



Culture Shock and Its Impact on Motivation and Academic Achievement among Arabic-Speaking English Learners

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Abstract in English

This study investigates how culture shock affects the motivation and academic performance of Arabic-speaking EFL learners at Diyala University. The results demonstrate that students experience confusion and discomfort because their cultural background causes them to use different communication methods and social customs and idiomatic expressions. The research shows that culture shock has two types of effects on motivation because it caused some students to lose interest but it also motivated other students to learn English. The research shows that culture shock raises three academic challenges which include difficulties with reading comprehension and classroom participation and taking exams. The students achieve better academic results when they begin to understand the cultural elements which exist within the language they study. The research demonstrates that English language teaching needs both cultural awareness and authentic materials because these elements foster student motivation and build their intercultural skills and improve their overall educational results.

Paper Info

Keywords

*Culture shock ,
Motivation , Arabic
–speaking.*

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1. Introduction

The educational path of Iraqi students who study English as their second language introduces them to various cultural practices and methods of communication that exist in different parts of the world. The students learn new social practices through their first language environment which teaches them about different cultural values and social behavior through both direct cultural diversity teaching and indirect contact with the language environment. Student performance in learning activities depends on the two different types of exposure they receive which determines their study attitude and their educational achievement.

English speaking students need to learn how to interpret body movements and polite behavior and conversational voice volume which differ from Arabic social customs. Students from Arab backgrounds who used to communicate in formal ways will face challenges when they attempt to speak English which requires them to use a casual style that uses short sentences and informal speech. This situation presents students with difficulties which can result in misunderstandings about cultural differences and mistakes in communication (Pisková, 2024).

Academic writing skills become more difficult for students to develop when they encounter different Arabic and English writing systems. Arabic writing uses repetition as its main technique while English

academic writing demands writers to achieve their objectives through precise and unambiguous language. English speakers use idiomatic expressions and figurative language and humor which create problems for learners who need to communicate their ideas successfully. The encountering of unfamiliar cultural practices generates discomfort and disorientation which results in culture shock according to (Lombard, 2014).

Language and culture exist as two elements that remain linked together. Learners must study the social rules and communication patterns and cultural traditions which form the framework of the target culture which they study (Nieto, 2001; Ting-Toomey and Chung, 2005). Students face a psychological obstacle from culture shock which prevents them from adapting to academic materials and instructional methods and social behavior expectations while it decreases their study motivation and their educational results. The management of Arabic-speaking EFL learners' challenges happens through comprehension by educators who need to learn about these obstacles. The research investigates how students experience culture shock through three main points which include its causes and effects and the methods to reduce its negative impact and the research shows how students from different cultures achieve academic results and develop their cross-cultural skills.

Problem Statement

The communication patterns and social customs and cultural beliefs of English-speaking environments create major challenges for Arabic-speaking EFL learners who need to adjust their English communication skills between their native language and English. Culture shock, which refers to the combination of these challenges, leads to lower student motivation and increased classroom absences and decreased academic achievements. Research on culture shock impact on Arabic-speaking EFL students remains sparse despite increased incidents of these challenges which exist in Iraqi educational systems that rely on teacher-focused learning. Building effective learner support systems requires understanding how culture shock impacts student behavior and their academic results.

Research Aim

The study examines how culture shock affects Arabic-speaking English learners' motivation and academic success while it discovers effective methods to help these learners navigate English-language learning environments.

Research Objectives

1. The research will study culture shock experiences which Arabic-speaking EFL students encounter in their daily lives.
2. The research will investigate how culture shock affects students' dedication to their English language studies.
3. The research will investigate the impact of culture shock on student academic achievement through its effect on writing skills and speaking abilities and comprehension capabilities.

Research Questions

1. What types of culture shock do Arabic-speaking EFL learners experience during their English language learning?
2. The research will study how culture shock affects students' dedication to studying English.
3. According to our research, culture shock decreases students' academic success in English studies.

Significance of the Study

The research investigates how language learning and cultural factors affects students' motivation to learn a second language. The research identifies how culture shock affects Arabic-speaking EFL learners which helps educators and curriculum developers to develop practical teaching methods. The students who face these obstacles will develop better motivation skills and academic achievements and cultural understanding abilities which will create more successful EFL instruction.

Literature Review:

Language and culture are interconnected through their complex relationship. According to Brown (2000) “language exists as a component of culture which exists as a component of language because both elements interconnect so closely that separating them results in losing the essential meaning of both language and culture.” The cultural-linguistic differences between Arabic and English create situations where people experience culture shock which causes them to feel disoriented and anxious in new cultural environments (Saylag, 2014). According to Brown (2007) students face three types of difficulties when they try to learn the cultural standards that exist between their second language and their native language.

