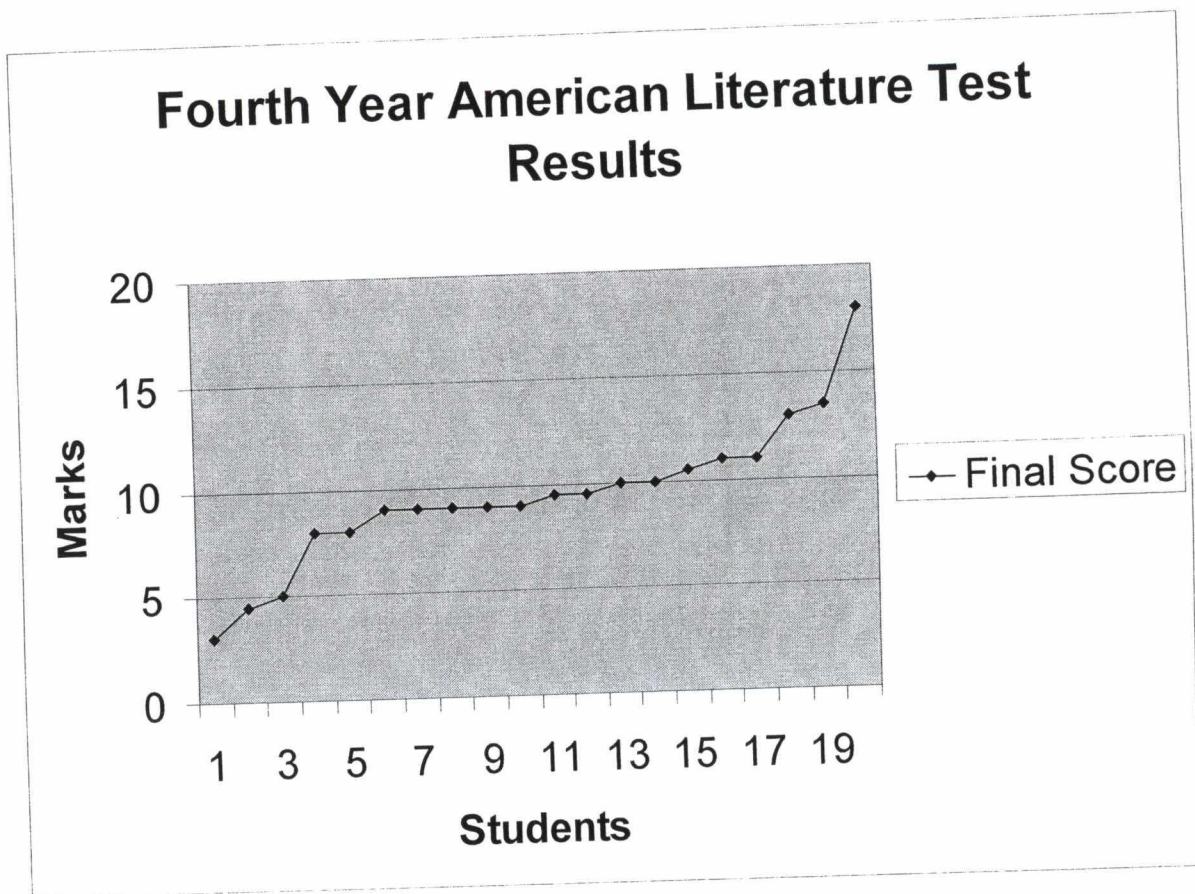
#### 3.3.1-Presentation of the Test Results:

##### 3.3.1.1-Presentation of the General Test Results:

The results in Figure 1 (p.62) represent the final scores obtained by the 20 fourth year students in the American literature reading comprehension test (see Appendices G & H pp. 123-124). The results reveal two characteristics:

1. 60% of the students (twelve students out of twenty) have a score that is below average and 40% of the students (eight students out of twenty) have a score that is above average.
2. 70% of the students (fourteen students out of twenty) have a score that is between 08/20 and 11/20. the majority of students have scores that are quite close to the average mark 10/20.

Only three students have very low results (between 03/20 and 05/20), and likewise only three students are very successful with marks ranging from 13/20 to 18/20.



**Figure 1: Fourth Year American Literature Test Results**

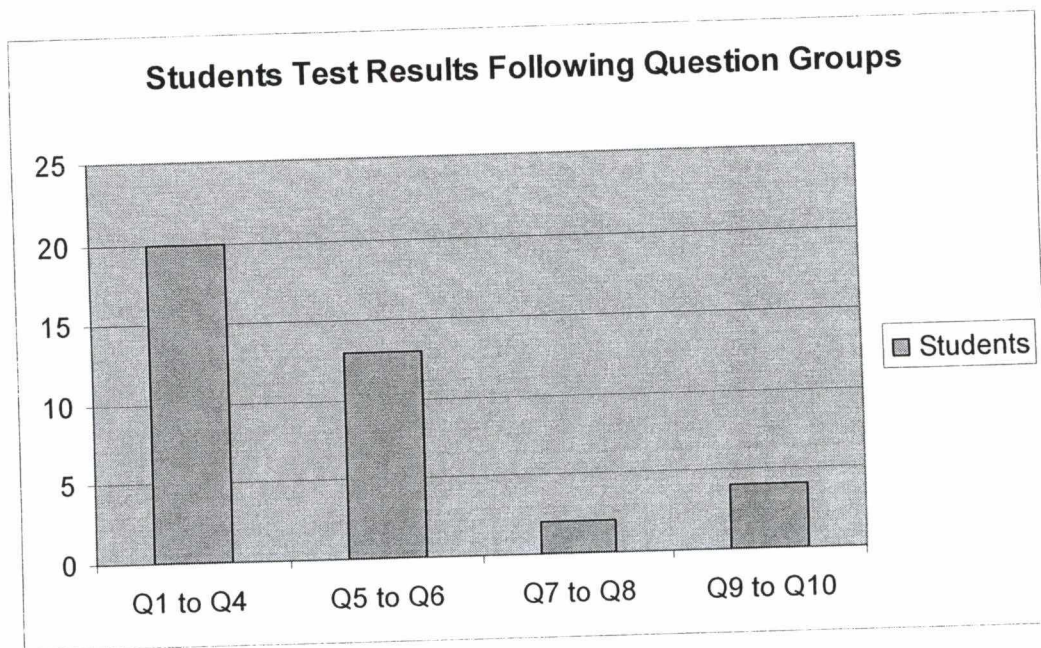
The reason for these scores is at first, the test format which does not permit to have drastically excellent marks or the contrary. There are ten questions equally marked, notwithstanding their particular levels of difficulty. As a matter of fact, the test respects scrupulously the reading comprehension process and aims essentially at identifying the levels of text understanding which have been most problematic for the students. Therefore, the balance between literal understanding questions and interpretation stage questions is not an issue to our results analysis. Indeed, we have observed that marked level by level, the scores of the students become more significant.



### 3.3.1.2-Presentation of the Test Results Following the Categories of Questions:

The results in Figure 2 (p.64) represent the scores of the students at each of the four groups of test questions. As a matter of fact, although there are six levels of understanding in reading comprehension following Thomson in Amer (op-cit), we have grouped the test questions into four categories:

1. The literal understanding of the text is composed of Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4. These questions concern language proficiency and narrative understanding.
2. The empathy and analogy levels have been grouped together as they require close skills such as replacing characters within their contexts and to grasp the experience the author is exposing in order to learn from it. This category encloses Q5 and Q6.
3. The interpretation and evaluation levels have also been grouped together as they coincide in skills ability. The reader must identify the message from the implied author. This category encloses Q7 and Q8.
4. This last category comprises Q9 and Q10, two questions for what we consider to be the most important level of text understanding. Recognition is understanding the significance a literary work has for a given reader issued from a given context; an essential skill in our research.



**Figure 2: Students Tests Results Following Question Groups**

- Q1 to Q4: 18 students out of 20 (90%) have a score above average (4 points out of 8 or more). An interesting characteristic is that out of the ten students who obtained excellent scores at this level (7 points out of eight or more); only three students have a final score above average. These are S14 with 10/20, S17 with 11/20, and S20 with 18/20. We also notice that among these three students only S20 obtained a high mark, the other two obtained 'mean' or 'just average' scores. Additionally, among the eight students who obtained a final score that is above average, five students obtained language proficiency results that vary between 4,5/8 points and 6,5/8 points.
- Q5 to Q6: 13 students out of 20 (65%) have a score above average (2 points out of 4 or more).

Compared to the first category of questions we are getting a little deeper in the level of understanding of the text and the number of students who successfully answered these questions is getting lower. Nevertheless, among the thirteen students who succeeded at this stage, eight students obtained a final score above average.

- Q7 to Q8: It is at this stage that the students are the weakest. 2 students out of 20 obtain a score above average (2 points or more), only 4 students out of twenty manage to get 1 point and 16 students out of 20 (80%) have a score of zero.
- Q9 to Q10: At this stage, we notice that the students have weak results as in the previous level. 4 students out of 20 have a score that is above average (2 points or more), only 7 students out of 20 manage to get 1 point and 13 students out of 20 (65%) have a score of zero.

### 3.3.2-Presentation of the Fourth Year Students' Questionnaire Results

(illustrated with citations from the interviews of both teachers and students):

#### ➤ Responses to Question 1:

Yes	No	A little	No opinion	Total
08	01	07	04	20

Table 1: Students' Appreciation of the American Literature Class

Students answer rather favourably to question one. This implies that students do not have a problem of acceptance of the literature module. Eight students declare they appreciate it against one student only who says he does not like it.

