

Developing real life experience through teaching culture in the efl class: fostering the learning through intercultural awareness.

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ABSTRACT: *The teaching of English as a foreign language is expanding popularity throughout the world. Most of the countries are also using English for all part of the general curriculum. Implementing cultural strategy in the EFL class room has been recently considered as a significant aspect for involving students in a wider version of language learning appropriately. As culture has taken an important place in foreign language teaching and learning, to develop real life experience, teaching through cultural awareness is now very essential in EFL class of Asian Pathway to foster the development of the language learning. Teaching culture in the EFL classroom makes a useful contribution to understanding the term and clarifies about how to reflect it on the expected outcomes and teach it successfully. In today's world the students know the rules of language but they don't know appropriately how to apply the knowledge in the target culture. So this paper provides the necessary information for the EFL teachers and learners so that they can create a good connection with the target language and culture. This article also provides information about the findings of Research project carried out with the English faculties in The Universities of Bangladesh in order to analyze the concept of culture, materials and teaching strategies' teachers are using to address culture in their EFL class.*

Keywords—*Teaching culture, Cultural awareness, Teaching process, Sources of cultural information.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays there is an acknowledgment among educators that teaching and learning in the classroom take place within socio cultural practices. The problem of leaving behind the role of culture in the EFL classroom in The University of Information Technology & Sciences may not let learners open their minds to authentic and important information that can take them to the wide learning to the target language.

There are many reasons why language courses do not include culture in the language syllabus. This study implies extra time that faculties do not consider in an overcrowded curriculum and also a limited span of time to complete the syllabi in a semester. Many faculties believe that that students could be exposed to cultural material later after they have mastered the basic grammatical structures and lexical features and the foundation of language, they have the insisting tendency of language first and culture later attitude. Some others afraid to teach culture that they afraid that they do not know details about it. This position is not valid in terms of effectiveness since teacher's role does not deal with providing information but helping students to attain the skills to understand and deal with the cultural background of the target language.

Another reason why faculties neglect to teach culture is that they face difficulties in teaching for negative attitudes of students. Learners do not care about it or consistently reject the target culture. Although several positions can be observed in the regular classroom, The teaching and learning process of a language is not simply mastering the object of academic study but is more appropriately focused on learning a means of communication. It is not difficult to see strong arguments for developing students intercultural competence giving the increasingly international nature of so many professions. In the cotemporary world a person does not need to travel to encounter representatives of the culture like popular music, tourism, media, and pluricultural nature of the society. In accordance with these trends developing student's skills in intercultural communication is an appropriate and necessary part in teaching process. (Note: **Pluricultural competence:** Ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part of intercultural interaction. **Intercultural competence:** Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities, distinctive differences) between the world of origin and the world of the target community.)

In order to account for the issues already mentioned, the article will provide the partial results of the first stage of a two phase research project carried out by English faculties of The University of Information Technology & Sciences.

The English Language Program at The University of Information Technology & Sciences has started to place a greater emphasis on the inclusion of cultural aspects in the teaching practices. Information about cultural issues is inherent to any language teaching purpose. This teaching –learning process can be achieved at different level even when teachers are not carrying out a systematic analysis in their classes. This innovative process aims at the integration and development project of intercultural competence in both pedagogical documents and teaching processes.

The first phase of the research project intends to describe the way teachers are addressing culture in their current teaching practices, while the second phase aims at the construction of a proposal to facilitate the inclusion of the concept of intercultural in the English classes of the language program. Partial results will respond to the following research questions:

1. How do teachers understand the concept of culture?
2. How are teachers addressing cultural issues in their teaching practices?
3. What materials are teachers using to address cultural issues in their English classes?

This article consists of four major parts: literature review to recall main theoretical reasons to address culture in the EFL classroom, research design and instruments used preliminary results, and concluding thoughts.

II. WHAT IS CULTURE

Culture may mean different things to different people. In the anthropological sense culture is defined as the way people live (Chastain 1988:302). Trinovitch (1980:550) defines culture as “...an all-inclusive system which incorporates the biological and technical behavior of human beings with their verbal and non-verbal systems of expressive behavior starting from birth, and this “all-inclusive system” is acquired as the native culture. This process, which can be referred to as “socialization”, prepares the individual for the linguistically and non-linguistically accepted patterns of the society in which he lives.

