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CULTURAL IDENTITY AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

Within the conventional view of language; language is seen as a system of words, letters, symbols or figures used to crystalize ideas. Yet, the real meaning and purpose of language is actually demonstrated through communication .i.e. the actual use of that system in real correspondences. Language is one of the causal factors of realizing people's culture in the world. In fact, language as one of the means of passing on numerous ideas, emotions , opinions and information attends multi functions in outlining the varied cultural identities of a specific group of people. Diverse languages typify different geographical settings which reflect various people's cultural identities. The present term paper is intended to investigate the role entailed by cultural identity in reinforcing Iraqi EFL university students second language learning . .To achieve the aim of the study, a sample of (30) 4th year students at the Department of English/College of Education/ Ibn- Rushd /university of Baghdad for the academic year 2023-2024 have been chosen to respond to the items of the questionnaire constructed by the researchers and validated by being exposed to a group of

professors in the field. The students' responses have been statistically analyzed and come to prove positively the role of cultural identity in boosting second language learning.

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الهوية الثقافية وتعلم لغة ثانية

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المخلص

معلومات الارشفة

في النظرة التقليدية للغة؛ تُعتبر اللغة نظامًا من الكلمات والحروف والرموز أو الأشكال المستخدمة لبلورة الأفكار. ومع ذلك، فإن المعنى الحقيقي للغة والغرض منها يتجلى في الواقع من خلال التواصل، أي الاستخدام الفعلي لهذا النظام في المراسلات الحقيقية. تُعد اللغة أحد العوامل المسببة لإدراك ثقافة الناس في العالم. في الواقع، تلعب اللغة، باعتبارها إحدى وسائل نقل العديد من الأفكار والعواطف والآراء والمعلومات، وظائف متعددة في تحديد الهويات الثقافية المتنوعة لمجموعة معينة من الناس. تُجسد اللغات المتنوعة بيئات جغرافية مختلفة تعكس الهويات الثقافية لمختلف الشعوب. إن الهدف من هذا البحث هو تقصي الدور الذي تنطوي عليه الهوية الثقافية في تعزيز تعلم طلاب الجامعات العراقيين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية. ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة، تم اختيار عينة مكونة من (30) طالبًا وطالبة من المرحلة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية/كلية التربية/ابن رشد/جامعة بغداد للعام الدراسي 2023-2024 للإجابة على فقرات الاستبيان الذي أعده الباحثان، وتم التحقق من صحته من خلال عرضه على مجموعة من الأساتذة المختصين في هذا المجال. وقد تم تحليل إجابات الطلاب إحصائيًا، وقد جاءت النتائج لتعزز إيجابيا دور الهوية الثقافية في تعزيز تعلم اللغة الثانية.

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1.1Introduction: Language and culture are virtually correlated ; to learn a second language is to be knowledgeable of the target language culture . i.e. a student should be equipped with two types of culture; visible and invisible one Murcia et al(2020). The first is related to literature, the arts and the history of certain people besides their style of dress ,customs, cuisine and traditions whereas the second is more sophisticated due to the fact that it refers to sociocultural norms, beliefs, values and assumptions that embodied within all aspects of language use including classroom. Scollon and Scollon (2001) indicate that the culturally determined concepts of what is appropriate , inappropriate and expected behavior are acquired through socialization and become afterwards attached to an individual's identity. The present study is to highlight the role entailed by cultural identity in upholding second language learning.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW: Culture has often been assumed is as a bulk of knowledge that people have about a specific society. This bulk of knowledge may be manifested in certain aspects; as knowledge about cultural objet d'art or works of art; as information about geographical and historical sites and societies; as facts about events and signs; or as facts about habits of living. It is also possible to consider this aspect of culture in terms of information and to instill the culture as if it were a set of the learnable documentations which can be mastered by students. In teaching and learning context, this knowledge-based perspective about culture is characterized by instructing information about another country, nation , institutions, traditions ,customs and relics. Culture is not, however, simply a bulk of knowledge but rather a context in which people lead their lives , communicate and share meanings with each others. (https://tlg.unisa.edu.au/uploads/1/2/7/6/127656642/gllt_ch2.pdf).

