

مجلة كلية الآداب

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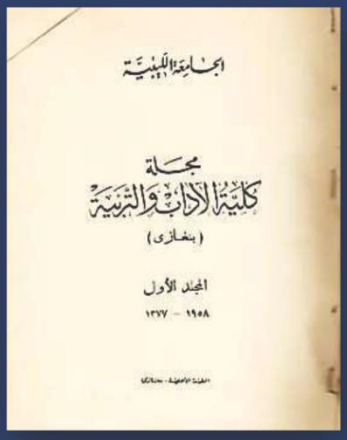
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مجلة علمية محكمة
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بجامعة بنغازي

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تحت اسم
مجلة كلية الآداب والتربية



الرقم الدولي الموحد للنسخة الإلكترونية للمجلة الصادرة عن
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Cultural Awareness Impact on Second Language Acquisition: A Case Study of English Learning among Libyan Students

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Abstract

The teaching of culture through communication has received the attention it deserves in a variety of academic and linguistic contexts across numerous institutions. To communicate in another language, a speaker must have a strong grasp of cultural norms and gestures to convey a message to someone fully. Likewise, cultural context allows for more efficient, natural communication between individuals.

The aim of this study is to show Libyan instructors and learners'' knowledge about culture and language, as well as the perception toward cultural awareness as a contributing factor in learning and mastering a language. The population of this study were 20 fifth semester students of academic year 2022 and ten instructors of the Faculty of languages at the university of Benghazi.

In order to achieve the goals, two questionnaires were opted as data collection tools. A questionnaire for students and another one for instructors. With regard to learners, the results of this study showed positive perception of cultural awareness as a contributing factor in learning English. Although the students knew the importance of culture, they did not link this importance to language learning. While there is a strong willingness among students to engage with cultural diversity, there is also a need for language learning curriculum to better integrate cultural content to enhance students' cross-cultural communication skills effectively.

In the part of instructors, the results showed that although teachers are aware of the significance of culture and its role in mastering language learning, they do not integrate culture into their teaching in order to develop intercultural competence among learners due to some obstacles.

Keywords : culture, learning, cultural awareness

تأثير الوعي الثقافي على اكتساب لغة ثانية:
دراسة حالة لتعلم اللغة الإنـجليزية بين طلاب ليبيين

موجز الدراسة

لقد حظي تدريس الثقافة من خلال التواصل بالاهتمام الذي يستحقه في مجموعة متنوعة من السياقات الأكاديمية واللغوية عبر العديد من المؤسسات التعليمية. للتواصل بلغة أخرى، يجب أن يكون لدى المتحدث فهم قوي للمعايير والإيماءات الثقافية لنقل رسالة ما بشكل كامل. يسمح السياق الثقافي بتواصل طبيعي أكثر كفاءة بين الأفراد..

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى إظهار مدى معرفة المعلمين والطلاب الليبيين بالثقافة واللغة، وكذلك تصورهم للوعي الثقافي كعامل مساهم في تعلم اللغة وإتقانها. بلغت عينة الدراسة 20 طالبا من طلاب الفصل الخامس للعام الجامعي 2022 وعشرة أعضاء هيئة تدريس من كلية اللغات بجامعة بنغازي.

لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة ، تم اختيار استبيانين كأدوات لجمع البيانات. استبيان للطلاب وآخر لأعضاء هيئة التدريس. فيما يخص الطلاب، أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة تصورا إيجابيا للوعي الثقافي كعامل مساهم في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. وعلى الرغم من معرفة الطلاب بأهمية الثقافة، إلا أنهم لم يربطوا هذه الأهمية بتعلم اللغة. في حين أن هناك رغبة قوية بين الطلاب للتعامل مع التنوع الثقافي، هناك أيضًا حاجة إلى تطوير مناهج تعلم اللغة لدمج المحتوى الثقافي بشكل أفضل لتعزيز مهارات التواصل بين الثقافات لدى الطلاب بشكل فعال.

ومن جانب أعضاء هيئة التدريس، بينت النتائج أنه على الرغم من إدراك المعلمين لأهمية الثقافة ودورها في إتقان تعلم اللغة، إلا أنهم لا يدمجون الثقافة في تدريسهم من أجل تطوير الكفاءة الثقافية بين المتعلمين بسبب بعض العوائق.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الثقافة، التعلم، الوعي الثقافي

Literature Review

At first glance, some may think that language and culture are two different fields, but in fact the relationship between them is intertwined, and each has an impact on the other.