According to Brown(1994:170) culture is deeply ingrained part of the very fiber of our being, but language –the means for communication among members of a culture- is the most visible and available expression of that culture. And so a person’s world view, self-identity, and systems of thinking, acting, feeling, and communicating can be disrupted by a change from one culture to another.

Similarly, Tang (1999) propounds the view that culture is language and language is culture. He suggests that to speak a language well, one has to be able to think in that language, and thought is extremely powerful. Language is the soul of the country and people who speak it. Language and culture are inextricably linked, and as such we might think about moving away from questions about the inclusion or exclusion of culture in foreign language curriculum, to issues of deliberate immersion versus non-deliberate exposure to it.

In a word, culture is a way of life (Brown, 1994:163). It is the context within which we exist, think, feel and relate others. It is the “glue” that binds a group of people together. It can be defined as a blueprint that guides the behavior of people in community and is incubated in family life. It governs our behavior in groups, makes us sensitive to matters of status, and helps us to know what others expect of us and what will happen if we do not live up to their expectations. Thus, culture helps us to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to the group.

III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Importance of culture in the teaching field

Culture teaching derives from social and cultural anthropology which aims to provide a comprehensive description of the way of life of a society. In early 1900’s linguists researched the structure of American languages noting the complex relationships among thought, abstract notions and language. In the 1920’s, Edward Sapir concluded that language and the culture of its speakers could not be analyzed in isolation; language could be seen as a way of describing and representing human experiences and understanding of the world. He stated that members of a language community share systems of beliefs and assumptions which underline the construction of the world.

Later, studies of culture were developed under the domains of anthropology and sociolinguistics. In the 1960’s and 1970’s, investigations of the connections between language and culture produced impressive works led by Hymes (1964) “Language and Culture,” Gumperz (1972) on interactional sociolinguistics, and Kaplan (1966) on rhetorical patterns accepted in different cultures and styles of writings. Hymes (1972) was the first to introduce the concepts of speech community, speech events, and communicative competence, stating the connections between the interpretation of speech and behavior according to the norms of the speech community.

In the 1980’s researchers pointed out the influence of culture on second and foreign language teaching processes focused on the effects of body language, eye contact and other behavioral and communicative

paradigms. Damen (1987) analyzed the influence of culture on interaction and communication; and defined cultural values and beliefs.

Current perspectives about culture and language aimed by Kramersch (1991), indicated the teaching of culture implicitly or explicitly permeates the teaching of social interaction and the spoken and written language. He affirmed the necessity for second and foreign learners to become learners of the second culture due to the fact that a language cannot be learned without an understanding of the cultural context in which it is used.

Being proud of one's culture is stated by Byram and Morgan (1994) when they point out: "learners cannot simply shake off their own culture and step into another... their culture is a part of themselves and created them as social beings."

Learners are committed to their culture and to deny any part of it is to deny something within their own being.

Peterson & Coltrane (2003) cite the "National Standards in Foreign Language Education" of the United States which assert that "students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs" (National Standards in Foreign Language Education project, 1996).

Finally recent guidelines given by the Common European Framework aim the importance of the "Plurilingual approach" by emphasizing "... as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples, he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact."

IV. SOURCES AND TECHNIQUES FOR CULTURAL CONTENT

Today, with the help of technological developments, we have access to many sources easily and quickly. Almost all the printed materials are on the Internet in electronic forms and we can easily search anything anytime. As a result, we do not lack cultural content to use in our classrooms. Cullen and Sato (2000) suggest practical techniques and a wide range of sources for teaching culture in the EFL classroom using three different parameters, namely, information sources, activity-types and selling-points and also Kodotchigova (2002) discusses the role of role-play in teaching culture for classroom suggesting quick steps for classroom implementation. Jordan (1997, p. 105) lists sources of cultural information:

- Newspapers: these are a good source of cultural information: local papers will give more of a flavor of everyday life in towns.
- Video: a number of published ELT video tapes are a good visual source of cultural information. (Today, we have CD/DVD versions of these video tapes, which provide us with better quality.)
- Talks/discussions: some topics may be suitable for giving information to students in a plenary session.
- Role play/dramatizations: these can be used to initiate discussion and introspection.
- Culture quizzes/tests.