1.2.1Cultural Identity and Language: Cultural identity is a multifaceted and stunning textile merged from language threads which is involved with beliefs, heritage, and traditions. Language is wider than a way of communication; it's a repository that holds the spirit of our cultural gene. It symbolizes individuals' history, emotions, and life experiences. It's a mirror that reflects the treasures of the past and figures out the route to the future.

Languages ,in fact, are just like the narrators of certain culture. They record the tales of people, passed down through generations. The splendor of languages appears in their ability to express emotions and shades that can be missed in translation.

English, as an international language, often strives for catching the full range of feelings and cultural shades. In today's world of globalization, English has become the lingua franca in business fields. English, nowadays is highly developed all over the world to facilitate communication and performance across varied functions and locations.

Many institutions and companies today underscore English in overcoming barriers to communication, collaboration, and expansion. English is, indeed, the common ground for many businesses worldwide. (www.linkedin.com/pulse/embracing-cultural-identity-english-my-first-language-richards-zlrke).

1.2.2 Culture Teaching Approaches: There are certain approaches that can be classified in diverse ways. Simply, they can be divided mainly into two approaches: those which emphasize typically on the TL culture .i.e. the mono-cultural approach and those which are founded on comparing SL and TL cultures .i.e. the comparative approach. The mono-cultural approach was typical for the courses like, British life and institutions which is considered insufficient currently because it does not contemplate learners' understanding of their own culture. <https://faclettire.univ-tlemcen.dz/assets>. Whereas the comparative approach, focuses that TL culture should be related to learners' own culture. (Buttjes and Byram :1991), cited in (Edginton: 2000) claim that learners are not to be supplied with "a one-way course of cultural information" they should be stimulated to replicate on their own and foreign culture. The comparative approach call on the learner's own information, views and principles which constitute a foundation for effective communication with individuals from other cultures. (Byram: 1994) states that learners cannot free themselves from their own culture and merely move to another. For learners to reject their own culture is to reject their own actuality. Actually, the comparative approach is to supply learners with a double perspective, viz. their own culture and the target one. Thus, the comparative approach implicates evaluation but not kind of comparison with something which is better, but kind of cultivating what is all too familiar. In fact, Comparison makes the strange, the other, familiar, and makes the familiar, the self, strange – and therefore easier to reconsider.(Byram and Planet: 2000). Comparison bounces learners with a new insight of their own language , culture and investigates their presumed nature. (Byram: 1998).Out of comparison, learners can figure out both similarities and differences of their own and other cultures. In return, this may lead to better familiarity, understanding and acceptance.

(Risager:1998) indicates that the intercultural approach is centered on the idea that culture is best learned through comparison. Although the focus is on the target culture, the intercultural approach attends to the relations between the learners' own country and the country where the language is spoken. It may contain associations between the two and it improves learners' understanding of both. The goal is to cultivate learners' intercultural and communicative competences, which would eventually empower them to perform as negotiators between the two cultures. The approach has widely gained recognition since the 1980s. The multicultural approach calls on the idea that multi cultures exist within one culture.

The multicultural approach stresses on the ethnic and linguistic multiplicity of the target country as well as on the learners' own. As in the intercultural approach, comparison is necessary. (Risager :1998) also emphasizes that a balanced and anti-racist view of cultures should be involved. This approach focuses the principle that cultures are not monolithic. Risager(1998) suggests a third approach ;the transcultural approach. The main point behind it is that, cultures are intertwined in the up-to-date world due to wide-ranging tourism, international communication systems, economic interdependence, globalization and migration in addition to the fact that foreign languages are actually spoken as lingua franca among a great deal of people. Within the transcultural approach, the foreign language is dealt with as an international language. Its key purpose is to enable learners to use language for international communication. As a result, it could be argued that it is unnecessary to associate the foreign language to any particular culture. Nevertheless , Byram (1997:55) asserts that "although it is possible to introduce topics which are of universal significance in all cultures, such an approach leaves learners without topics which are characteristic of a particular country that is the ones which "characterize its uniqueness for the language learner". Moreover, such an approach refutes the relation between language and culture.

The mono-cultural approach according to Risager(1998) is characterized by what he names the foreign cultural approach. It is built on the idea of a single culture and emphasizes on that country's culture where the language is spoken.i.e.TL culture, It does not focus on the learners' own country and the relations between the two cultures. The aim behind teaching the language is to progress the so-called native speaker 's communicative and cultural competence. The approach was prevailing until the 1980s and is currently criticized due to the absence of relationships between the two cultures.