The relationship between language and culture is a continuum and inseparable . In fact, language is not only a set of grammatical rules and principles but also requires an understanding of cultural norms. To acquire and master a language like a native speaker , it is necessary to understand its culture to ensure effective acquisition.

Culture and Language Learning

Greey (1994) defines culture as a learned system of values, beliefs and norms among a set of individuals. Culture changes people's values and habits and affects language and behaviour as well. In fact, cultural knowledge is very essential for achieving language proficiency.

Moreover, Kramsch (1996) states that culture refers to the attitudes and beliefs, means of thinking, performing and memorizing shared by members of that community.

The culture of a society can be changed depending on the language used, for example, new words appear used by generations that were not used with other generations, and this is evidence that culture has an effective role in communication.

Briefly, language has always been cultural in some ways. Language must be conceived of as an integral part of society and its culture. Lu (1998) states that learning a language and learning culture can be associated to the child's first experiences with the family into which he/she was born, the society to which he/she belongs and the surroundings in which he/she lives. That is, children acquire their first language in a natural way because their society, environment and culture constantly feed them. Likewise, in acquiring another language, learners need to absorb the nutrients of the new culture.

According to Thanasoulas (2001), learning another language requires developing an awareness of the ways in which culture interrelates with language whenever it is used. For some scholars (e.g. Halliday, 1978; Ellis, 1994; Taga, 1999; Van Leeuwen,, 2005; Brown , 2007) culture can satisfy biological and psychological needs that are usually formulated as conceptual networks or mental structures of reality. Mental structures are based on social foundations and it needs to be externally validated by the medium of language. That means that **"**language is social semiotic used to symbolically encode and carry over the underpinning socio-cultural values." (Halliday, 1978 , p. 4). Halliday considers language as a resource for human social living. Taga (1999) states that culture constitutes beliefs, transfers ideas, and shares knowledge on values. All these features are communicated through language which is an essential portion of culture.

Individuals think in the context of the language they are exposed to, understand the output from their environment, and engage in communication with other individuals (exposure). This indicates how vital a language is in assessing human beings to communicate, produce and comprehend one another. Since language is a means of communication and transmission, culture is part of a language and hence it transmits through generations

and intercultural languages (Kaplan, 1983). Smoking and Dorothy (1999) believe that culture is the most significant protector for the transfer, improvement and transport of language.

Learning a second language entails both knowing its linguistic structures and being familiar with its culture in order to understand intercultural communication. Consequently, in the case of English language, learners should be exposed to cultural awareness in order for them to attain proficiency in intercultural communication.(Myron & Koester, 2010)

Cultural Awareness

Risager (2013) states that the term cultural awareness (CA) started to be widespread in 1980s and 1990s. It has been used in a various disciplines particularly in the field of foreign language teaching and learning.

When learners are culturally aware, this means that they understand that their own culture differs from other cultures they learn. This enables them to communicate effectively.

When communicating with individuals from different cultures, cultural awareness must be taken into consideration, as it helps in knowing the meaning to be conveyed or clarified. Some situations are sensitive in certain cultures and normal in others. The lack of cultural awareness may lead to a misunderstanding in communicating with others (Lucie , 2006).

According to Tomalin and Barry (1993, p. 5), cultural awareness ‘’covers beliefs, values, attitudes and feelings conveyed not only by language but by paralinguistic features such as dress, gestures, facial expressions, stance and movement’’.

Implementing Culture into Language Learning

Incorporating culture into language learning and teaching is essential to creating a well-rounded and immersive learning

experience. By integrating cultural elements into language instruction, students gain a deeper understanding of language and its contextual use. This approach promotes cultural awareness, understanding, and empathy, helping students communicate more effectively and authentically. Incorporating cultural aspects such as traditions, customs, and social norms into language lessons enhances cultural competence and promotes a more holistic language learning experience. Additionally, it encourages students to learn language in a real-life context, which ultimately enriches their language skills and understanding.