Some key considerations in developing cultural awareness in efl classrooms

As is mentioned, both learners and teachers of a second language need to understand cultural differences, to recognize openly that everyone in the world is not "just like me", that people are not all the same beneath the skin. There are real differences between groups and cultures (Brown, 1994:167). Therefore, language teachers cannot avoid conveying impressions of another culture whether they realize it or not (Rivers, 1981; 315). Language cannot be separated completely from the culture in which it is deeply embedded. Any listening to the utterances of native speakers, any reading of original texts, and any examination of pictures of native speakers engaged in natural activities will introduce cultural elements into the classroom.

While developing cultural awareness in the EFL classroom it should be kept in mind that the native language is learned along with the ways and attitudes of the social group, and these ways and attitudes find expression through the social group. Learning to understand a foreign culture should help students of another language to use words and expressions more skillfully and authentically; to understand levels of language and situation ally appropriate; to act naturally with persons of the other culture, while recognizing and accepting their different reactions, and to help speakers of other tongues feel at home in the students' own culture.

While most learners indeed find positive benefits in cross-cultural living on learning experiences, nevertheless a number of people experience certain psychological blocks and other inhibiting effects of the second culture. Teachers can help students to turn such an experience into one of increased cultural and self awareness. It is possible that learners can feel alienation in the process of learning a foreign language, alienation from people in their home culture, the target culture, and from themselves. In teaching foreign language we need to be sensitive to the fragility of students by using techniques that promote cultural understanding.

The use of role-play in EFL classrooms can help students to overcome cultural "fatigue" and it promotes the process of cross-cultural dialogues while at the same time it provides opportunities for oral communication. Numerous other techniques –readings, films, simulation, games, culture assimilators, culture

capsules and culturgrams can be used for language teacher to assist them in the process of acculturation in the classroom (Chastain:1988).

In addition to these techniques, teachers can play a therapeutic role in helping learners to move through stages of acculturation. If learners are aided in this process by sensitive and perceptive teachers, they can perhaps more smoothly pass through the second stage and into the third stage of culture learning and thereby increase their chances for succeeding in both second language learning and second culture learning. While teaching culture through the language teaching Seelye (cf. Rivers, 1982: 323-4), suggests that students should be able to demonstrate that they have acquired certain understandings, abilities, and attitudes:

1. That they understand that people act the way they do because they are using options the society allows for satisfying basic physical and psychological needs.
2. That they understand that social variables as age, sex, social class, and place of residence affect the way people speak and behave
3. That they can demonstrate how people conventionally act in the most common mundane and crisis situations in the target culture.
4. That they are aware that culturally conditioned images are associated with even the most common target words and phrases;
5. That they are able to evaluate the relative strength of a generality concerning the target culture in terms of the amount of evidence substantiating the statement;
6. That they have developed the skills needed to locate and organize material about the target culture from the library, mass media, and personal observation;
7. That they possess intellectual curiosity about the target culture and empathy toward its people.

Another point need be addressed is that if we wish the learners to master another language; we need to help the learners become communicatively competent in that language as much as possible. Namely, successful speaking is not just to master of using grammatically correct words and forms but also knowing when to use them and under what circumstances. Communicative competence should incorporate grammatical competence, discourse competence, and sociolinguistic competence.

In other words, if the goal of the language course is to enable students to reach a level of communicative competence, then all three components are necessary. The sociolinguistic component of communication refers to rules of speaking which depend on social, pragmatic, and cultural elements.

Thus, which linguistic realization we choose for making an apology or a request in any language might depend on the social status of the speaker or hearer, and on age, sex, or any other social factor. Besides, certain pragmatic situational conditions might call for the performance of a certain speech act in one culture but not in another.

The other issue that should be focused is that before learning about culture, students must be receptive to the concept of learning about cultures other than their own. To achieve culture goals, often teacher has to play a role in breaking down cultural barriers prior to initiating teaching-learning activities. One way to begin teaching culture on a positive note is to emphasize similarities between people. Such a beginning should be followed by a discussion of differences between members of students' family, between families, between schools and between cultures.