Arab learners encounter difficulties during their English communication because they come from cultures which rely on high-context communication styles leading to dissatisfaction in classrooms and lower motivation levels (Al-Bulushi & Al-Issa, 20017). According to Schumann (1975) identified four primary elements which determine second language acquisition success because all elements except culture shock have negative effects on language learning success.

Arab students from Middle Eastern countries experience school difficulties when they must meet EFL program standards according to research conducted by Maulid and Sofi (2014). Peacock (2001) states that new cultural group members require learning all group norms while existing research tends to overlook all emotional and behavioral changes which they must learn. Saylag (2014) explains that EFL students need to identify their culture shock experience which must be treated to achieve successful learning outcomes.

Iraqis teach English as a foreign language while students face challenges understanding foundation rules and idioms and expressions which block their academic progress (Santi Indriani et al., 2021). People associate culture shock with migration but it applies to educational environments too. Fan (2010) states that culture shock functions as an incentive which leads people to build their adaptive abilities and resilience (Mustafa, 2022).

In cross-cultural learning environments teachers who have positive attitudes toward their students and use effective teaching methods lead to student motivation growth. The research shows that EFL learners who need to overcome their culture shock experience gain better academic results and greater involvement in school activities. Language barriers and homesickness and social adaptation challenges (Mulyadi et al., 2024; Aulia et al., 2023; AL-Khalil, 2019) prove that language instruction needs cultural understanding integration to produce better learning outcomes.

3. Methodology

The research used a quantitative descriptive design to assess how culture shock affects motivation and academic performance of Arabic-speaking EFL students. The researchers used a survey method to gather data from students who needed to report their views on cultural differences together with their English learning motivation and academic performance.

3.2 Participants

The research population included all students who were attending classes at Diyala University. The research sample consisted of 80 students from the English Language Department who were both male and female. The researchers used random sampling to choose participants during the second semester of the school year. The student body included individuals from different academic levels who had previously studied English as a foreign language.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

The study team collected data by using a standardized questionnaire which they created specifically for this research project. The questionnaire included statements which assessed three primary variables that included culture shock, student motivation, and academic achievement in English language learning. The instrument used a five-point Likert scale which included these response options:

- 1.Strongly Agree
- 2.Agree
- 3.Neutral
- 4.Disagree
- 5.Strongly Disagree

The questionnaire contained 21 items which are classified into three categories:

- Culture shock experienced by students
- Students' motivation toward learning English
- Academic achievement and performance in English learning

3.4 Validity and Reliability

The content validity of the questionnaire was established through instrument assessment by two English language teaching academic specialists. They evaluated the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items and provided feedback to improve the questionnaire.

The researchers used Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to evaluate questionnaire reliability through which they checked how well the items maintained their internal consistency. The reliability coefficient demonstrated that the questionnaire maintained sufficient reliability to assess the study's variables. To assess reliability, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated using SPSS. The overall reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was $\alpha = 0.74$. Since the obtained value exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, the instrument was considered sufficiently reliable for measuring culture shock, motivation, and academic achievement among Arabic-speaking EFL learners.

the questionnaire used in this study was developed based on a review of the relevant literature on culture shock, motivation, and academic achievement in English language learning. Several items were adapted from previous studies addressing cultural adjustment and second-language learning, while additional items were designed to reflect the specific experiences of Arabic-speaking EFL learners in the Iraqi context. The initial version of the instrument consisted of 21 items distributed across three dimensions: culture shock, motivation, and academic achievement.

3.5 Procedure

The academic term allowed survey distribution to students who were chosen for research participation. The research team explained the study purpose to participants while they assured participants that their information would be kept secure for research purposes only. The students needed to read each statement exactly and select their most accurate response which matched their view.

The researchers conducted descriptive statistical analysis to categorize the collected responses through standard methods including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. The researchers presented statistical results through tables which showed how culture shock affected motivation and academic performance of the study participants.