Additionally, McKay (2003, p. 89) states that in order to master a language students have to learn both, its linguistic and cultural norms. Linguistically, culture is important within language structure as it affects its semantics, pragmatics and discourse. Pedagogically, it guides the choosing of materials emphasizing cultural content within them and considering cultural underpinnings of the teaching approach to be used.

Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, a descriptive methodology was adapted. Two questionnaires were opted as data collection tools. A questionnaire for students and another one for instructors. A population of (20) fifth semester students at the Department of English at Benghazi University were selected randomly. Moreover, in order to obtain more knowledge about the influence of cultural awareness,(10) instructors of the English Department were involved in the study so that they assist in explaining some facts about the learning process including the curriculum used in their teaching.

In the part of students, the questionnaire was composed of two sections. Section one contained 5 personal questions to gain more information about learners' self-evaluation about their

English level. Section two included cultural awareness 5 questions. The questions were based on a 4 point Likert scale[1].

Regarding the teachers' questionnaire, it is a four-point scale contains 15 questions divided into 3 dimensions: attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

Moreover, to obtain more data that would help in obtaining guaranteed results, the researcher interviewed and asked the participants about the reasons why they chose their answers in the questionnaires for more details .

Again, due to the importance of this study and to obtain fruitful results, care was taken that the questions include vital points about the curriculum, viewpoints, and instructors' beliefs about the concept of culture, educational activities, and procedures of applying them in the classroom, in addition to their role as teachers teaching culture.

Ten teachers were selected, five of whom were female and five were male. The number of years of experience in teaching English ranged from 5 to 10 years, and their average age ranged from 33 to 45.

Findings

The results of the study were discussed in two parts: the students' part and the teachers' part.

The Findings of Students' Quesionnair

According to Sugiyono(2005), Likert scale can be calculated as follows:

[1]A four-point Likert scale is a measure used to assess attitudes, opinions, or perceptions. It consists of four answer categories that participants can choose from to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on questions. The four options are :(1) Strongly Agree (SA), (2) Agree (A), (3) Disagree (D), and (4) Strongly Disagree (SD).

$$P = \frac{f}{n} x100\%$$

P = percentage
f = frequency of each questionnaire answer
n = Ideal number of scores
100% = constant value

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants in the Study

The participants were from various cultural backgrounds, including Libyan, Egyptian and Palestinian. Their ages ranged from 21-23. Participants have varying levels of English proficiency, categorized as pre-intermediate and intermediate.
Moreover, They have diverse language learning experiences. Some have formal English teaching in schools and language institutes, while others have learned English through immersion experiences, self-study and online resources.

Results of Section Two of the Questionnaire

Q. Cultural awareness is important when learning a language because it promotes effective communication and understanding between cultures

.Question No	Answer	F(frequency)	Percentage%
1	Strongly Agree	15	%75
	Agree	3	%15
	Disagree	2	%10
	Strongly Disagree	0	

As shown above %75 of students got the highest percentage where they strongly recognize the significance of cultural awareness in the process of learning. They believe that cultural awareness leads to successful understandings and subsequently promotes communication. In the second place, 15% of the students also agreed on the important role of culture in the language learning process. Only %10 of students disagreed about the vital role of cultural awareness. Generally, the findings revealed that most students are aware of the significance of cultural awareness when learning another language as it ensures that communication is clear and appropriate. For instance knowing when to use formal or informal language , appropriate greetings and gestures can prevent misunderstanding and promote positive interactions.

Q. It is important to know cultural nuances and etiquette when using a foreign language.

Question .No	Answer	F(frequency)	Percentage%
2	Strongly Agree	*18*	%90
	Agree	2	%10
	Disagree	0	
	Strongly Disagree	0	

The results of this question showed that %90 of students strongly agreed on the importance of the knowledge of cultural nuances and etiquette . They believe that being aware of cultural nuances allows individuals to build rapport and establish meaningful connections with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Cultural awareness helps individuals avoid inadvertently offending others by violating cultural taboos or norms.