(Galloway :1985)provides some other examples of the mono-cultural approach like;(Wiśniewska-Brogowskan:1985)

a.The theme-based or thematic approach to culture teaching is built around specific themes, e.g, ceremony, love ,symbolism, , humour , , beauty, value honour, , realism intellectuality, the art of living, , family, liberty, patriotism, religion, and education, all found as representative of a culture. Despite the fact that mono-cultural by nature tries to demonstrate the relations and values in a certain culture and, therefore, assists learners to realize it better. (Liiv:1999) Though mono-cultural normally, it tries to display the relations and values in a given culture and, therefore, helps learners to realize it better. However, it is sometimes believed that the theme-based approach offers learners with a segmented view of the target culture. It might be challenging for them to see individual people and understand social processes and values from this perspective and could lead to stereotyping (Wiśniewska-Brogowska:1985)

b. The topic-based approach focuses on more wide-ranging and cross-sectional topics which

involve numerous cultural matters. As stated by Alan McLean (1994, cited in Wiśniewska-

Brogowska), a “topic-based approach can provide an oblique yet original encounter with British life and culture. It deals with key elements of current British life, such as class, privatisation, education, health, not in isolation but within a series of unifying contexts.” Wiśniewska-Brogowska argues that employing the topic-based approach in teaching culture cherishes language class and cultivates a more universal and cohesive view of the target culture. She believes that “knowing about the people who

use the language, understanding their behaviours, beliefs and customs increases cultural awareness and promotes greater personal interest both in the language and the culture.”

Durant (1997: 31), supporting the topic- based approach, concentrates that learning should be based on analytic and comparative methods.

c.The problem-oriented approach intends to get learners concerned in target culture and inspires them to perform certain research on their own. Seelye (1993) indicates that teacher’s role is crystalized in outlining the problem that concerns learners.

He asserts that the more defined a problem is the simpler it is for a learner to attain the anticipated results. The teacher should also direct learners to the bibliographic work .i.e. students to be taught how to skim and scan the texts on certain topics that relevant to their interest fields rather than get bogged down in the stream of knowledge .

It's important to take into consideration that the amount of material given to learners should be accessible and the outcome of students' research should be presented either orally or written.

d. The task-oriented approach is different from other approaches that it is represented in having co-operative tasks .i.e. Learners work in groups on diverse facets of the target culture. The students exchange their findings and discuss with each other in order to constitute a broader picture. Finally, learners infer the information within the context of the target culture and make a comparison with their own. (Tomalin and Stempleski :1993).

e. The skill-centred approach is distinguished from the other approaches being more practical and could be beneficial for those who intend to live within the target-language community.

It intends to improve learners' skills, which they may need to handle issues involved with miscommunication between cultures or societies. According to Bolt(2021), the skill-centered approach asserts awareness , skills and content in addition to similarities and differences in cultures. Whatever approach is used, it is essential that teaching culture as (Seelye:1993) indicates should focus on "how societal values, institutions, language, and the land affect the thought and lifestyle of someone living in the culture we are studying." Second, association of student's own and the target culture is significant. (www.faclettre.univtlemcen.dz/assets/uploads/DOCUMENTS/culture.pdf).

1.2.3 Culture and Language Interlocking

Language and culture are inextricable units as indicated by(Brown, 2007) that language not only mirrors culture but also vigorously contributes to its realization. The sophisticated dance between language and culture (Kramsch, 1993) is apparent in the realm of English language learning, where the acquisition process surpasses simple grammatical and lexical proficiency; it intricately implicates embracing the cultural overtones interwoven within the language.