1. Results and Discussion

4.1 Findings

The descriptive statistics for the culture experience as it is show in Table 1. Items in this scale refer to students

1. Demographic information

Figure 1 Interacted with native or fluent English speakers

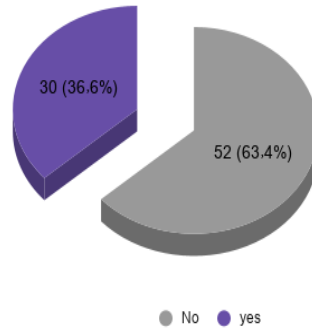


Table 1: Students' culture shock affects

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1. I experienced cultural differences when I started learning English.	16 (19.5%)	35 (42.7%)	11 (13.4%)	15 (18.3%)	5 (6.1%)	3.51
2. English communication styles are different from Arabic communication styles.	22 (26.8%)	38 (46.3%)	19 (23.2%)	2 (2.4%)	1 (1.2%)	3.95
3. Differences in values and social norms make learning English challenging.	36 (43.9%)	14 (17.1%)	25 (30.5%)	5 (6.1%)	2 (2.4%)	3.93
4. I sometimes feel confused by English idioms and slang expressions.	30 (36.6%)	19 (23.3%)	25 (30.5%)	6 (7.3%)	2 (2.4%)	3.84
5. Differences in humor and cultural references affect my understanding.	12 (14.6%)	30 (36.6%)	27 (32.9%)	13 (15.9%)	0 (0%)	3.5
6. I feel uncomfortable using English in culturally unfamiliar situations.	10 (12.2%)	24 (29.3%)	26 (31.7%)	18 (22%)	4 (4.9%)	3.21
7. Differences in classroom interaction styles were difficult for me.	3 (3.7%)	28 (34.1%)	26 (31.7%)	7 (8.5%)	18 (22%)	2.89
8. Non-verbal communication differences affect my communication	11 (13.4%)	32 (39%)	26 (31.7%)	12 (14.6%)	1 (1.2%)	3.48
9. Differences between Arabic and English grammar increase my frustration.	5 (6.1%)	35 (42.7%)	22 (26.8%)	15 (18.3%)	5 (6.1%)	2.95

Items in this sub hub refer to students' culture shock. The effect of culture shock refers to differentiations in learning style, communication and norms. Items such as " I experience culture difference", " different in values and social norms", "non-verbal communication" and " I experienced linguistic culture shock" as in Table 1 shows the majority of the students 'agree' and slightly 'strongly agree' with all items that students face culture shock.

Table 2 students' Motivation

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
10. Culture shock reduced my motivation to learn English.	8 (9.8%)	33 (40.2%)	11 (13.4%)	24 (29.3%)	6 (7.3%)	3.56
11. Cultural challenges sometimes make me feel discouraged.	2 (2.4%)	26 (31.7%)	25 (30.5%)	22 (26.8%)	7 (8.5%)	2.92
12. Understanding English culture increases my motivation.	32 (39%)	39 (47.6%)	8 (9.8%)	3 (3.7%)	0 (0%)	4.21
13. I feel more motivated when I adapt to cultural differences.	28 (34.1%)	37 (45.1%)	13 (15.9%)	3 (3.7%)	1 (1.2%)	4.07
14. Cultural exposure through English media increases my interest.	16 (19.5%)	48 (58.5%)	17 (20.7%)	1 (1.2%)	0 (0%)	3.80
15. Despite cultural challenges, I remain motivated to improve my English.	41 (50%)	29 (35.4%)	7 (8.5%)	4 (4.9%)	1 (1.2%)	4.28

The descriptive statistic in Table 2 shows the sub-hub for students' motivations towards new culture. Items in this sub-hub are the frequency of students' motivation. There are six items under this sub-hub: "culture shock reduces my motivation", "culture challenges sometimes make me feel discouraged". The means for the items are closed in the range of 2.92 to 3.56. The two items are asked with the same word with different expressions. In item "Understanding English culture increases my motivation" "Despite cultural challenges, I remain motivated to improve my English", "Despite cultural challenges, I remain motivated to improve my English" and "I feel more motivated when I adapt to cultural differences" the Means for the items are closed in the range of 3.80 to 4.28 the four items are showing high range that's indicates despite students face high culture shock are still finding ways to become motivated for learning new language.