Moreover, the topics to be used to teach the target language should be presented in the contexts accompanying the native ones.

That is to say, while teaching a culture specific topic first language equivalent can also be given in order to enhance learning. The use of culture-based activities abundantly in the classroom help learners be familiar with the target culture. The activities in the materials should involve the cultural values of the target language designed for every level.

A cultural series usually begins at the elementary stage with discussions of the daily life of the peer group in the other language community –their families, their living conditions, their school, their relations with their friends, their leisure-time activities, the festivals they celebrate, the ceremonies they go through, dating and marriage customs.

At intermediate and advanced levels attention may be drawn to geographical factors and their influence on daily living, major historical periods, how the society is organized, production, transport, buying and selling, aspects of city and country life, the history of art, music, dance and film and so on.

Some topics that can be presented within the course syllabus are suggested below:

- Climate
- Clothing
- Crime
- Eating
- Education
- Family life
- Geography
- History
- Holidays
- Humor
- Language
- Leisure activities
- Meeting people
- Money
- Pets
- Population
- Religion
- Social occasions
- Sports
- Transportation
- Vacation
- Nonverbal Communication

V. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In regards to the research questions and data collection, the following are the preliminary results and conclusions drawn. About how teachers understand the concept of culture, and how they incorporate culture in their teaching. There were different answers that evidenced as three separate Likert scale. That is Strongly agree, Agree and Strongly Disagree. The method of research deemed appropriate for this study was the method, using a questionnaire. The descriptive research design with qualitative data from the open-ended section of the questionnaire can provide useful information about the distribution of a wide range of characteristics.

Instrumentation

In order to explore the perceptions of and attitudes towards culture in the classroom of different Universities, a questionnaire for teachers was designed to elicit instructors on teaching culture in the EFL classroom.

In this way, participants with time and interest in the survey topic were able to expand on their answers, while those with little time or interest could simply circle numbers on the Likert scales.

Participants

English language instructors at the University level participated in this study. Twenty-five instructors had taught for more than ten years, and their teaching experiences ranged from 5–15 years; some had more than 15 years' experience in TEFL. Of them, 30 % were Ph.D. holders, and the remaining 70 % were MAs. Participant teachers, most of them, taught at universities,

Results

Informants responded to the survey questions on a three -point scale, from 'Strongly Agree, Agree and Disagree. As for the open-ended questions requiring written responses, approximately 95 % of the instructors answered some or all of the question items that allowed open-ended comments, while 85 % of the student sample filled out this section.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these open-ended responses covered a remarkable range of examples and ideas. The questionnaire is attached below.

| Culture Content | SA | A | SD |
|---|-----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Do you think it is important for EFL teachers to include the target language's culture as part of their classroom teaching? | 56% | 23% | 21% |
| 2. Do you comprise cultural information about your native country in your classes? | 59% | 28% | 13% |
| 3. If you do include cultural content, is your cultural content planned or is it introduced spontaneously? | 45% | 43% | 12% |
| 4. Do you include cultural content that information concerned with culture, e.g. food, music, people, living style etc? | 67% | 14% | 19% |
| 5. If you do include cultural content, is that information concerned with covert culture, e.g. ethics, values, beliefs, attitudes, etc? | 58% | 24% | 18% |
| 6. Do you think that tv show can play an important part for teaching culture? | 78% | 12% | 10% |
| 7. Do you think that newspaper is full of cultural content of real life situation? | 85% | 24% | 9% |
| 8. Are these cultural aspects found in the published texts that you use? | 75% | 15% | 10% |
| 10. Have you adjusted your teaching style based on your knowledge of your students' culture since beginning teaching in Bangladesh? | 65% | 13% | 12% |
| 11. Do you use textbooks in your classes? | 79% | 12% | 9% |
| 12. If you do, do your textbooks include any cultural information? | 75% | 21% | 4% |
| | | | |

Here the result shows that 56% strongly Agreed and 23% Agreed and 21% Strongly Disagreed to include the target language's culture as part of their classroom teaching.