Beyond the systems of language, learners should explore the cultural layers, understand the nuances that figure expression and meaning (Kramersch, 2013). (Crystal, 2003) indicates that since English is an international language, it fundamentally reflects the varied cultural backgrounds of its speakers. As learners advance in their linguistic knowledge, they inexorably run into a numerous cultural elements, covering idiomatic words, metaphors, figurative speech

and social conventions (Kramersch, 2014). These cultural occurrences are not only linguistic obstacles but accesses to better understanding. The conception of these cultural nuances enriches learners' communicative competence, empowering them to figure out the contextual complexities, sociolinguistic appropriateness and pragmatics ingrained in the language (Kramersch, 2013). The matter is not just only related to learning words rather than conceiving the cultural milieu that enlivens those words . (Byram et al., 2002) stress that the importance of culture in learning a second language goes far beyond being linguistically proficient rather than motivates learners considerably to perceive language through assimilating impeccably cultural facets into language learning. Second language teachers in their turn should seek for opportunities to develop learners' intercultural competence ; a skill believed vigorous for traversing worldwide settings and promoting open-mindedness and empathy (Byram et al., 2002; Canagarajah, 2013). The way that learning a second language is flourished through cultural investigation, enriching learners with the skills to speak and communicate seamlessly in various situations. Nevertheless, in teaching context, the operative association of culture and language creates challenges on educators part. The prevalent one is the limited cultural content in course materials (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). (McKay, 2002) indicates that most of second language syllabi excessively underscore grammar and vocabulary and neglect the culturally rich aspects of the language. This lapse produces frustrated learners scarcely exposed to real-life exchanges and cultural variety. Have that challenge overcome necessitates an alteration in educational primacies, where cultural content should be an essential part of the textbooks not an appendix to it. What aggravate this issue are language stereotypes implanted in learning materials (Pennycook, 2007), which may unintentionally extend cultural biases and obstruct learners' understanding of the factual multiplicity within English-speaking communities (Hall, 1997).

According to (Widdowson, 1994) to nurture cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in language learning, it is authoritative to address these stereotypes by vigorously stimulating stereotypes, educators can construct an environment where learners involve with the language genuinely and realize its shades apart from predetermined notions prearranged norms and inevitable behavioral patterns. (Kramsch, 1993) indicates that cultural misapprehensions may also rise when learners misread cultural performs and standards requiring educators to traverse this contest and stimulate cross-cultural understanding among learners (Liddicoat, 2007). In miscellaneous-cultural classrooms, teachers should vigorously spot and accept various cultural viewpoints, avoiding portraying any specific culture (Seidlhofer, 2011). This necessitates not just to theoretically acknowledge that but to take practical steps to form a wide-ranging atmosphere where every single culture is appreciated and not just acknowledged. Educators should be trained on intercultural competence to equip them with the essential skills to pilot cultural variances efficiently (Seidlhofer, 2001). Furthermore, culturally responsive teaching methodologies can promote comprehensive learning environments that confirm learners' dissimilar cultural identities (Byram et al., 2002). The matter is not just about understanding cultures; it is about making a situation where every learner feels their culture is a fundamental part of second language learning process. Varying course materials by picking genuine cultural content imitating numerous English-speaking communities internationally provides teachers with a powerful means to offer learners with a widespread understanding of the second language's global nature (Graddol, 2006). It is not just about English teaching; it is about establishing a holistic view of the language which replicates its dynamic progress across cultures and geographies.

Additionally, technology integration constitutes an effective tool to augment the interconnection of culture and language (Phillipson, 1992). Through online language conversations, virtual cultural immersion programs, and multimedia content, learners can enthusiastically engage with a wide spectrum of culturally miscellaneous resources (Risager, 2007). Technology becomes not just a convenience but a bridge, connecting learners with real-world cultural experiences and nurturing a worldwide perspective.

1.2.4 Challenges Faced by Educators

The main challenges encountered by language educators are summarized as;

1.2.4.1 Limited Cultural Content

The scarcity of cultural content in English syllabus constitutes as a substantial concern for language teachers (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). The matter which restricts learners' exposure to real-world language use and cultural diversity (Clarke, 2019; Liddicoat, 2018). As Norton (2019) pertinently notes, learners may unintentionally miss cherished visions into the English traditions, customs and beliefs worldwide. This absence of cultural exposure impedes the development of cultural competence the essential aspect of language learning nowadays. (Sharifian, 2020).

Hence, it is preferable to integrate cultural content into syllabus to sufficiently train students for the sophisticated challenges of international communication, as opposed to simply being a pedagogical concern.