Table 3: Academic Achievement

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
16. Culture shock negatively affected my academic performance.	5 (6.1%)	28 (34.1%)	21 (25.6%)	24 (29.3%)	4 (4.9%)	3.07
17. Cultural misunderstanding influenced my exam performance.	10 (12.2%)	26 (31.7%)	28 (34.1%)	16 (19.5%)	2 (2.4%)	3.31
18. Difficulty understanding cultural context affects my reading comprehension.	16 (19.5%)	33 (40.2%)	21 (25.6%)	8 (9.8%)	4 (4.9%)	3.59
19. Participation in English discussions improved my performance.	36 (43.9%)	13 (37.8%)	11 (13.4%)	4 (4.9%)	0 (0%)	3.32
20. As I adapted to cultural differences, my grades improved.	16 (19.5%)	43 (52.4%)	18 (22%)	3 (3.7%)	2 (2.4%)	3.82
21. My academic achievement reflects my ability to adjust to English culture.	18 (22%)	36 (43.9%)	19 (23.2%)	8 (9.8%)	1 (1.2%)	3.82

The descriptive statistic in Table 3 shows the sub-hub for students' academic achievement throughout learning a new language. Items in this sub-hub are the frequency of students' academic achievement. There are six items under this sub-hub:

"Culture shock negatively affected my academic performance," students respond, with most of the students agreeing and slightly disagreeing. "Cultural misunderstanding influenced my exam

performance.” Students' responses are agree and slightly neutral to this item. “*Participation in English discussions improved my performance*”, “*As I adapted to cultural differences, my grades improved.*” and “*My academic achievement reflects my ability to adjust to English culture.*” Most students respond strongly agree and agree with these three items. The means for the items are closed in the range of 3.07 to 3.82.

4.2 Discussion of the Findings

The present study investigated the impact of culture shock on motivation and academic achievement among Arabic-speaking EFL learners at Diyala University. The findings demonstrate that students experience different cultural aspects while studying English which affects their motivation and academic performance in multiple ways.

Culture Shock Experienced by Students:

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that most students reported experiencing cultural differences while learning English. The study found that students scored higher on items which included differences in communication styles and social norms and idioms and non-verbal communication. Arabic-speaking learners face culture shock between moderate and high levels when they deal with English learning materials and communication methods.

The statement about English communication styles showing differences from Arabic communication styles received the highest mean score of 3.95 which demonstrates the large cultural distinction between these two language systems. Brown (2000) argued that learners must learn both language structures and cultural communication patterns because language remains connected to cultural identity.

A large number of students believed that social value differences together with normative social value differences created obstacles in their English learning (mean = 3.93). The result shows how Arabic high-context communication creates a cultural gap with English-speaking societies which use low-context communication methods. The differences can lead to misunderstandings between learners who need to understand messages and idioms and humor and informal expressions.

Students face challenges when they need to interpret English idioms and slang terms which achieve a mean score of 3.84. The linguistic elements depend entirely on cultural knowledge and when people do not have this knowledge it leads to miscommunication and increased frustration. The results show that foreign language students face challenges with new cultural elements which they find in the language they are learning according to Saylag (2014). Arabic-speaking learners encounter different types of culture shock which affect their educational process according to the findings of the study.

The Effect of Culture Shock on Students' Motivation

The results shown in Table 2 demonstrate that culture shock has a mixed influence on students' motivation. The students who experienced culture shock showed decreased motivation according to their reports (mean = 3.56) while the students who learned English cultural knowledge showed increased motivation to study the language.

The item “*Understanding English culture increases my motivation*” recorded a high mean score of 4.21, suggesting that cultural awareness plays a positive role in enhancing students' interest in learning English. The item “*Despite cultural challenges I remain motivated to improve my English*” achieved the highest mean score in this section (4.28) which shows that many students keep their motivation during cultural barriers.

The results demonstrate that culture shock does not automatically result in decreased motivation for students. The experience of learning about a different culture motivates students to study the language more thoroughly. The finding supports Fan (2010) who explained that culture shock leads to increased learner motivation because it generates curiosity and helps students adjust to new situations.

Students reported that they become more interested in studying English when they watch English media which shows various cultural elements (mean = 3.80). Media platforms together with films and online content play a major role in helping learners to understand the target culture better while they deal with culture shock challenges.

The findings show that culture shock makes learning challenging at the beginning but several students succeed in adjusting themselves while they still work hard to develop their English language abilities.

Culture Shock and Academic Achievement:

The relationship between culture shock and students' academic performance is shown in Table 3. The results showed that students experienced academic challenges from culture shock which prevented their academic progress between 3.07 and 3.82 average scores.

Students who experienced culture shock showed negative effects on their academic work (mean = 3.07) while cultural issues led to problems for them in their test performance (mean = 3.31). The results show that learners have difficulties understanding text content and classroom discussions and exam questions which contain cultural elements that are not familiar to them.

The results of this section show that cultural adaptation has a positive connection with academic performance. The statement “As I adapted to cultural differences my grades improved” received a relatively high mean score of 3.82. The results show that students advanced in their academic performance after they understood the communication norms and cultural standards.

