

Enhancing EFL learners' Cross-Cultural Communication Skills through Teaching Culture A Case Study of EFL Students at Sudanese Universities,(2022)

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Abstract:

The study aims at: improving EFL students' cross cultural communication abilities and facilitating their understanding of other cultures through teaching authentic texts. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method. The data for the study were collected by means of a questionnaire from EFL Sudanese University students. Then the collected data were analyzed by SPSS program. The study came out with many results, the most important ones are. EFL students need to communicate cross culturally, teaching L2 culture improves the intercultural competence of the students, it is not sufficient for the EFL teachers to teach only the grammar part of the target language, but they must also help students enhance cross-cultural competence awareness, through intercultural communication, students can learn more about other people and their unique cultures and cross-cultural pragmatic competence exposes EFL learners to knowledge of traditions and beliefs of different societies. The study recommends: EFL learners should be enabled to cross culturally communicate with others, EFL teachers should teach cultural topics

which enhance cross cultural communication skills.

Key Words: cross cultural communication, intercultural competence, cross-cultural pragmatic competence.

مستخلص:

تهدف الدراسة إلى تطوير مهارات طلاب اللغة الانجليزية في التواصل عبر الثقافات وتيسير فهمهم للثقافات الاخرى خلال تدريس النصوص الأصلية في صفوف تدريس اللغة الانجليزية. استخدمت الدراسة المنهج التحليلي الوصفي كما استخدمت نظام الاستبانة لجمع البيانات من خمسة وعشرين (25) طالباً وطالبة من طلاب الجامعات السودانية. تم تحليل البيانات إحصائياً بنظام (SPSS). وبعد تحليل البيانات توصلت الدراسة للآتي: يحتاج طلاب اللغة الانجليزية إلى إكتساب مقدرات التواصل عبر الثقافات، تدريس الثقافة في صفوف تدريس اللغة الانجليزية يطور مهارات الطلاب في التواصل الثقافي، لا يكفي لمعلم اللغة الانجليزية فقط تدريس القواعد اللغوية بل يجب عليه تحسين مهارات الطلاب في التواصل الثقافي وتطوير وعيهم بالثقافات الاخرى ومعرفة تقاليد تلك المجتمعات ومعتقداتهم. توصي الدراسة بمساعدة الطلاب على إكتساب مهارات التواصل عبر الثقافات كما توصي بتدريس النصوص الأدبية التي تساعد على تنمية مهارات التواصل الثقافي.

1.0 Introduction

Integrating cross-cultural communication in EFL classes helps students develop the ability to communicate in a social context (Dash,2015). It helps avoid some challenges such as misconception, misinterpretation and misunderstanding during the interaction of two or more different cultures. Thus, teaching and learning a target language must not be separable from its cultural norms and values. Hence, it is not sufficient for the EFL teachers to teach only the grammar part of the target language, but they must also help students enhance cross-cultural pragmatic competence awareness. (Jie,2010) claims that language teachers must focus on three points when teaching culture in EFL classes: (a) helping students become familiar with cross-cultural differences; (b) helping students tolerate each other's culture by considering the cultural

norms and values in the target language; and (c) helping students to learn the target language along with its culture. Teachers' task of making students understand the different cultural norms and values in the EFL context is essential for learners to understand what seems polite in one culture and impolite in a different culture. Thus, using a word or an expression may be morally acceptable in one culture and not in another. In this perspective, (Bouchard, 2011) affirms that the challenges of cross-communication often occur when the felicity conditions are not respected.

1.1 The Problem of the Study

While EFL students need to cross culturally interact, many of them face challenges in cross-cultural communication abilities. Many of EFL learners lack confidence to present a piece of discourse orally. They do not speak English in real life interaction. As such, EFL students need to be taught how to speak through effective teaching techniques.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study aims at:

1. improving EFL students cross cultural communication skills.
2. facilitating EFL learners' understanding of other cultures through interaction with other English varieties.

1.3 Questions of the Study

The study will answer the following questions:

1. To what extent can EFL learners culturally communicate with different people?
2. To what extent do EFL teachers facilitate learners' un-

derstanding of other cultures through interaction with other English varieties?

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

The study states the following hypotheses:

1. Teaching culture in EFL classes improves EFL students cross cultural communication skills.
2. Creating interaction with other English varieties facilitates EFL learners' understanding of other cultures.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study explains the benefits of teaching culture in EFL classes to enhance EFL learners cross cultural communication skills and their comprehension of other cultural contexts. For the teachers, it shows them the teaching techniques of culture. For the learners it improve their cultural knowledge.

1.6 The Methodology of the Study

The study will follow the descriptive analytical method. The data for this study will be obtained through a questionnaire from (25) EFL university students at Sudanese Universities. The collected data were analyzed statistically with SPSS Program.

