

**ENHANCING CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN EFL STUDENTS AS THE
MAIN ISSUE.**

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Annotation: This article discusses how to help English learners understand different cultures while learning the language. It explains that teachers, students, and study materials all play important roles in this process. Teachers should learn about their both necessary cultures and teach cultural aspects alongside language skills. Students need to understand their own culture first, then learn about others'. Teaching methods vary depending on students' ages and language levels, with activities like using pictures for younger learners and authentic materials for higher levels. Well-designed materials should cover both language and culture, helping students communicate effectively. To cut in short, the article emphasizes the importance of cultural competence in English language learning and provides practical insights for teachers and students alike.

Introduction

The reputation of the English language is increasing day by day, and more and more people are trying to learn English in light of its status as an international language and its usability in technology, social media, and many other areas. At the same time, it is a tool for gaining and sharing knowledge, as many experiments, surveys, and research based in different fields of study have been carried out in English-speaking countries, such as the US. This means that those who know English can easily, and of course, with the use of a few specific skills, including analytical and critical thinking, access data that is pithy, reasonable and applicable. The use of that data and the clear comprehension of it can benefit the users in terms of keeping up with the pace and performing their jobs as skillfully as possible, which contributes to the growth of those individuals and their nation as a whole. We cannot escape from the fact that we use language in order to communicate, for which purpose we don't have to only learn the linguistic aspects of English but also need to take its culture into account.

Communicative language teaching is the last teaching method which particularly attaches greater importance to the speaking aspect, which is crucial because it is the skill that is developed with the help of other skills. This method opened up neglected skills such as pronunciation and encourages students to learn the language in context, meaning individuals need to learn the language with its true definition and sentence-based examples.

It is undoubtedly true that language learning is also learning a new culture, which is a highly complex and broad concept to define. According to Laddicoat, Papademetre, Scarion, and Kohler (2003, p. 45), culture is a complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviors, practices, rituals, and lifestyles of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artifacts they produce and the institutions they create, while Brown (2000, p. 177) defines culture as the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time. It is also certain from the definitions given above that without cultural awareness of the target language, it is much of a problem to succeed speaking in the target language. It is also worth noting that learning a foreign language without learning the culture can only produce a fluent fool, someone who speaks the language well but does not understand the social and philosophical context in which it exists (Bennett and Allen, 2003, p. 237). Focusing only on linguistics and ignoring cultural aspects can surely cause potential misunderstandings in communication with native speakers, and this means undesirable results in language learning.

Main part:

It is logical to say that there are three main objects of cultural competence: teachers, English learners, and materials. If all of each function properly, it is possible to increase intercultural competence and eradicate prospective communication issues that individuals perhaps always have, becoming one of their debatable topics nowadays.

Teachers

Teachers definitely play a critical role in improving cultural competence because, like culture, the term "teacher" is a complicated word to define. A few definitions may be the trigger behind any positive changes and, to some extent, the future of the generation and nation. For the sake of their contribution to cultural enhancement, apart from following Bloom's taxonomy, they should have specific classes dedicated to learning and teaching cultural aspects. For example, in Termiz State University, students majored in English language and literature have classes on culture, through which students are learning cultural aspects deeply, distinctly, and practically in order to eliminate any possible gap in providing students with quality education in the future. Also, teachers are advised to know the nation's culture and the cultural aspects of their target culture in order to appreciate and enthrall English learners when it comes to teaching a foreign language. This is expected to be useful when those English learners have conversations with the people of the target language, confirmed by Gebhard (2006, p.124). In doing so, teachers prevent behavioral problems in the classroom. There is also the possibility of being discouraged once students start learning the cultural aspects of the target language. This is the time an English teacher must take measures mentally and emotionally in order to tackle disappointed students.

Brown (2001, p. 65) mentions the idea that teachers should recognize the unique qualities of each student and focus on their comprehension and awareness. They should employ a range of teaching methods to accommodate students at different levels. The other main quality teachers should consistently have is that they are required to keep abreast of changes occurring cross-culturally, since Stenou (2002, p. 4) suggested that culture is changeable across time and place.