➤ Responses to Question 2:

Novels	Teaching	Extra Knowledge	Total
11	02	07	20

Table 2: Students Preferred Aspect in the American Literature Class

The answers to question 2 reveal that there is a problem with the teaching practices. Eleven students actually appreciate the novels they study and seven declare to value the extra knowledge they can acquire outside the class. However, only two students announce teaching to be one of their favourite aspects in American Literature class. This is very significant, particularly if we consider the following declaration by one of the interviewed students who considers the teacher to be fully responsible of their non attainment to autonomous learning.

S<sub>15</sub>: “Teachers do not give us research to do, nor work outside class. They base the tests on theme, plot and characterisation, so why should I bother to gather extra information that anyway will be marked out of topic?”

➤ Responses to Question 3:

African Literature	American Literature	English Literature	Total
03	06	11	20

Table 3: Students' Favourite Literature Among the Three Taught

The answers to this question have been quite surprising. We were actually expecting African literature to be the most appreciated as it is the least distant culturally to our Algerian students' environment: same continent and same colonial past.

#### Responses to Question 4:

##### Students who prefer English Literature:

- 06 students say it is the easiest or it is the one they are knowledgeable in.
- 03 students say they prefer it for its references (writers at the program).
- 01 student says it's for the teacher.

##### Students who prefer American Literature:

- 04 students say they prefer it because they like American culture and want to learn about it.

The student who prefers African Literature: says it's the literature he identifies to.

Answers to question four show that the English literature is the one the students prefer probably because it is the most dealt with literature in the Algerian school programme. Consequently when six students declare to be knowledgeable in English literature, only one student declares that African literature is a literature he feels close to.

➤ Responses to Question 5:

The novel at the program	Critics	A summary of the novel	Different novels of the same period at the program	Internet articles	Class notes
12	12	10	00	01	09

Table 4: Students' Readings for Literature Class Requirements

The answers to this question are very important as the readings of a student are the most important means to enrich his cultural background knowledge. We discover then, that not one student has read another novel from the same period of time as the novel dealt with in class and only one student has searched for information on the internet. Therefore, the majority of the information gathered comes from the class notes. The best readers, that is to say twelve students, read the novel studied in class.

T3: "...these students have never been familiarised with documentation and research. The first encounter with research is supposed to start right from primary school with the researches on insects for example."

➤ Responses to Question 6:

Yes, very well	Not adequately	I do not know what is required at the exam	Total
03	12	05	20

Table 5: Students' Responses Concerning How Well The American Literature

Class Prepares Them to the Exams

As expected, students show they strongly rely on their teachers and expect to be thoroughly guided by them. Student 15 declares in a straightforward manner that students are not guided enough to be able to grasp what exactly is expected from them. He states:

S<sub>15</sub>: “Before the exam the ‘method’ required is not clearly presented, and after the exam we are told that our work is incorrect, but still without having the teacher present what for him is the adequate response.”

➤ Responses to Question 7:

05 students say that teachers do not guide them effectively.

02 students think they lack of methodology or ‘know how’.

03 students say that the lessons do not correspond to the test requirements.

With the answers to this question, students appear to know what they need: be better guided with an appropriate step by step methodology in order to reach the test requirements.

➤ Responses to Question 8:

yes	no	I don't know	Total
18	01	01	20

Table 6: Students' Perception of a Link Between Literature Class and any other

Module

➤ Responses to Question 9:

100% of the students declare that the link that literature class has is with the civilisation module.

If the majority of the students agree to say that there is a link between literature class and other modules in question eight, in question nine they all identify the connected module to be the civilisation module.

➤ Responses to Question 10:

Very well	A little	Not at all	Total
05	09	06	20

Table 7: Students' Recall of Cultural Studies Class

T1: "...I think that the program is to be changed and to be adapted to the needsof our current world. I don't think that knowing about the Aztecs or about the ancient Egyptians will motivate them for the fourth year literature class."

Only five students in question ten say they remember the Cultural Studies class. According to teacher 1, it is a question of curriculum and ways of teaching the cultural studies that needs to be reviewed. Actually, when asked to describe the role of Cultural Studies in the licence in question eleven, the students are quite vague.

➤ Responses to Question 11:

Concerning the role that Cultural Studies plays in the licence:

04 students say it gives extra cultural knowledge.

08 students say it serves to teach the civilisations and history in general.

02 students say it helps to understand others and their way of thinking.



In fact, the students do not make use of words such as ‘cultural references’ or ‘text context’ for instance, because they ignore what cultural information involves in reality.

### 3.3.3-Presentation of the Interview Results:

#### 3.3.3.1-Presentation of the Teachers’ Interview Results:

##### I the students’ cultural background knowledge:

1. Do the students present a lack in target cultural knowledge?

The three American literature teachers agree to say that their fourth year students lack target cultural background knowledge.

2. Is the target cultural background knowledge an important element in their training? Why?

The three teachers recognise that it is an important element for their training, but that it is not valued in our society. Furthermore, as students limit their training outcome to the field of teaching, those interested by other professions do not bother to think about culture and literature as important.

##### II the possible issues out of the lack of cultural background knowledge deficiency:

3. What can be done to enrich the students' cultural background knowledge?

- For teacher one culture must be taught at every level of education.
- Teacher two puts emphasis on reading
- And teacher three considers that students need to be familiarised with documentation.

4. What about Cultural Studies?

The three teachers seem to agree here again that the programme of Cultural Studies at the level of the 'licence' is an issue.

### III teaching perspectives:

5. Is it challenging to teach American literature nowadays?

Apparently, the teachers have difficulties teaching their module. Teacher one uses the terms 'difficult' and 'disappointing'. Teacher two accuses the students of being uninterested, and teacher three says it's impossible to make them work outside the classroom.

6. Is it the role of the teacher to develop their cultural background knowledge?

The teachers here are unambiguous: it is not feasible to 'fill in the gaps' when students do not make the necessary effort to show their interest in what they are being taught. Moreover, the teacher at this stage, the last year before graduation, can only guide and control.

### 3.3.3.2- Presentation of the Students' Interview Results:

#### I the American literature class:

##### 1. How do you feel about American literature class?

Student five answers that this course is confusing, and the other three answer it is a boring course. According to one of the interviewed students, this is due to the teaching practiced.

S10: "I actually appreciate American literature, but the class is not really interesting, we don't do interesting activities."

##### 2. Is any homework required from you?

Students five, ten, and twenty declare having too many modules and only a small amount of time for everything. One student says that research outside class is not required since the teachers base the literature study on theme, plot, and characterisation.

S5: "Some teachers want us to write what they say in class, others want us to read the critics' notes and use them. For me, it's a question of knowing the teacher."

#### II analysing the cultural issue:

##### 3. What can be done to enhance your understanding of literature?

- Readings: students ten and twenty declare they want the teachers to give them lists of readings with titles as well as reading exercises to do.

- Dialogue with teachers: student five says the students need to be encouraged and not criticised. For student fifteen, the teachers should give further explanations to their students and exchange more with them.
- Skills development: For student five, literature understanding and cultural acquisition is secondary; only those students interested in a teaching career will be motivated to become culturally proficient.

#### 4. What about the Cultural Studies module you had in first year?

- Recall of the Cultural Studies module: Two students (student five and student ten) declare they do not remember what they were taught in the first year Cultural Studies class.
- Cultural Studies, a history module: The other two students (student fifteen and student twenty) say that it is a module that has no connexion with literature. It draws the basis on which European civilisations were built, presenting historical events and date indicators.

### III the cultural background of the novels at the programme:

#### 5. How well do you know American culture?

The four students interviewed declare not knowing well the American culture. They do recognise, however, that this is entirely their fault as they are not curious enough in their studies (student five and twenty). They also admit that culture information is not such a difficult task (student fifteen).

Student ten even declares that the students ignore all about the background of the novel they have to study in class.

S<sub>10</sub>: “If we take *The Waste Land* by T.S. Elliott, that we studied this year, there is a lot of cultural information, such as symbols referring to the middle ages which we don’t know.”

6. Do you have difficulties with this ‘cultural aspect’ of the literature you study?

All the students declare having difficulties with the cultural aspect of the literature they have at the programme. Student five says he only gives importance to the general idea of the novel. Students fifteen and twenty declare this is because the teachers do not give them any indication. Student ten says that their hindrance in target cultural background knowledge confines them in the trap of rote learning.

### 3.4-Discussion of the Results:

#### 3.4.1-Discussion of the Test Results:

The first and most significant feature that emerges in the test results is that language proficiency does not seem to have any direct correlation with high order interpretive reading skills. As a matter of fact, the test results prove that linguistically proficient testees are not necessarily proficient readers in the sense that they are not skilled to interpret, criticise or evaluate a text and the message it conceals.

Surface-level reading is more or less ensured by culturally non-proficient readers. At this level they must narrate events, paraphrase the words of the text or extract information from the text in an appropriate manner.

In fact, the drawing out and use of words for support from the text varies whether the student is answering a surface level question or a deep and interpretative one. It is clear from the results obtained in the reading comprehension tests that the students who give good answers at the level of the language comprehension questions, present a good surface-level understanding but nonetheless give wrong interpretations when profound cultural references come into play. Taking the Okies in the text for instance, not one student identified the farmers from Oklahoma.

However, the majority of the students (45%) consider them to be Native Americans. These students immediately identified wrong themes and recognised erroneous messages such as colonialism or racism. Only one student (S20 with a final score of 18/20) wrote of agrarian America which was oppressed and persecuted.