2.0 Literature Review

At the time when communication across the world increases in scale, scope and speed, communicative competence is required to avoid misunderstanding arising from differing expectations in language use and diverging beliefs, worldviews, values, attitudes and ideologies. Cross-cultural communication is the communication that occurs between people who may have different cultural perspectives of interpretation of words and expressions

(Stringer and Cassidy, 2009).. Today, we communicate beyond the national borders by e-mailing, chatting, blogging, web browsing besides speaking and writing. In these days of global networking, we are thrown into the society of deterritorialized, hybrid, changing and conflicting cultures, where we are expected to become pluricultural individuals.

2.1 EFL Students' Communicative Competence

Byram, et al., (2001) define communicative competence as the ability to interact with 'others and accept other perspectives. It is taken for granted that if one observes dispassionately, analyzes critically, interprets, and discusses cultural differences, one would be led to mutual understanding and respect, and becomes more tolerant of cultural differences. EFL students need to interact and communicate cross culturally. To do this, they need to develop cross-cultural awareness and competence. As such, they need to develop intercultural communicative competence which requires knowledge, motivation and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures (Barnett and Lee 2002). However, in teaching English language, it is necessary to incorporate aspects of cross-cultural awareness as a part of the their studies to immerse students in effective intercultural communicative competence (Krasner, 1999). In any society which expects its education system to prepare people for living in an internationalized culture and globalized economy, and also for the interaction between people of different cultures within and across national boundaries, the process of tertiary socialization and

the acquisition of intercultural competence are clearly desirable. (Alred and Byram, 2002)

As such, linguistic and cultural diversities are significant factors for communication with the people of diverse race, custom, and ethnicity. Cross-cultural awareness implies preparing students for effective and competent intercultural communication which requires not only mere teaching of linguistic skills like phonology, morphology, lexicology, and syntax, but also the vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness. Communication that lacks appropriate cultural content often results in an odd or humorous situation leading to misunderstanding and miscommunication (Kirvalidze, 2008). In other words, learning a language effectively requires knowing something about the cultural aspects of that language.

Consequently, the intercultural awareness to language teaching and learning is believed to be one of the many paradigms in this complex global perspective. No one involved in teaching English is likely to argue for cross-cultural misunderstanding. Nevertheless, there are many challenges related to teaching English in a cross-cultural context and the issue of exploring the challenges and the way to come out of the deficiency of the learners has been a matter of immense concern since long. Therefore, intercultural competence must be seen as a generic competence. So, the reason behind the teaching of culture is "to help the second language learners develop the ability to use the target language in culturally appropriate ways for the specific purpose of empathizing and interacting

with speakers of the target language” (Barnett and Lee, 2002). Today, in the era of globalization, professionals, learners, and others are involved in meaningful interactions and negotiations with people of the same or other discourse community. Negotiation is considered as a powerful device enabling speakers to engage in cross-cultural communication.

2.2 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is an important aspect in EFL classrooms since EFL classrooms are one of the learners’ environments to learn the culture and intercultural communication.. As students will not only obtain the new knowledge about intercultural but more than that, they will get the chance to enlarge their relation with different people and will be easy to communicate with them. As result, in future, they will reduce culture shock if they make relation and communication in various cultures. (Lustig, et al,2010) stated that the need to understand the role of culture in interpersonal communication is growing. Because of demographic, technological, economic, peace and interpersonal concerns, intercultural competence is now more vital than ever.

Considering the advantages of participating in EFL classroom of learning a culture, the students can enhance their awareness of different culture both of their own culture and cross-culture. (Farnia,etal.2009) found that Cross-cultural and contrastive pragmatics studies help teachers with enhancing their students’ awareness of the social and cultural differences of the native language and

the language they are learning. (Valencia,etal,2009) found that the teacher can improve their EFL teaching context through the enrichment bilaterally in the purpose of enhancing awareness of diversity in culture. Moreover, the students can increase their cultural sensitivity in culture.

2.3 English as an International Language

The English language has become an international language from that of a tiny island off the European continent since it was brought from the Continent 1,500 years ago. As language changes in time and space, English has changed in Britain and has transformed into North American English, Australian English, and further into Nigerian, Indian, Philippine, Singaporean Englishes as the language spread globally. In its destinations, English has developed into local varieties by adopting and adapting to local languages and cultures in its process of inevitable localization and internalization. English has adopted concepts and forms of indigenous languages and incorporating local cultures and traditions in order to accommodate local needs and for the sake of identities. Cook (2003, 29) points out that being a native speaker does not presuppose that he or she has proficiency in writing, a large size of vocabulary, a wide range of styles, and ability to communicate across diverse communities. In all of these aspects of proficiency, he continues, the expertise of the non-native speaker often exceeds that of many native speakers