1.2.4.2 Language stereotypes

Language learning syllabus may accidentally maintain stereotypes and cultural biases (Pennycook, 2007). These stereotypes can be misleading, impeding learners' ability to comprehend the real diversity of English-speaking communities (Hall, 1997). Quite common in language learning resources are stereotypes related to language accents and dialects (Kramsch, 2014). Certain accents may be depicted as superior or inferior, strengthening linguistic prejudices and limiting appreciation of linguistic diversity (Byram et al., 2002). Identifying the effect of these portrayals, educators must guide learners in critically analyzing these stereotypes, inspiring them to question preconceived notions and nurturing a more wide-ranging view of language varieties. Moreover, gender-related language stereotypes are predominant (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

1.2.4.3 Cultural misunderstandings

Cultural misinterpretations in language learning may result in miscommunication and cross-cultural struggles (Kramsch, 1993). The interaction of culture and language necessitates learners' consciousness of diverse cultural norms and practices (Byram et al., 2002).

Language learning

input, designed to address potential cultural misinterpretations, should expose learners to various cultural viewpoints, aiding them to traverse possible misinterpretations (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; McKay, 2002). The matter that teachers need to guide students through the cultural scenes integral in a language as well as its linguistic abilities. Typecasts present in language learning materials may contribute to cultural misunderstandings (Pennycook, 2007). Instructors must be attentive in choosing materials that avoid essentializing any specific culture and instead nurture a nuanced understanding of cultural diversity (Hall, 1997). This involves educators serving as custodians, vigorously modeling the cultural narratives learners run into to ensure they are abundant, reliable, and free from stereotypes.

1.3 Methodology: The research methodology of this term paper is based on the questionnaire. In order to investigate the cultural identity for Iraqi university students, a questionnaire (see Appendix) has been constructed by the researchers, and been validated by giving the initial version of the questionnaire to a number of Jurors in the field of English Language Teaching and Linguistics. According to their remarks, the final version of the questionnaire has been modified. The questionnaire has been given to the sample of the study .i.e. 4th year students in the English Department/ College of Education/Ibn-Rushd/University of Baghdad for the academic year 2023-2024. The questionnaire consists of (20) items with five numbered and qualitatively valued responses accompanying each. Thus, each question requires participants to circle a number 1 through 5 with its corresponding qualitative value on an inclining scale. After a manifestation by the researcher, the subjects are instructed to complete the questionnaire to the best of their ability. Having the responses been statistically analyzed, It has turned out that the more perception Iraqi EFL university students have of TL cultural identity, the better their English language learning will be.

Conclusions: The term-paper is finalized with certain conclusions; Language learning nowadays necessitates versatile approaches that manage to benefit from the latest technology in language instruction context highlighting TL culture and multi-cultural classrooms. Language teachers need to acquire skills that respect and accept cultural differences in a language classroom, enhancing collaborative student- teacher relations and encouraging students to accept diversity in one classroom.

The inadequacy of cultural content in English syllabus creates a considerable problem for language teachers, the matter which unfortunately deprive learners from valued images into the English traditions, customs and beliefs worldwide. The more Iraqi EFL university perceiving TL culture, the better their English learning and performance will be.

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Appendix

Questionnaire of TL Cultural Identity

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, using the following 5 point scale, where 1 stands for “totally disagree” and 5 stands for “strongly agree”. The 5-Likert scale responses are shown as;

1 2 3 4 5

(strongly disagree ;somewhat disagree; neutral; somewhat agree; strongly agree)

1. You have an easy connection with those who speak your own language
2. You find it easy to communicate with people from other cultures
3. You like being in a class of cultural diversity
4. You like to recognize how students of cultural diversity think and behave
5. You like being in a heterogeneous class
6. You are interested in interacting with students across diverse cultures to develop your language
7. You find it easy being in a class where many students speaking different languages
8. You like watching movies and reviewing pictures and images depict other cultures

9. You develop certain skills and strategies to understand students from other cultures
10. You show respect to other cultures beliefs and customs
11. You prefer to speak with the target language in a class where many languages spoken
12. You encourage a friendship across the mixed gender in a class
13. You manage to dispel some of the mindsets and stereotypes
14. You experience a challenge towards your cultural values
15. You mind attending celebrations across other cultures and religions
16. You experience sensitivity towards other cultures festivals and practices
17. You share things you learn about other cultures with others
18. You feel cautious when dealing with students from other cultures
19. You distance yourself from cultural diversity conversations
20. You communicate easily in a cultural diversity class