If students are comfortable at the level of text deciphering, it is impossible for them to identify which word or group of words in the text refer to any precise historical event or personality in real life; neither are they able to quote from the text to relate to these events and people which contextualise the literary work at stake. In our reading comprehension test, the majority of students correctly picked the words for support in the surface-level questions. However, when it came to identifying what 'Hooverilles' stood for it was more difficult: in majority, students successfully identified them to be precarious housing settlements, but only one student found that they were named after president Hoover. Extensionally, no one spoke of the non-interventionist policy of government Hoover that made him so unpopular during the Great Depression of the 1930's. If the students had been culturally equipped they could have reached an academic level of reading with an interesting query on the fact that although there are two Americas, one rich and one poor, the United States of America is a democracy giving a voice to the oppressed who can vote for change.

### 3.4.2-Discussion of the Questionnaire Results:

The results of the questionnaire show that American literature benefits of a positive image among our Algerian University students. Most of them say that they appreciate it although it appears that they are more familiar with English literature (probably because English literature is the most taught literature at the level of high school). The surprising result was to discover how ignored African literature is. We expected the Algerian students to be more confident with African literature because of its culture when the results show quite the opposite. In fact, it appears that it does not matter how distant or close culturally communities are to one another, but how the members of each community have learned to view the other group. In citing Bourke & Seelye (1974), Suny J. G, Tuttle H. G & Zampogna J. (1979:177), state:

“Bourke believes that if foreign language teachers do not use effective techniques for teaching culture, they could contribute to increasing students’ negative attitudes. Seelye not only supports this point but emphasizes that if teachers present culture in an ‘us-them’ fashion they are not substantially changing students’ attitudes.” (Suny J. G, Tuttle H. G & Zampogna J., 1979:177)

Everything depends then, on how the teaching about the ‘others’ was made and the results of the questionnaire put the teachers’ responsibility in the front line. Students observe that the lessons are in discordance with what they are expected to do in tests and declare that their teachers lack of guidance for that matter. For Widdowson (1975:72), this is due to the fact that literature teachers come unprepared for such a mission. He states:

“...the teacher of language and literature has no training other than what he might acquire incidentally in studying for his first degree...” (Widdowson, 1975:72)

Thus, students feel abandoned to guess what they are supposed to do in tests because a precise methodology is missing in their lessons.

Therefore, they refer to the critics of the novels at the programme although they do not perfectly well understand what is at stake in such an enterprise causing the anger of their teachers who see them flee from their responsibilities to read and interpret texts autonomously. T<sub>1</sub> says about students' interpretation of text: "generally, they tend to interpret a text from what they know already". For Widdowson (1975:75), teachers do exactly the same thing they accuse the use of critics to cause: provide the students with 'their' interpretation of a text instead of showing them how to analyse it. He declares:

"What critics and teachers so often do is to tell students what messages are to be found in the literary works they are studying...discourage them from seeking out messages for themselves." Widdowson (1975:75)

The teacher is however, not the only trigger for learning and the students' difficulties to grasp literary works' meanings and their vast cultural dimensions can be attributed to the program and more precisely to the teaching of culture in the 'licence'. As a matter of fact, the Cultural Studies module which was implemented to enrich the students in cultural knowledge and assist them in their understanding of literary texts seems to present several issues. Firstly, the fourth year students in majority do not remember what they learned in CS, and if they do ignore how to use the information they acquired in it. Not one student questioned saw that the role of CS was to help them identify cultural references in literary texts for them to interpret. S<sub>15</sub> about CS says:

"It has no relation with literature learning: for instance, we dealt with Renaissance in the first year, but I discovered Shakespeare in the fourth year only."



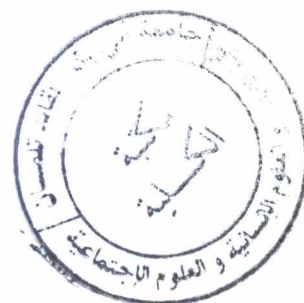
### 3.4.3-Discussion of the Interview Results:

When the students have to analyse a text, they do not pay attention to dates, events, and names of places for instance; they will try to guess connexions according to their background knowledge whether it is appropriate or not. All the teachers agree to say that the students lack appropriate cultural background knowledge causing them to feel disappointed and frustrated. The students in turn, are confused as to what they are supposed to do with the American literature they have to study; consequently they feel bored in class. What comes out of the interviews is that students feel trapped in a vicious circle; not only do they ignore what to do, but they have many modules and not enough time to do it. Therefore, they end up rote learning instead of consolidating their knowledge in American culture. Another important element that comes out in the interviews is an outlasting lack of communication between teachers and students. This transpires in the fact that they both have negative feelings concerning the teaching and learning of literature without openly talking about it. The students are the ones to pinpoint this in demanding more communication, more detailed explanations, and more guidance. Also, both teachers and students speak of the need to implement more reading and the use of documentation as well as a reform of the Cultural Studies programme. However, their difference lies in how to install changes since for the students more guidance is a step by step supervision on the part of the teacher, and for the teachers more guidance implies to show the way towards autonomous learning.

The marking of the test aimed essentially at localising the steps of the reading comprehension process that present difficulties. For so doing, we have first marked the tests globally in order to see how many students successfully completed the task at stake and therefore obtained a mark above average (10/20 or more). Then, we have established the percentage of students who gave a correct answer at the level of each question. Thirdly, we have grouped the questions following their level of understanding following Thomson (1987) in Amer (2003) (see Appendix A. p113) in prevision of 'measuring' the number of students who succeeded at each level of reading comprehension. After that, we were able to identify the effect that one question or one group of questions has on another and to verify as well whether this is due to a hindrance in cultural knowledge indeed.

### 3.2.2-Questionnaire Results Analysis Procedure:

The questionnaire results were aimed at explicating the students' state of mind regarding their reading difficulties and at drawing some parallels between the teaching practices and their learning strategies. Therefore, concerning the multiple choice questions, we counted the number of students for each answer selected that we have represented in tables. Concerning the four open-ended questions (questions 4, 7, 9, and 11), we grouped the answers following themes/issues raised by the students; these were then listed and used for the discussion of the results.



#### 4.2.1-Language-based Approach:

The first recommendation we can make in order to remedy to the students' hindrance in target cultural background knowledge, is to have the students become more familiarised with the literary text analysis. As a matter of fact, when dealing with the text from a language-based approach it is not with the intention to limit the text study to the linguistic level, but to force the students to focus on the text as a starting point. Instead of guessing for a hidden meaning and giving approximate answers, students will learn that it is in analysing the words of the text that there are cultural referents to be discovered. For Carter & Long (1991) the language-based approach does not promote the function of language acquisition over literature study, but rather tries to reconcile the two and to integrate language as a tool for adequate comprehension into literature teaching. Therefore, Carter & Long (1991) compare the conventional approach of literature teaching with the language-based approach:

##### 1. Conventional Approach

- Paraphrase and context
- Describe and discuss
- Evaluate and criticise

##### 2. Language-based Approach

- General comprehension
- Text focus
- Personal response and impact

The conventional reading approach seems to be addressed to highly proficient readers. In the term 'paraphrase' already there is a complexity in the sense that the student must rewrite what he has understood in his own words. For a first step, the student is asked to decipher language, understand the idea expressed and finally transform it into personal wordings. All this is intricate and for culturally non proficient readers very risky. However, the language-based approach alone is insufficient. In fact, students that are unaware of the sociocultural aspect of literary texts need first and foremost to develop their knowledge in target culture: hence our second recommendation, extensive reading.

#### 4.2.2-Extensive reading:

The implementation of extensive reading in the university programme is justified by the fact that this suggestion favours the development of independent learning. Bramford & Day (1998) present a definition of extensive reading taken from the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. Extensive reading is described as follows: "...extensive reading is 'intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading.'"(Bramford & Day, 1998:6) Therefore, extensive reading can change the reader's vision of reading from being a burden as his school homework can be, to being an extra activity that can give him pleasure. Extensive reading principles according to Bramford & Day are as follows (1998: 7, 8):

- Students read as much as possible in and out of class with the teacher controlling weekly for instance the students' book log or reading diary
- A variety of materials as well as a wide range of topics are available

- Students select what they want to read and can stop reading what fails to interest them
- The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding
- Reading is its own reward, no follow up exercises or little
- Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Dictionaries are rarely used
- Reading is individual and silent at the student's pace outside the classroom

Extensive reading creates enrichment in the readers' general knowledge, and this progress will reciprocally be useful to the reading act itself. Knowledge in vocabulary, in grammar as well as world knowledge are all increased in the process of reading and the more they will develop the more competent the reader will become to make meaning out of the text. Rivers (1964:148) adds:

“As soon as students have passed the early stages, they should be encouraged to read extensively and in this way to build up their knowledge of the language and its culturally determined ‘meanings’ independently of classroom teaching.” (Rivers, 1964:148)

Practicing extensive reading will ensure the students not only to enrich their target cultural background knowledge, but in the long run to bridge the gap between acquired knowledge and new knowledge.

#### 4.2.3-Suggested Activity:

We have chosen to present our teaching suggestions under the form of one major learning type: problem-solving activities.

The interesting characteristic of problem-solving activities is they can palliate to fossilised bad learning habits and remedy to the situation in installing new ways of learning as Anderson & Wilson (1997) suggest. In fact, problem-solving activities can develop students' learning style and help them achieve independent learning. When students are taught to actively reason about texts, their comprehension will be improved. Developing an individual learning style is possible no matter how profound or fossilised the nature of the student's hindrance is. This can be motivating for University teachers who have students with heavy gaps on the one hand, and a curriculum that requires highly academic proficiency skills to be developed.