2.4 Developing Students' Cross-Cultural Awareness

Learners need to know what is appropriate to say to whom, and in what situations. Hence, the teaching of

English as a second or foreign language should go beyond teaching the language as a linguistic skill to teaching the language in a way that incorporates intercultural awareness and understanding as well (Peterson and Coltrane, 2003). Teaching culture thus becomes a vital part of ELT as language is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways. So, to construct a meaningful communication, cultural awareness must be viewed as enabling language proficiency, for language and culture are interwoven to such degree that one cannot separate them without losing the significance of either language or culture (Jiang, 1994). Moreover, Kramsch claimed, “culture in language teaching is an expendable fifth skill, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 26). Though every teacher has his/her own style of teaching, there are different national and cultural academic traditions as well as cultural differences in pedagogy.

3.0 Material and Method:

The participants of this study were the EFL students at Sudanese Universities. A questionnaire was distributed to twenty five (25) of them who were randomly selected from three Sudanese Universities for collecting the required data. Then, the collected data were statistically analyzed with the SPSS program. The statistical analysis were shown in the following tables.

4.0 Data Analysis

The study used the SPSS Program for analyzing the questionnaire statements as it is appear below in the following table and diagram

Tables	agree	percent	neutral	disagree	Total
Table (1)	23	92	1	1	25
Table (2)	21	84	3	1	25
Table (3)	20	80	3	2	25
Table (4)	22	88	2	1	25
Table (5)	24	96	1	0	25
Table (6)	23	92	1	1	25
Table (7)	21	84	2	2	25

4.1 Results and Discussions

Statement(1) Teaching L2 Culture improves the intercultural competence of the students

Table (1) indicated that (92%) of the sample agree that, applying metacognitive strategy develops learners' comprehension skills while (4%) of the sample are neutral and (4%) disagree with the statement. According to the statistical analysis the statement is justified.

Statement (2) It is not sufficient for the EFL teachers to teach only the grammar part of the target language, but they must also help students enhance cross-cultural pragmatic competence awareness.

Table (2) indicated that (84%) of the sample agree, (12%)

are neutral and (4%) disagree with the statement. Therefore, this statement is proved.

Statement (3) EFL students need to understand the different cultural norms and values in the EFL context.

Table (3) showed that the majority of the sample (80%) agree with the statement, (12%) of them are neutral and (8%) disagree with the statement. This statement is justified

Statement (4) It is essential for learners to understand what seems polite in one culture and impolite in a different culture.

Table (4) showed that most respondents (88%) agree with the statement while (8%) of them are neutral and (4%) disagree with the statement.

Statement (5) Through intercultural communication, one can learn more about other people and their unique cultures, and about ourselves culture as well as our background.

Table (5) showed that most of respondents (96%) agree that through intercultural communication, one can learn more about other people and their unique cultures, and about ourselves culture as well as our background while (4%) of respondents are neutral. Therefore, this statement is proved.

Statement (6) The teaching culture is similar importance with language teaching, both of them are needed by students in EFL classrooms.

Table (6) indicated that (92%) of the sample agree that the teaching culture is similar importance with language

teaching, both of them are needed by students in EFL classrooms while (4%) are neutral and (4%) disagree with the statement. This statement is justified.

Statement (7) Cross-cultural pragmatic competence exposes EFL learners to knowledge of conventions, rules, beliefs and principles of different societies.

Table (7) showed that (84%) of the sample agree that cross-cultural pragmatic competence exposes EFL learners to knowledge of conventions, rules, beliefs and principles of different societies while (8%) of the sample are neutral and (8%) disagree. Thus, this statement is accepted.

5.0 Conclusion and Findings

The study stresses the role of teaching culture in enhancing EFL students' cross cultural communication skills and showing the importance of teachers' role in facilitating students' cultural interaction. The study measured University students perceptions about cross cultural communication ability through a questionnaire. The study came out with the following results

5.1 Findings

1. Teaching L2 Culture improves the intercultural competence of the students
2. It is not sufficient for the EFL teachers to teach only the grammar part of the target language, but they must also help students enhance cross-cultural pragmatic competence awareness
3. EFL students need to understand the different cultural norms and values in the EFL context.
4. It is essential for learners to understand what seems po-

- lite in one culture and impolite in a different culture.
5. Through intercultural communication, one can learn more about other people and their unique cultures, and about ourselves culture as well as our background.
 6. The teaching culture is similar importance with language teaching, both of them are needed by students in EFL classrooms.
 7. Cross-cultural pragmatic competence exposes EFL learners to knowledge of conventions, rules, beliefs and principles of different societies.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends:

1. EFL learners should be enabled to cross culturally communicate with others.
2. EFL teachers should teach cultural topics which enhance cross cultural communication skills.
3. Learners of English language should understand what is seems polite in one
4. culture and impolite in a different culture.

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