Certainly, an important aspect for teachers is to encourage students to see English learning as an avenue for discovering new opportunities, ideas, and lifestyles. They need to make students believe, English language only enhances academic and spiritual growth but also offers economic and personal benefits. Cultures often value different things, and by embracing a combination of these values, students can feel more motivated and resilient, developing a new identity through language acquisition. It's crucial for teachers to guide students in enjoying the learning process, acquiring information, and understanding life's intricacies.

English learners

Students and their input should be the main focus of this article. Definitely, as cultural aspects should be taught differently according to the variety of age and level. One commonality would have ever be all EFL learners should have the basic understanding of their own culture. Without it, it seems impossible to learn the cultural aspects of their foreign language. For this policy to happen, there should be a consensus among the necessary individuals, meaning that teachers of the mother tongue or other culture-based subjects are to raise cultural awareness both practically and theoretically. Otherwise, when learning cultural aspects of a foreign language, it is normal to see challenges both with the teachers and students. Galloway (1992, as cited in Hadley, 2003, p. 360) also thinks that, so as to build the knowledge based in the target culture, EFL learners initially need to explore their own cultural values.

Considering the question of how to teach different levels of students culturally, various strategies and techniques can be utilized. For instance, with young EFL learners, it is logical to use picture-based textbooks and materials, along with technological tools, namely monitors and many more. Despite this, the aim behind teaching EFL students should not be showing the superiority of the target culture over the native culture, mentioned by Choudhury (2013, p. 23). More often than not, and it is reasonable to include simple cultural features of both native and targeted language culture, since young English learners are almost foreign to their cultural norms, let alone the foreign language. As it is supported in one case study in Turkey, students of a young age and level can make comparisons and find similar features when they have a book in which cultural norms of both languages are described. With this tendency, they develop comprehension, which plays a special place in the expansion of clear ideas timely. Regarding older age and level, say, B1, students who have better

linguistic aspects needed for comprehension. The teacher can design relevant materials based on authentic sources, which are efficient and productive. But in this case, all that comes down to how the teachers select the topic and design according to the four skills of language, which is at times quite difficult, in spite of being rewarding. Turning to a higher level than B1, students should start realizing the context in which the words have to be expressed culturally, socially, and philosophically in English, and paying attention to communicative confidence more rather than receptive skills. The reason for too much emphasis on communicative competence is to do with comprehensible input. Students of this level must work hard on linguistic aspects and the cultural aspects because they are required to concentrate on pronunciation sufficiently and develop a certain level of fluency ultimately. With the fluency and true output, it is possible to make the entire process of language learning as easy as possible. In this case, accurate output means clear production of the language and the agreement of ideas with native speakers, which requires cultural awareness.

Materials

Materials also matter importantly in improving the cultural competence of EFL learners. They can serve as the teacher, the trainer, their authority, the reasons, and the ideology in the foreign language classroom (Hinkel, 1999). There is a host of textbooks available for students to use. Those books should include cultural feature of the target language so that students can function linguistically and culturally in communicative acts. The role of the teacher in material design is very crucial, precisely because only the teacher can reasonably design materials that can meet the specific criteria. For this to take place, teachers should consider the age, level, curiosity and the significance of cultural topics. The basic requirements for well-designed materials would be;

- appropriate for age and level,
- suitable for attention and curiosity,
- well-designed in terms of technology and authenticity
- sufficiently simplified by paraphrasing, and the use of approved resources, addressing all the skills of the language,
- comprehensible and somewhat related to modern life
- the cultural aspects of target language must be included

If all of these requirements are met, the textbooks can please students and achieve lesson objectives contributing to cultural competence as a result. If the books or materials of the target language cover only the linguistic aspects of English and show the cultural aspects of the local language, which is the example of English for Saudi Arabia, they only develop their own cultural identity, and it is certain that students would not be able to learn about the target culture. Therefore, we cannot ignore the significance of materials.

Conclusion

English language is free access to necessary data in every field of study, and it is also becoming a requirement in every type of employment in this era of globalization. Developing communication, which is the purpose we use language, is a must. That communication must be done with the cultural awareness, which is discussed in this article for improvement in it. Although culture is the term which is too difficult to describe and to achieve most importantly beyond a linguistic aspect. The three objects, teachers, students, and materials, can allow increased cultural competence and by playing their parts properly.

Used literature

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