#### **Objective:**

- To identify the cultural references stated in the text
- To arouse the students' awareness that every reading needs to be preceded by information gathering.

**Task:** Read the following text, and then place the underlined words next to their appropriate definition in the table below.

I Read the following extract as many times as you need:

Highway 66 is the main migrant road. 66\_the long concrete path across the country, waving gently up and down on the map, from the Mississippi to Bakersfield\_over the red lands and the grey lands, twisting up into the mountains, crossing the Divide and down into the bright and terrible desert, and across the desert to the mountains again, and into the rich California valleys.

66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking ownership, from the desert's slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas... And while the Californians wanted many things, accumulation, social success, amusement, luxury, and a curious banking security, the new barbarians wanted only two things\_ land and food; and to them the two were one. And whereas the wants of the Californians were nebulous and undefined, the wants of the Okies were beside the roads, lying there to be seen and coveted: the good fields, earth to crumble experimentally in the hand, grass to smell, oaten stalks to chew until the sharp sweetness was in the throat...

And in the South he saw the golden oranges hanging on the trees, the little golden oranges on the dark green trees; and guards with shotguns patrolling the lines so a man might not pick an orange for a thin child, oranges to be dumped if the price was low. He drove his old car into a town. He scoured the farms for work. Where can we sleep the night? Well there's Hooverville on the edge of the river. There's a whole raft of Okies. He drove his old car to Hooverville. He never asked again, for there was a Hooverville on the edge of every town. The rag town lay close to water; and the houses were tents, and weed-thatched enclosures, paper houses, a great junk pile...

Extract from *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (1939)

1. .... Struggling with dispossession, these impoverished farmers from Oklahoma escaped a devastating drought that had ravaged the entire Midwest and South from Virginia to Oklahoma in the 1930s. Their corn and hay crops were ruined and their cattle died from eating dust-covered grass.
  
2. .... This route relating Oklahoma to California is also called "road of flight". Destitute tenant farmers in search of jobs to feed themselves and their children took this migrating road in the 1930s.
  
3. .... During the Great Depression Era, the happily consumer-oriented Middletown was transformed into shanty towns that sprang out from old crates and cartons. With no money for rent and nowhere to go for help, many unemployed people had to set up housing in the open.
  
4. .... A single storm on May 11, 1934 blew away 300 million tons of top soil, the equivalent of tossing 3000 hundred-acres farms in the air. This caused a mass migration of farm families to California's San Joaquin Valley.



### 4.3-Cultural Studies:

Although the results present the Cultural Studies module as having failed to prepare the students to become active and alert readers, we still maintain our second research hypothesis. Therefore, we can assert that within appropriate programme readjustments, it can help the students reach an academic reading competency.

#### 4.3.1-Native Cultural Background:

To foster foreign cultural awareness is essential for literature comprehension as understanding a literary text is culturally determined by our capacity to adapt to the target culture. Reading literature goes necessarily through the acquisition of target cultural knowledge, but also with a certain awareness of the student's own native cultural background which gives him a particular standpoint for interpreting the text. Rivers (1964) explains:

“To Sapir, our whole view of the world is shaped by the language we learned as a child...No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.”(Rivers, 1964:133)

Therefore, because the reader's native cultural background permits him to view things differently and because it is inherent to his identity, EFL language teaching and extensionally EFL literature teaching should value this cultural background and not occult it. Oxford & Scarcella (1992:7) explain:

“Tapestry materials reflect the cultural diversity of ESL classrooms. They give students specific information that will help reduce their difficulty interacting with native speakers of English. They strike a healthy balance between the necessity of teaching the target culture and validating the students' native cultures. The importance of knowing the learners' cultures is often forgotten in the rush to help students adjust to their new environment.” (Oxford & Scarcella, 1992:7)

The accent is then put on the target cultural background knowledge that the students obviously need. Nonetheless, it is difficult to balance between the two cultures within class activities completion. Therefore, Anderson & Wilson (1997:46) propose the use of analogy. They explain:

“Building knowledge can be as simple as telling students things they don’t know, but more subtle teaching tactics may be required if the topic is abstract or completely unfamiliar. One such tactic is the use of analogy. Hayes and Tierney (1982) showed that an introduction to the game of cricket, particularly one drawing correspondences with baseball, helped American students understand newspaper reports of cricket matches...Good analogies are not in abundant supply. However, it may be possible to engage students in providing their own analogies” (Anderson & Wilson, 1997:46)

In citing Bourke and Seelye (1974), Suny J.G, Tuttle H.G & Zampogna J. (1979:181), state about a Puerto Rican culture presentation to American students:

“In helping students to become more positive toward the language group, foreign language teachers should, at the beginning of the language instruction, limit the difference between the two cultures: A presentation of differences at the beginning of language study is not a good starting point for promoting positive feelings about other cultures” (Suny J.G, Tuttle H.G & Zampogna J., 1979:181)

In addition, the use of analogy is an interesting suggestion to install enthusiasm and comfort with the use of media such as television. Lado (1964:30) explains:

“Motion pictures made in the setting of the target culture provide a powerful medium for giving the student experience in cultural meanings within his control of the language” (Lado, 1964:30)

To enrich students’ knowledge in the target culture is definitely not a simple manoeuvre, therefore both the Cultural Studies and the literature classes should benefit from a long-term and task-oriented teaching perspective where pedagogical tools such as extensive reading (outside the classroom) and problem-solving activities (inside the classroom) are at the centre.

#### 4.3.2-Suggested Activity:

**Objective:** This activity aims at challenging the students when they face new information. This is to teach students to evaluate the veracity of any extra information.

**Task:** Say whether the following statements are true or false, if they are false correct them.

1. President Hoover was favourable of an intervention of the government in the private sector. He also advocated governmental relief efforts.
2. The black population was hit the hardest, as African Americans who migrated from impoverished rural areas in the South to cities in the North found no more opportunities there.
3. Not only did these migratory blacks for the most part fail to find jobs in the so-called Promised Land, they also faced virulent racism for even trying to “take” scarce employment from whites.

As a matter of fact, it is the role of the Cultural Studies module to arouse in the students a certain curiosity in the hidden layer that exists in each and every literary work: the sociocultural aspect of its production. It is only when they will be aware of the fact that a novel is necessarily related to a particular environment and to its community that they will become proficient critical readers. Additionally, they have to accept their own cultural foreignness if they want to be able to use it advantageously instead of viewing it as a handicap.

#### 4.4-Teacher Role:

Although our research results show some elements of controversy about the limits of the teachers' role, they are the only ones who can remedy the situation and guide the students in the realms of the sociocultural dimension of literature.

##### 4.4.1-Teaching Methodology:

As our results have shown, for a majority of teachers whose training did not prepare to deal with the cultural layer of a literary work, teaching literature to EFL students is rather challenging. This is due, in part, to the lack of coordination between literature teachers and cultural studies teachers in their respective teaching plans. As a matter of fact, literary research is much theorised in showing what is to be interpreted and in what way without considering how the cultural studies or the civilisation modules can be helpful, when applied linguistics to EFL teaching presents pedagogy in use. Literature teaching is somewhere between the two.

There is a lack of communication between reading theory and literary theory, which following Alderson (op-cit), hinders the leap from theory to a practical and more importantly focused pedagogy. The issue of the Cultural Background Knowledge brings forward the necessity to set up a pedagogy specific to literature teaching. An initiative that according to Alderson (op-cit: 295) tends to be driven back. He explains:

“During the past two decades, work in literary and cultural studies most particularly in Britain and more recently in America has accomplished such retheorizing of the reading subject and the text, but such work has just only begun to be translated into concrete pedagogies. By entering into more active dialogue with other areas of reading that focus more specifically on pedagogy, literary and cultural studies can begin to locate reading within the contexts in which it actually occurs.” (Alderson, op-cit:295)

Literature teaching has always been problematic according to Widdowson (1983): for a long time literature was used for language acquisition and mastery, until it was proved that the literary language stood by itself and was not practical to general use. Consequently, there is an urging need to identify with certainty what the literature teaching objectives are, particularly in an EFL context at the university level.

#### 4.4.2-Literature Teaching Objectives:

Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives in Hooper (1971:281) already illustrated the classification of the objectives in teaching rather than advocating the superposing of different levels of knowledge. An idea developed by the cognitivist Piaget cited in Burden & Williams (1997). These are ranged from the simple process of identifying and then remembering to the acquisition of complex skills such as the process of relating or evaluating:

1. The knowledge of specifics on which more complex forms of knowledge are built:

- Knowledge of terminology
- Knowledge of specific facts, dates and, events
- Minimum knowledge about ‘organisms’ studied

## 2. Intellectual abilities and skills:

- Comprehension metaphor symbolism (exaggeration irony)
- Translation: ability to understand literal statements
- Extrapolation: determine immediate inferences made from explicit statements
- Analysis: recognise form and pattern to understand meaning
- Synthesis: combine the elements to create a structure not clearly there before
- Evaluation: Judgements\evaluation of accuracy

Bloom's Taxonomy classifies the teaching objectives first, as primary information to be mastered and upon which more complex forms of knowledge will be built. Therefore, if a literary text requires language mastery it is not an end in itself, but a tool alongside with cultural acquisition in order to relate the words read to the context they refer to. As for the intellectual abilities, the second group of objectives, their classification very clearly initiates the reading act with the text analysis through direct comprehension and translation before its interpretation with extrapolation which relates the words to the references in the real context. The stages of analysis and synthesis consist in interpreting the ideas in the text and to reformulate them in a clear and critical manner.