Students confirmed that their performance improved through participation in English discussions because of interactive learning environments which helped them build language confidence while they faced cultural barriers.

The results of the study show that people who succeed in language learning need to develop both their language skills and their cultural knowledge. Students who understand English cultural contexts can better understand written materials and take part in discussions and achieve academic success.

Conclusion :

The research investigated how culture shock affects both motivation and academic performance of Arabic-speaking EFL learners at Diyala University. The results show that students encounter distinct cultural differences during English language learning, which specifically affect their communication methods and social behavior and idiomatic usage and classroom participation. The cultural differences between these two groups create situations that lead to confusion and discomfort which are typical of culture shock.

The study results demonstrate that culture shock produces dual effects which influence student motivation. Some students reported that cultural challenges diminished their motivation which resulted in feelings of discouragement while many students said that learning about English culture made them more interested in studying the language. The research findings show that students need time to adjust to culture shock because it creates initial obstacles which prevent their English skill development.

The study discovered that culture shock affects students' academic performance in reading comprehension and exam results and classroom engagement. Students' ability to engage with English learning materials gets affected when they face difficulties understanding cultural references and communication patterns. The research results show that academic performance improves after students develop English language skills through cultural adaptation.

The study results emphasize the need to include cultural understanding as a core element in English language teaching. Teachers need to use cultural information together with real-world materials and interactive activities which enable students to learn about the language's social and cultural background. Educators can improve students' English learning outcomes by reducing culture shock negative effects while developing students' intercultural skills which lead to better motivation and confidence and academic performance.

Appendix A**Section A: Demographic Information****Gender:**

Male Female

Age:

18–20 21–23 24–26 27 and above

Year of Study:

First Year Second Year Third Year Fourth Year

Self-Rated English Proficiency Level:

Beginner Intermediate Upper-Intermediate Advanced

Have you interacted with native or fluent English speakers?

Yes No

Current

GPA

(Optional):

Below 60 60–69 70–79 80–89 90 and above

Section B: Culture Shock

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I experienced cultural differences when I started learning English.					
English communication styles are different from Arabic communication styles.					
Differences in values and social norms make learning English challenging.					
Differences in humor and cultural references affect my understanding.					
I feel uncomfortable using English in culturally unfamiliar situations.					
Differences in classroom interaction styles were difficult for me.					
Non-verbal communication differences affect my communication.					
Differences between Arabic and English grammar increase my frustration.					

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I experienced linguistic culture shock while learning English.					

Section C: Motivation

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Culture shock reduced my motivation to learn English.					
Cultural challenges sometimes make me feel discouraged.					
Understanding English culture increases my motivation.					
I feel more motivated when I adapt to cultural differences.					
Cultural exposure through English media increases my interest.					
Despite cultural challenges, I remain motivated to improve my English.					

Section D: Academic Achievement

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Culture shock negatively affected my academic performance.					
Cultural misunderstanding influenced my exam performance.					
Difficulty understanding cultural context affects my reading comprehension.					
Participation in English discussions improved my performance.					
As I adapted to cultural differences, my grades improved.					
My academic achievement reflects my ability to adjust to English culture.					

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Abstract in Arabic

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تأثير الصدمة الثقافية على دافعية وأداء متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الناطقين بالعربية في جامعة ديالى. تُظهر النتائج أن الطلاب يعانون من الارتباك وعدم الارتياح نتيجةً لاختلاف خلفياتهم الثقافية، مما يدفعهم إلى استخدام أساليب تواصل وعادات اجتماعية وتعبيرات اصطلاحية مختلفة. وتبين الدراسة أن للصدمة الثقافية تأثيرين على الدافعية، إذ أدت إلى فقدان بعض الطلاب اهتمامهم، بينما حفزت آخرين على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. كما تُظهر الدراسة أن الصدمة الثقافية تُثير ثلاثة تحديات أكاديمية، تشمل صعوبات في فهم المقروء والمشاركة الصفية واجتياز الامتحانات. ويحقق الطلاب نتائج أكاديمية أفضل عندما يبدأون بفهم العناصر الثقافية الكامنة في اللغة التي يدرسونها. وتوضح الدراسة أن تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية يتطلب الوعي الثقافي والمواد الأصلية، لأن هذه العناصر تُعزز دافعية الطلاب وتُثمي مهاراتهم في التواصل بين الثقافات، مما يُحسن نتائجهم التعليمية بشكل عام.