At the point of including cultural content that information concerned with culture, e.g. food, music, people, living style etc SA67%,A14% and SD19%.Teaching Cultural content that information is concerned with covert culture, e.g. ethics, values, beliefs, attitudes, etc SD58%, A 24% & 18% SD. 85% Participants SA that newspaper is full of cultural content of real life situation and 24% Agreed and 9% Disagreed. But 12% agreed,65% strongly agreed and 12% disagreed about adjusting teaching style based on knowledge of students' culture since beginning teaching in Bangladesh. At last 75% Strongly Agreed, 21% Agreed and 4% Disagreed about including textbooks with cultural information.

Finally, according to the materials teachers implement to teach culture in the EFL classroom, data collected reported the intension of using them: Materials are taken as a way to describe a culture. In this sense, authentic materials such as films, music, readers, article, newspapers and TV programs are the commonly used English classes. It was very evident in teacher's comments, questionnaires and class observations.

Here are some comments of the teachers about teaching culture in their materials.

"I have considered working on some English materials... They are English news reports taken from The Daily Newspapers..."

Teacher's official report included "The unit the teacher is doing is called "Films, music, news" in the textbook ...The teacher asks students to read and discuss one Reading about selected topic,

Class experiences included "Charts, posters, CD, videos, newspapers, magazines, articles, souvenirs".

Despite the missing data collection, information already analyzed illuminates final conclusions from this the research project is that it was the starting point for the English program to make all members of the educational community be aware of the cultural contexts missing in the English classes. Cultural issues need to be systematically implemented in daily classes; reflections and teaching activities should take student to a higher analysis level from their own culture to the target one. Even when teaching strategies and materials to address cultural issues had been implemented in EFL classrooms at The Universities of Bangladesh. Preliminary findings lets infer the long way to build up to reach the Intercultural Awareness expected in the Languages program.

VI. CONCLUSION

In developing cultural awareness in the classroom it is important that we help our students distinguish between the cultural norms, beliefs, or habits of the majority within the speech community and the individual or group deviations from some of these norms. Students should be enabled to discuss their native culture with their foreign-speaking friends at the same time that they are provided with a real experiential content.

They can make use of their knowledge of the foreign language. There should also be presented, discussed, or merely alluded to in two parallel streams. It should also be kept in mind that language teaching, as mentioned above, is a long process in which performance is not absolute and therefore we cannot expect all learners ever to acquire perfect native like behavior.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY

Culture in the EFL Classroom in Bangladesh

The purpose of this survey is to understand more about whether and how culture is conveyed and used as a teaching medium by teachers of EFL in Bangladesh. Researchers sincerely appreciate your help in filling out this form. You may add more detail or comments in the comments space on any question below:

Number of years teaching at tertiary level -----

Course information

- Average number of students in your English courses _____
- Main skill focus(es) of the courses you teach (circle a maximum of three)
- Speaking - Listening – Reading – Writing - Four-skills

| Culture Content | SA | A | SD |
|--|----|---|----|
| 1. Do you think it is important for EFL teachers to include the target language’s culture as part of their classroom teaching? | | | |
| 2. Do you comprise cultural information about your native country in your classes? | | | |
| 3. If you do include cultural content , is your cultural content planned or is it introduced spontaneously? | | | |
| 4. Do you do include cultural content that information concerned with culture, e.g. food, music, people, living style etc? | | | |
| 5. If you do include cultural content, is that information concerned with covert culture, e.g. ethics, values, beliefs, attitudes, etc? | | | |
| 6. Do you think that tv show can play an important part for teaching culture? | | | |
| 7. Do you think that newspaper is full of cultural content of real life situation? | | | |
| 8. Are these cultural aspects found in the published texts that you use? | | | |
| 10. Have you adjusted your teaching style based on your knowledge of your students’ culture since beginning teaching in Bangladesh? | | | |
| 11. Do you use textbooks in your classes? | | | |
| 12. If you do, do your textbooks include any cultural information? | | | |
| | | | |

13. How do you feel about the quality of cultural content in EFL textbooks and can you suggest any recommendations?

14. What are your feelings about the cultural content in EFL textbooks in general?