The last stage is that of evaluation which joins the reader-response movement where in the last level of interpretation the reader must 'respond' to the text and give his projection of the meaning in the text, i.e. from his viewpoint. This 'reader-response' is still not taken into consideration in tests, a situation that needs to be changed according to Carter & Long (1991) who advocate the language-based approach to literature teaching, which enables the students to understand concretely how reading works.

#### 4.4.3-Suggested Activities:

##### 4.4.3.1-Activity one:

**Objective:** Teach the students how to interpret the text in linking the historical event with the words of the author.

**Task:** Search for information about the 'Black Thursday'.

Read the following text and answer the two questions below.

(The 'Black Thursday' is the financial market downturn by which America was heading into the worst economic depression in its history. The great stock market crash of October 1929 was the worst sell-off of shares since 1907. It put an end to what had been a decade-long rise in stock values.)

I Read the following extract and answer the questions below:

Highway 66 is the main migrant road. 66\_the long concrete path across the country, waving gently up and down on the map, from the Mississippi to Bakersfield\_over the red lands and the grey lands, twisting up into the mountains, crossing the Divide and down into the bright and terrible desert, and across the desert to the mountains again, and into the rich California valleys.

66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking ownership, from the desert's slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas... *And while the Californians wanted many things, accumulation, social success, amusement, luxury, and a curious banking security, the new barbarians wanted only two things\_ land and food; and to them the two were one.* And whereas the wants of the Californians were nebulous and undefined, the wants of the Okies were beside the roads, lying there to be seen and coveted: the good fields, earth to crumble experimentally in the hand, grass to smell, oaten stalks to chew until the sharp sweetness was in the throat...

*And in the South he saw the golden oranges hanging on the trees, the little golden oranges on the dark green trees; and guards with shotguns patrolling the lines so a man might not pick an orange for a thin child, oranges to be dumped if the price was low.* He drove his old car into a town. He scoured the farms for work. Where can we sleep the night? Well there's Hooverville on the edge of the river. There's a whole raft of Okies. He drove his old car to Hooverville. He never asked again, for there was a Hooverville on the edge of every town. The rag town lay close to water; and the houses were tents, and weed-thatched enclosures, paper houses, a great junk pile...

Extract from *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (1939)



1. a. What is ironic about the sentence in italic lines 8, 9, and 10?  
b. Pick the exact words that show this.
  
2. a. What feeling does the sentence in italic lines 14, 15, and 16?  
b. Pick the exact words for support.

#### 4.4.3.2-Activity 2:

**Objective:** Students actively think about the themes of the text used in the previous activities.

**Task:** Read the following statement and comment the photography below.

What interrogations come to your mind?

Then identify the theme or themes presented in the extract page 100.

“Hoover said that he took his hands-off approach to protect American democracy, arguing that direct federal aid would have turned its citizens into government dependents who would take to electing whatever demagogue promised the best bread and circuses.” (Brinkley:1998)

#### 4.5-Conclusion:

We have suggested some activities to assist our students in bridging their gap in cultural background knowledge and that the teachers of literature as those of Cultural Studies can reflect upon. Interdisciplinary research is necessary for the establishment of a literary pedagogy, and an explicit teaching of culture in the program of the licence must be taken into consideration. In fact, it can be academically interesting for the students to use their cultural difference as it grants them with a certain degree of detachment. They will then evaluate the impact a work can have on its intended community of readers and vice versa analyse how it is perceived by them. It is in reality the reaching of a certain balance between the target cultural knowledge necessary to rightly appreciate the intensity of a work and the distance of observation that a foreign reader can have, that brings about the most interesting and maybe challenging interpretations.

### **General Conclusion:**

It appears to us that the cultural background knowledge is essential to literary texts' full comprehension as literature happens to be culturally specific. Thus a hindrance in cultural background knowledge is harmful; students will have access only to a surface-level of understanding. Moreover, although modernists are advocates of multi-interpretation, with the reader-response movement originated in the United States by Rosenblatt (1930s), they do not reject the value of cultural background knowledge. Therefore, the issue of cultural background presents the need for an adequate pedagogy of literature teaching. According to Radway (1984) "intuitive" teaching that is not preceded by empirical research can lead to a slippery interpretation of the text. Also, Hinkel (1999) explains that multidisciplinary research has shown the importance of culture in language teaching and learning. As a matter of fact culture is considered too complex for the language classroom, thus the domain of ideas is left for researchers and theoreticians. The findings of our study corroborate the theoretical development mentioned above, hence the division of our work:

In the first chapter, we have presented some of the literature underlying theories from Modern Applied Linguistics as well as literature reading models, among which there is the reader-response model. The cultural background knowledge has driven us to examine the reading process in depth and to uncover the socio-cultural element as well as its importance for the text and its meaning. We have also tackled culture teaching, and more particularly the teaching of foreign values and different ways of thinking, at the level of EFL classrooms.

In our second chapter, we have described the underlying methodology of our case study in EFL literature reading. As we wanted to verify whether a hindrance in target cultural background knowledge impeded the students' reading process, we administered to a group of twenty students a reading comprehension test in American literature. We also gave these students a questionnaire concerning their learning styles and reading habits in addition to have their impressions on the cultural studies and American literature classes. Our last data collection instrument is the interview. We interviewed a focus group of four students and three fourth year American literature teachers who accepted to cooperate with us. What we collected were our informants' feelings' about the impact such a hindrance can have on their academic life and on the teacher/student relation.

In our third chapter, we have the findings of our inquiry and the answers to our three research questions. They appear as follows:

It appears that a hindrance in the target cultural background knowledge can alter the reading process and this particularly at the level of the higher order interpretive skills where the reader is asked to infer meaning and to uncover the author's message. Surface-level reading however is little affected by the lack in appropriate cultural information. It also seems that the cultural studies module has failed to do so. However, this is due to an inappropriateness of the programme and a lack of collaboration between cultural studies teachers and literature teachers. This situation encourages passive reading instead of fostering reading for documentation and literary study purposes. Moreover, although results show that it is very difficult for the teachers at this level of high education and with students burdened by so many weaknesses, the teachers remain the only protagonists who can actually do something about their students' gaps in target culture.

In our fourth and last chapter we present some pedagogical recommendations in agreement with our verified research hypotheses. Literature teaching in an EFL context should put emphasis on text analysis from a language-based approach in order to avoid approximate answering on the part of the students. Extensive reading practice could also be an interesting answer to consolidate students' background knowledge. The cultural studies module should focus on target culture acquisition with the use of analogy in presenting the students' native culture and showing them how to use it efficiently. Finally, concerning the teachers, they have the delicate mission of adapting their teachings to new generations of students who ignore the cultural dimension of literary texts.

The cultural background is not to be presented to the students as an end in itself, but as a tool in text reading comprehension. If the interpretation of a literary text is 'normally' effected idiosyncratically, as pointed out by Furstenburg et al (2003), the reader must be informed about the sociocultural context of the literary work at stake. Otherwise, the reader will not be able to make an analytical reading as he will be ignorant of the dialectical relationship between the novel for instance, and its sociocultural context.

In other words, the reader will disregard who the novel was directed to and for what reason it was written. In fact, students who ignore the cultural background knowledge of a novel will infer meaning from their native background knowledge, overlooking the cultural references that are present in the text and thus misinterpreting it totally. Not to mention that any judgement carried out on their part will be worthless.

Consequently, are our EFL students in need of an empirically-based pedagogy where the overt teaching of target culture is promoted? Also, how should we consider the affect of students, as these latter are more inhibited by their hindrances than it appears? Teachers could act as mediators between researchers and students, when applied linguists could assist literary scholars to construct an adequate pedagogy that would respond to the students' as well as the teachers' needs. Anyhow, interdisciplinary connections must happen because the students' uneasiness towards learning translates the teachers' frustration while teaching.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### Developmental Model of a Reader-Response Approach

#### **Level 1: *Literal understanding***

Students give summaries of the events of the story. Understanding of the story is at a very *superficial* level. Students are merely narrating the information in the text.

#### **Level 2: *Empathy***

Students are involved in the story. They *identify* some aspects of the story with their own lives. They also have *imaginative sympathy* with one of the characters in the story, and this sympathy can range from reacting with the character to imagining how the character feels.

#### **Level 3: *Analogy***

From the readings, students make connections between the characters and their lives, and from this, they learn about their own lives.

#### **Level 4: *Interpretation***

Students reflect on the significance of events and behaviours in the text. Their reflections lead to generalisations and evaluation of *characters* and *theme* of the story.

#### **Level 5: *Evaluation of Fiction***

Students view text as a *construct*. They question the author's values against their own values; they differentiate between *fiction* and *reality*; they are able to discuss and evaluate *forms of narration* and social and cultural values of the *implied author*.

#### **Level 6: *Recognition***

Students make a conscious effort to consider their relationship with the text: they gain implications of constructedness (aspects of level 5) for their own *self-understanding*. They become more aware of their *reading process* and how they arrive at the meaning of a text. They are also able to evaluate their relationship with the *implied reader*.

Thomson (1987) in Amer (2003:69)

## Appendix B (1/3)

### Test Administered to Fourth Year American Literature Class Students

#### Reading Comprehension Test

#### I Read the following extract as many times as you need:

Highway 66 is the main migrant road. 66\_the long concrete path across the country, waving gently up and down on the map, from the Mississippi to Bakersfield\_over the red lands and the grey lands, twisting up into the mountains, crossing the Divide and down into the bright and terrible desert, and across the desert to the mountains again, and into the rich California valleys.

66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking ownership, from the desert's slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas... And while the Californians wanted many things, accumulation, social success, amusement, luxury, and a curious banking security, the new barbarians wanted only two things\_ land and food; and to them the two were one. And whereas the wants of the Californians were nebulous and undefined, the wants of the Okies were beside the roads, lying there to be seen and coveted: the good fields, earth to crumble experimentally in the hand, grass to smell, oaten stalks to chew until the sharp sweetness was in the throat...

And in the South he saw the golden oranges hanging on the trees, the little golden oranges on the dark green trees; and guards with shotguns patrolling the lines so a man might not pick an orange for a thin child, oranges to be dumped if the price was low. He drove his old car into a town. He scoured the farms for work. Where can we sleep the night? Well there's Hooverville on the edge of the river. There's a whole raft of Okies. He drove his old car to Hooverville. He never asked again, for there was a Hooverville on the edge of every town. The rag town lay close to water; and the houses were tents, and weed-thatched enclosures, paper houses, a great junk pile...

Extract from *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (1939)



Appendix B (3/3)

III Answer the following questions using the information extracted from the text in the previous section:

9. Why are the Californians compared with the Okies in the extract? What does the author want to uncover about the American people?

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

10. What message or major information does the author present the reader with?

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

Thank you.

**Appendix C (1/3)**

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME

**Fourth Year Students' Questionnaire**

1. Do you enjoy American literature class?

- Yes
- No
- A little
- No opinion

2. What do you prefer about American literature class?

- Novels
- Teaching
- Extra knowledge

3. Which of the three literatures do you prefer?

- African literature
- American literature
- English literature

4. Please justify your answer:

.....

.....

**Appendix C (2/3)**

5. What do you read for the American literature class requirements?

- The novel at the programme
- Critics
- A summary of the novel
- Different novels of the same period at the programme
- Internet articles
- Class notes

6. Do you consider that American literature class prepares you well for the exam?

- Yes, very well
- Not adequately
- I do not know what is required at the exam

7. Please justify:

.....

.....

8. Is there a link between American literature class and any other module or modules?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

**Appendix C/3**

9. If yes, what module or modules is it related to?

.....  
.....

10. Concerning the Cultural Studies module you were taught in the first year, how well do you remember the content of the course?

- Very well
- A little
- Not at all

11. What is the objective of Cultural Studies?

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

Thank you.

## Appendix D

### Cover Letter of the Interviews

Hello,

I would like to thank you first, for giving me some of your time. My name is Meriem Fasla; I am a Magister student in Didactics and Applied Linguistics. I would like to interview you in the scope of my research on the cultural background knowledge proper to American literature and the impact of its absence/presence on your reading comprehension. If you don't mind I will record your sayings for the sake of recall. You can be sure that all that you say will be strictly confidential and that your name will not appear in any way. Also, the recordings will be erased as soon as this work is completed.

## Appendix E

### Students' Interview Questions

#### I Let's start with the American literature class:

1. How do you feel about American literature class?
2. Is any homework required from you?

#### II Let's see how you analyse the cultural issue:

3. What can be done to enhance your understanding of literature?
4. What about the Cultural Studies module you had in first year?

#### III Let's turn to the cultural background of the novels you have at the program:

5. How well do you know American culture?
6. Do you have difficulties with this 'cultural aspect' of the literature you study?

## Appendix F

### Teachers' Interview Questions

#### I Let's first deal with the students' cultural background knowledge:

1. Do the students present a lack in target cultural knowledge?
2. Is the target cultural background knowledge an important element in their training? Why?

#### II Let's turn to the possible issues out of the lack of cultural background knowledge deficiency:

3. What can be done to enrich the students' cultural background knowledge?
4. What about Cultural Studies?

#### III Let's talk about your teaching perspectives:

5. Is it challenging to teach American literature nowadays?
6. Is it the role of the teacher to develop their cultural background knowledge?

## APPENDIX G

### Presentation of the Results of the Test Administered to the Students of the Fourth Year American Literature Class by Question:

Student Number	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Final Score
S01	02	0	0	0	01	0	0	0	0	0	03
S02	01,5	01	0	0	01	0	0	0	01	0	04,5
S03	01	01	0	02	01	0	0	0	0	0	05
S04	01	02	02	02	0	0	0	0	01	0	08
S05	01	02	02	02	01	0	0	0	0	0	08
S06	02	02	02	0	01	02	0	0	0	0	09
S07	02	02	02	02	01	0	0	0	0	0	09
S08	02	02	02	02	01	0	0	0	0	0	09
S09	02	01	02	02	0	02	0	0	0	0	09
S10	02	02	01	0	01	02	01	0	0	0	09
S11	01,5	02	02	02	02	0	0	0	0	0	09,5
S12	01,5	02	02	02	0	02	0	0	0	0	09,5
S13	02	02	02	0	01	02	0	0	01	0	10
S14	02	02	02	02	0	02	0	0	0	0	10
S15	01,5	02	01	02	01	02	01	0	0	0	10,5
S16	02	0	02	02	01	02	0	0	01	01	11
S17	01,5	02	02	02	01,5	02	0	0	0	0	11
S18	02	02	02	0	01	02	0	0	02	02	13
S19	01,5	01	02	0	01	02	02	0	02	02	13,5
S20	02	02	02	02	02	02	02	02	02	0	18



## APPENDIX H

### Presentation of the Results of the Test Administered to the Fourth Year American Literature Class Students by Level:

Student Number	Q1- Q4	Q5-Q6	Q7-Q8	Q9-Q10	Final Score
S01	02	01	0	0	03
S02	02,5	01	0	01	04,5
S03	04	01	0	0	05
S04	07	0	0	01	08
S05	07	01	0	0	08
S06	06	03	0	0	09
S07	08	01	0	0	09
S08	08	01	0	0	09
S09	07	02	0	0	09
S10	05	03	01	0	09
S11	07,5	02	0	0	09,5
S12	07,5	02	0	0	09,5
S13	06	03	0	01	10
S14	08	02	0	0	10
S15	06,5	03	01	0	10,5
S16	06	03	0	02	11
S17	07,5	03,5	0	0	11
S18	06	03	0	04	13
S19	04,5	03	02	04	13,5
S20	08	04	04	02	18

**Appendix I (1/6)**  
**Transcripts of the Teachers' Interviews**  
**Teacher 1**

**I Let's first deal with the students' cultural background knowledge:**

I: "Do the students present a lack in target cultural knowledge?"

T1: "Certainly. And it's surely a handicap because it prevents them from exploring the deep meaning of the text. They stop at a surface level and they don't go any deeper because of the wrong inferences. It's not always a question of having insufficient cultural knowledge because sometimes they have this cultural knowledge but here they apply it the wrong way. They see it in the text where it is not. Generally, they tend to interpret a text from what they know already, they're not trying to get new or extra knowledge. So, it can be useful but when they know how to apply this knowledge and where it is in the text. Perhaps it should go along with other strategies such as respecting the text and reading the text deeply."

I: "Is the target cultural background knowledge an important element in their training?"

T1: "Some of them are going to be experts in communication so they have to know about the culture of the Anglophone countries they study. You should not restrict the 'licence' to potential or future teachers. There are other professions waiting where they might need culture. They should get extra motivation such as getting a good job, or having more value socially because of this cultural background. There's no 'milieu' where they would be appreciated for this knowledge, there's no reason why they should acquire it."

## Appendix I (2/6)

### Transcripts of the Teachers' Interviews

#### Teacher 1

##### II Let's turn to the possible issues out of the cultural background knowledge deficiency:

I: "What can be done to enrich their cultural background knowledge?"

T1: "It's difficult to answer because they should know about things such as the World War for instance, before they come to the University. I think that the question involves more than the mere University, it involves culture and the teaching of culture at all levels: primary school, secondary school, and obviously it is to be linked to society."

I: "What about the Cultural Studies module they have at first year?"

T1: "I haven't personally taught this module, but from the echoes I got, I think that the program is to be changed and to be adapted to the needs of our current world. I don't think that knowing about the Aztecs or about the ancient Egyptians will motivate them for the fourth year literature class."

##### III Let's talk about your teaching perspectives:

I: "Is it challenging to teach American literature nowadays?"

T1: "Difficult and disappointing I would rather say. Although, I think that at their stage an increased linguistic proficiency cannot go without an increased knowledge of the culture and civilisation, at University level and in particular in fourth year. Otherwise what's the difference between the University and a language school? I'm just wondering, what would be the difference?"

I: "Is it the role of the teacher to develop their cultural background?"

T1: "The role of the teacher I think is to control them at this stage ...at the fourth year I mean. I don't think that acquiring more culture would motivate them. First and foremost, they are motivated by the marks and they are not motivated by getting a deeper knowledge of the culture which they are studying."

## Appendix I (3/6)

### Transcripts of the Teachers' Interviews

#### Teacher 2

##### I Let's first deal with the students' cultural background knowledge:

I: "Do the students present a lack in cultural background knowledge?"

T2: "Personally, I have a high rate of failure; I have tried different methods that haven't worked. Let's take Puritanism. Because it's not their religion, they reject it. They look at me with big eyes when I tell them to read the bible. It's as if I were a heretic."

I: "Is the target cultural background knowledge an important element in their training?"

T2: "Of course, but the students are not aware of what is important, they're doing an English degree without knowing what is at stake and the first year is the basis and when they reach the fourth year they get stuck."

##### II Let's turn to the possible issues out of the cultural background knowledge deficiency:

I: "What can be done to enrich their cultural background knowledge?"

T2: "Algerian literature that has been integrated to the third year program can somehow give a parallel in literature learning and in the management of cultural knowledge, but it is in Arabic, how can it be helpful? No, the real problem is they don't read."

I: "What about the Cultural Studies class they have in first year?"

T2: "Students don't understand the importance of Cultural Studies and they forget in second year already what they have learned in CS."

## Appendix I (4/6)

### Transcripts of the Teachers' Interviews

#### Teacher 2

##### III Let's talk about your teaching perspectives:

**I:** "Is it challenging to teach American literature nowadays?"

**T2:** "These last few years students haven't taken American literature class seriously. They don't see the purpose of it. They can't answer questions on the previous course which means they don't even go over their notes. There's only a minority that is interested."

**I:** "Is it the role of the teacher to develop their cultural background knowledge?"

**T2:** "I do make the link between culture and literature texts. The period covered in the literature modules is also covered in the civilisation modules, but not all the students take the two modules at the same time as the choice of modules is optional. Nevertheless, I keep telling them to look for cultural knowledge no matter in what language they read. It's frustrating for the teachers to see these placid students in front of them."

## Appendix I (5/6)

### Transcripts of the Teachers' Interviews

#### Teacher 3

##### I Let's first deal with the students' cultural background knowledge:

I: "Do the students lack target cultural background knowledge?"

T3: "Students cruelly lack cultural knowledge. The problem lies at the level of primary and secondary school. Although things are changing, currently school does not teach universal culture. Most students do not know that the Mediterranean is the crib of all civilisations or who Saint Augustine was. Everything is based on memorisation or what is also called rote-learning."

I: "Is the target cultural background knowledge an important element in their training?"

T3: "That goes without saying although in our society this cultural dimension is not rightfully appreciated."

##### II Let's turn to the possible issues out of the cultural background knowledge deficiency:

I: "What can be done to enrich their cultural background knowledge?"

T3: "Actually, I demand from students to read a newspaper in English and I tell them that the test questions are elaborated from it. Why? Because these students have never been familiarised with documentation and research. The first encounter with research is supposed to start right from primary school with the researches on insects for example."

## Appendix I (6/6)

### Transcripts of the Teachers' Interviews

#### Teacher 3

I: "What about the Cultural Studies class they have in first year?"

T3: "The Cultural Studies can be useful if it is taught by qualified teachers with balanced programs."

#### III Let's talk about your teaching perspectives:

I: "Is it challenging to teach American literature nowadays?"

T3: "Oh yes, it's almost impossible to make students work outside the classroom apart from going over their notes and learning them by heart. It's difficult to motivate students at university level."

I: "Is it the role of the teacher to develop their cultural background knowledge?"

T3: "The teacher is a guide and orients the students to different research perspectives."

## Appendix J(1/8)

### Transcripts of the Students' Interviews

#### Student 5

##### I Let's start with the American literature class:

I: "How do you feel about American literature class?"

S5: "In American literature it's not clear what needs to be done. Literature in general is not hard sciences, and the teachers make us answer differently depending on their point of view. Some teachers want us to write what they say in class, others want us to read the critics and use them. For me, it's a matter of knowing the teacher. But if you take the linguistics course for example, the objective is clear: you have a lesson you learn it."

I: "Is any homework required from you?"

S5: "There are too many modules and every teacher acts like only their module exists. They give us too much work so we don't try to do extra work."

##### II Let's see how you analyse the cultural issue:

I: "What can be done to enhance your understanding of literature?"

S5: "Those who don't want to be teachers don't want to make the effort of finding cultural information. They want to work in a company, do translations maybe. So for them what's the use of getting interested in literature or civilisation? What is really important to focus on at first is oral expression, listening comprehension and written expression. Then and only then the students will get interested in complex things such as culture or even literature itself."



## Appendix J(2/8)

### Transcripts of the Students' Interviews

#### Student 5

And we need good explanations, not criticism. The test marks are always extremely low and many students have under 05/20, so what's the use of continuing when the students get only results that force them to be discouraged?"

I: "What can you say about Cultural Studies class of first year?"

S5: "I don't remember anything we did in that class. But basically it was a history class."

#### III Let's turn to the cultural background of the novels you have at the program:

I: "How well do you know American culture?"

S5: "Well, not really well. We, the students, should be more curious, if we try we can find the necessary cultural background knowledge, but only a minority does this in reality. Also, I don't know how to acquire critical thinking."

I: "Do you have difficulties with this 'cultural aspect' of the literature you study?"

S5: "Students do not really focus on cultural information, for them all they need to have is a general idea about the novel."

## Appendix J(3/8)

### Transcripts of the Students' Interviews

#### Student 10

##### I Let's start with the American literature class:

I: "How do you feel about American literature class?"

S10: "I actually appreciate American literature, but the class is not really interesting. We don't do interesting activities. It's actually very boring."

I: "Is any homework required from you?"

S10: "Every teacher seems to think that only their module exists, teachers must respect the fact that time is needed for the other modules. I try to work hard but because there isn't enough time I concentrate on some modules disadvantaging the rest. Moreover, two hours test is really not enough."

##### II Let's see how you analyse the cultural issue:

I: "What can be done to enhance your understanding of literature?"

S10: "The teacher should have given us a list of readings to prepare ourselves instead of saying: "do you know this?" the teacher should also be practical and give us titles because we don't have the time to search for them ourselves. Tests are also a problem. Some students are motivated to work, but the marks are always here to frustrate them: when we work and we fail at the tests when others seem to do nothing and succeed. This stops us from developing our ideas and we end up trapped by the marks."

**Appendix J(4/8)**  
**Transcripts of the Students' Interviews**  
**Student 10**

I: "What can you say about Cultural Studies class of first year?"

S10: "I have a very vague souvenir of CS. It was a dictation course; we didn't do any link with the literatures. It's a history class, today we do Mesopotamia and tomorrow we deal with the Greek Empire. Now, I know it's importance, but it's too late."

**III Let's turn to the cultural background of the novels you have at the program:**

I: "How well do you know American culture?"

S10: "Not well. If we take *The Waste Land* by T.S. Elliott, that we studied this year, there is a lot of cultural information, such as symbols referring to the middle ages which we don't know."

I: "Do you have difficulties with this 'cultural aspect' of the literature you study?"

S10: "Absolutely. Without cultural knowledge we fall into monotony, rote learning, but in literature there is no place for rote learning which we end up doing anyway. We write things with information from the notebook when comprehension is absent."

## Appendix J(5/8)

### Transcripts of the Students' Interviews

#### Student 15

##### I Let's start with the American literature class:

I: "How do you feel about American literature class?"

S15: "Students don't make efforts because there is a problem of motivation, most teachers do everything to destabilise them with the marks. Instead of explaining things, the teacher dictates the lesson. His message is clear: here is the information I want you to give back at the exam."

I: "Is any homework required from you?"

S15: "Teachers do not give us research to do, nor work outside class. They base the tests on theme, plot and characterisation so why should I bother gather extra information that anyway will be marked out of topic?"

##### II Let's see how you analyse the cultural issue:

I: "What can be done to enhance your understanding of literature?"

S15: "Instead of giving us handouts, he should come to class explaining and detailing and maybe giving opinions that would motivate us to study the American civilisation and understand how the Americans think. There is no effort in this sense. More than that, it's impossible to exchange ideas with the teacher or to give him our opinion about literature teaching. It's badly seen to do that."

## Appendix J(6/8)

### Transcripts of the Students' Interviews

#### Student 15

I: "What can you say about Cultural Studies class of first year?"

S15: "CS is about what we don't know: Greeks, Romans etc...things we hadn't met before reaching the university and that influenced the European civilisations in their architecture or social life. It has no relation with literature learning: for instance, we dealt with Renaissance in the first year, but I discovered Shakespeare in the fourth year only."

#### III Let's turn to the cultural background of the novels you have at the program:

I: "How well do you know American culture?"

S15: "Not much, although we can easily acquire cultural information with the media, through internet, movies ... People must read books, literary critics, read the history of countries and take different viewpoints. Students must seek for information but be alert."

I: "Do you have difficulties with this 'cultural aspect' of the literature you study?"

S15: "Before the exam the 'method' required is not clearly presented, and after the exam we are told that our work is incorrect, but still without having the teacher present what for him is the adequate response."

**Appendix J(7/8)**  
**Transcripts of the Students' Interviews**  
**Student 20**

**I Let's start with the American literature class:**

I: "How do you feel about American literature class?"

S20: "American literature class is boring because in two hours the teacher will speak not only quickly, but also with the expectation that the students will understand everything and take notes. Students have an extraordinary motivation but they do not know what to do with it. We have the baccalaureate which means we are motivated to study at the university."

I: "Is any homework required from you?"

S20: "The program is too heavy: we have to read, develop our writing, we have a lot of class hours and the teachers give us homework. The free time in the afternoon is for relaxing because teachers do not encourage us to work hard. They will work with those who already work. Teachers neglect students."

**II Let's see how you analyse the cultural issue:**

I: "What can be done to enhance your understanding of literature?"

## Appendix J (8/8)

### Transcripts of the Students' Interviews

#### Student 20

S<sub>20</sub>: "Teachers could give us titles to read, or detailed exercises concerning the course topics. They could also encourage students to write essays at home since we have essays to write at the exam. There is no practice or preparation for the exam, the teachers would rather give lectures. At the test, we have bad marks because we are not oriented by our teachers."

I: "What can you say about Cultural Studies class of first year?"

S<sub>20</sub>: "It's a basis for the civilisation modules of second, third and fourth year. It's history, there are a lot of dates to remember."

#### III Let's turn to the cultural background of the novels you have at the program:

I: "How well do you know American literature?"

S<sub>20</sub>: "A little, we do not find the time to read important books in direct relation with what is taught in American literature class. Students must make the effort to do research and not wait for the teachers to give the information."

I: "Do you have difficulties with the 'cultural aspect' of the literature you study?"

S<sub>20</sub>: "Yes, the opinion of the students must be developed for a correct reading, but the absence of references makes it impossible to do so successfully. The teachers give us information without telling us what to do with it."

**Appendix K**  
**Fourth Year American Literature Programme**  
**at the University of Algiers**

**Semester 1:**

The aim of the course is to provide the student with the study of some major authors from the 20<sup>th</sup> century American literature. The genre studied is the novel.

**Outline of the course:**

**I General Introduction: (2 hours)**

**II Regional and / or naturalistic fiction:**

**Two of the following:**

- R. Wright: *Black Boy*
- Dos Passos: *U.S.A.* (extracts)
- J. Steinbeck: *The Grapes of Wrath*
- W. Faulkner: *The Bear*

**III Fiction & Reality:**

**One work of either:**

- E. Hemingway: *Green Hills of Africa*  
*For Whom the Bell Tolls*  
*A Farewell to Arms*
- F. S. Fitzgerald: *Tender is the Night*  
*The Last Tycoon*
- J. D. Salinger: *The Catcher in the Rye*

**Semester 2:**

The aim of the course is to provide the students with the study of some major poets and playwrights of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American literature.

**Outline of the course:**

**I General Introduction:** 20<sup>th</sup> century Poetry and Drama

**II Drama**

- E. Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?*,
  - A. Miller: *The Crucible* or *Death of a Salesman*,
- or
- L. Jones: *Slave* or *Duchman*.

**III Poetry**

- E. Pound: *Cantos*,
  - T.S. Elliott: *The Hollow Men*,
  - Survey of *The Waste Land*,
- Or
- W. Stevens: *Sunday Morning*,
  - The Emperor of Ice-Cream*



## ملخص

يرمي هذا البحث المتكون من أجزاء الخمسة الآتية

-مقدمة

-نبذة تاريخية

-وصف للمنهجية المطبقة في هذا البحث

-نتائج و تحليل

-اقتراحات بيداغوجية

إلى دراسة مكانة و أهمية تدريس المعارف الاجتماعية الثقافية في مادة الأدب لطلبة الليسانس في اللغة الانجليزية. لقد بينت بحوث سابقة في هذا الميدان أن ثقافة اللغة المستهدف تدريسها متواجدة بنسبة غير كافية في مادة الأدب. اعتمادا على نتائج تلك البحوث افترضنا في هذا البحث أن العلاقة التي تكمن بين المعلومات الأساسية الثقافية للنص لا تؤخذ بعين الاعتبار عند تدريس الأدب في قسم اللغة الانجليزية.

يعالج هذا البحث التجريبي كيفية استعمال المعلومات الثقافية من طرف الطلبة أثناء القراءة من ثلاثة نواحي

-من الفهم الأدبي للنص ناحية

-من ناحية الربط بين الأحداث المقصوصة في النص و الأحداث الواقعة في الحية اليومية

-من ناحية تحقيق مستوى عال في التفسير عتما أن تفسير النص الأدبي يتطلب قدرة في التحليل و النقد

بناء على هذه العوامل اعتمدنا دراسة شملت 20 طالبا مسجلين في قسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة الجزائر لتحضير شهادة ليسانس في تعليم اللغة الانجليزية قسم السنة الرابعة و مسجلين في مادة الأدب الأمريكي. و من اجل ذلك تم القيام باختبار يسمح بدراسة عاملين فهم الطلبة لثقافة اللغة المدرسة و الأعمال المدروسة. كما تم استجواب الطلبة الذين امتحنوا إضافة إلى ثلاثة اساتدة في مادة الأدب الأمريكي. كان هذا الاستجوابين يتعلقا بقضية تدريس مادة الدراسات الثقافية في السنة الأولى ليسانس التي تهدف إلى تحضير الطلبة على تلق مادة الأدب في السنة الثانية ليسانس. الهدف من هذا الاستجواب هو التعرف على مكانة الثقافة في مادة الأدب لدى الطلبة و الاساتدة و ضرورة تحصيلها حتى يتمكن تسهيل إلقاء و استو . عاب مادة الأدب عند الاساتدة و الطلبة.

أشارت النتائج المتحصل عليها إلى الدور الإيجابي الذي تلعبه مادة الدراسات الثقافية في تحسين فهم الطلبة لنصوص الأدب. إضافة إلى ذلك بينت الاستجابات على تواجد نسبة مهمة من الثقافة في مادة الأدب . كما أنها بينت قدرة مادة الدراسات الثقافية المدرسة في السنة الأولى على الربط بين الثقافة و الأدب.

بناء على هذه النتائج قمنا باقتراحات بيداغوجية تتمثل في تقديم تمارينات حول ثقافة اللغة المدرسة تستعمل قبل قراءة النص الأدبي في مادة الأدب. كما أننا اقترحنا على اساتدة الدراسات الثقافية القيام بتحليل بعض النصوص مع طلبة السنة الأولى أملا في أن تؤدي هذه الاقتراحات إلى تحسيس الاساتدة بالدور الهام الذي تلعبه الثقافة في ترقية تدريس الأدب و تحسيس الطلبة بالدور الهام الذي تلعبه الثقافة في مساعدتهم على فهم النصوص الأدبية.

جامعة بويكر بلقايد - \* تلمسان \*  
كلية الآداب و اللغات  
مكتبة اللغات الأجنبية

إلى دراسة مكانة و أهمية تدريس المعارف الاجتماعية الثقافية في مادة الأدب لطلبة الليسانس في اللغة الانجليزية. لقد بينت بحوث سابقة في هذا الميدان أن ثقافة اللغة المستهدف تدريسها متواجدة بنسبة غير كافية في مادة الأدب. بناء على هذه العوامل اعتمدنا دراسة شملت 20 طالبا مسجلين في قسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة الجزائر لتحضير شهادة ليسانس. الهدف من هذا الاستجواب هو التعرف على مكانة الثقافة في مادة الأدب لدى الطلبة و الاساتدة و ضرورة تحصيلها حتى يتمكن تسهيل إلقاء و استوعاب مادة الأدب عند الاساتدة و الطلبة في تعليم اللغة الانجليزية قسم السنة الرابعة و مسجلين في مادة الأدب الأمريكي. أشارت النتائج المتحصل عليها إلى الدور الإيجابي الذي تلعبه مادة الدراسات الثقافية في تحسين فهم الطلبة لنصوص الأدب. إضافة إلى ذلك بينت الاستجابات على تواجد نسبة مهمة من الثقافة في مادة الأدب. كما أنها بينت قدرة مادة الدراسات الثقافية المدرسة في السنة الأولى على الربط بين الثقافة و الأدب

الكلمات المفتاحية : تدريس المعارف الاجتماعية الثقافية، المعلومات الأساسية الثقافية، الصلة بين القارئ و النص، طريقة البحث في القراءة .

Cette étude essaie d'identifier et d'évaluer la place ainsi que la valeur de l'acquisition socioculturelle dans la littérature enseignée aux étudiants algériens de l'anglais langue étrangère durant les quatre années de licence. La recherche antérieure a démontré que la culture de la langue ciblée est insuffisamment traitée en classe d'anglais langue étrangère et encore moins en classe de littérature en langue anglaise. Ainsi, nous assumons dans notre travail de recherche que la relation entre le bagage culturel propre à un texte et la compréhension qu'en fait un étudiant étranger, par ailleurs incompetent culturellement, devient difficile à établir. Cette étude a examiné de façon empirique comment les étudiants manient l'élément culturel durant le processus de lecture. Ce présent travail de recherche met en évidence les thèmes de l'enseignement de la culture ainsi que la lecture en classe d'anglais langue étrangère. Des activités de pré lecture nécessitant l'interaction de l'enseignant avec les apprenants en classe de littérature ou des études de textes en travaux pratiques en classe d'études culturelles peuvent aider l'apprenant à obtenir une meilleure connaissance de la culture de la langue étudiée.

Mots clés: Acquisition socio- culturelle, connaissances en bagage culturel, interaction de la lecture, procédé de la lecture

This study tries to investigate the place and value of socio-cultural acquisition in the literature taught to Algerian EFL university students throughout their four years' studies. Previous research shows that the target culture is insufficiently tackled in EFL language courses and extensionally in EFL literature courses. For this reason we assume, in this study, that the relationship between the cultural background knowledge proper to a text and the comprehension EFL students reach when they are culturally unacquainted, is rendered difficult to understand. This study empirically examined the way students deal with cultural background information during the reading process. The present study sheds light on issues of teaching culture and reading comprehension in a foreign language to ensure the students' acquisition of cross-cultural awareness in order to stand as a basis for the literature courses. Interactive pre-reading tasks on culture in literature class as well as practical text analyses in cultural studies can enhance a better awareness of the culturally proficient reader.

Key words: socio-cultural acquisition, cultural background knowledge, reading interaction, reading process.