Q. **I always seek opportunities to communicate and learn from people from different cultures while learning a new language**

Question .No	Answer	F(frequency)	centagePer%
3	Strongly Agree	*14*	%70
	Agree	6	%30
	Disagree	0	
	Strongly Disagree	0	

The results reveal that %70 of students strongly agreed that seeking opportunities to communicate and learn from individuals from different cultures is incredibly valuable when learning a new language. For them, interact with native speakers provides a deeper understanding of the cultural context surrounding the language. That is , when interacting with speakers from other languages, individuals learn not just about words and grammar rules but also about understanding how language is used in real-life situations within a specific cultural framework. As language learners, they are exposed to authentic language use such as colloquialisms, slang, and cultural references that may not be taught in textbooks.

Q. I am willing to adapt my communication style and behavior to suit the cultural norms of the target language

Question .No	Answer	F(frequency)	Percentage%
1	Strongly Agree	*14*	%70
	Agree	3	%15
	Disagree	3	%15
	Strongly Disagree	0	

%70 of students strongly agreed on adjusting their language to match the conventions of the target language. For example, using formal or informal language as appropriate, and avoiding slang that may not be appropriate in a certain context. Moreover, learners believe that different cultures have varying expectations regarding politeness and tone. For instance, speakers can modulate their tones to be more formal or casual based on cultural norms, and ensure that they use appropriate honorifics or expressions of respect in specific situations.

Q. My English language learning curriculum adequately addresses cultural awareness

Question .No	Answer	F(frequency)	Percentage%
1	Strongly Agree	8	%40
	Agree	0	
	Disagree	12	%60
	Strongly Disagree	0	

%40 of students strongly feel that their English language learning curriculum does not adequately address cultural awareness. %60 of them state that their curriculum does not address cultural awareness for some reasons. First , some curriculums lack sufficient content related to cultural topics, such as history, traditions, customs, and societal norms of English-speaking countries. Second, some textbooks predominantly focus on one particular culture, neglecting the diversity of English-speaking countries . This can result in limitations in students' ability to navigate cross-cultural communication successfully.

The Findings of the Part of Instructors

The findings were presented based on three parts of the questionnaire :

- Knowledge
- Attitudes and Beliefs
- Skills

Questions related the first part(knowledge)

Frequency and percentage				
Indictor	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
1	6(60)	4(40)	0	0
2	4(40)	6(60)	0	0
3	2(20)	0	8(80)	0
4	0	5(50)	5(50)	0

Regarding the first indicator, %60 of instructors strongly agree that they are familiar with the concept of cultural awareness in the context of second language learning. As teachers, they state that understanding cultural awareness means recognizing and appreciating cultural backgrounds, values, customs, and norms of both learners and target language community. They believe that when understanding the cultural context in which the language is used, learners can easily grasp the meanings behind words and expressions.

%40 of instructors strongly agree that they actively seek out resources and materials that promote cultural understanding in language learning. Moreover, %60 of them also agree that they look for authentic materials such as videos, audio recordings, newspapers, magazines, websites produced by native speakers that reflect the target culture.

Concerning indicator 3, % 80 of instructors state that they do not receive sufficient training and support . Insufficient training and support in integrating cultural awareness into language teaching can undermine the effectiveness of language education and hinder students' development of cultural competence and intercultural communication skills. They believe that it's essential to prioritize cultural awareness training and support to ensure that language teaching is inclusive, respectful, and culturally responsive.

The fourth indicator showed that 50% of teachers agree that they assess students' understanding of cultural aspects related to language learning, while the other 50% do not use cultural aspects related to language learning while assessing their students.

It can be concluded that teachers are aware of the concept of cultural awareness and that it is an important element in the educational process, but there are some obstacles such as lack of training and adherence to academic curriculum.

Questions related the second part (attitudes and Beliefs**)**

Frequency and percentage				
Indictor	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree
5	7(70)	3(30)	0	0
6	6(60)	1	3(30)	0
7	5(50)	5(50)	0	0

The findings of indicator 5 showed all instructors agree on the significance of cultural awareness in learning a language. %70 of instructors believe that ccultural awareness enhances students' ability to learn a second language. It enriches language learning experience by providing context, improving communication skills, boosting motivation, and fostering respect and empathy towards others.

%60 of instructors agree that they should incorporate cultural elements into language lessons to facilitate language learning.

However, %30 did not agree with the necessity of introducing cultural elements into their teaching because their institution imposes certain curricula on them and they must adhere to them. Therefore, since they are restricted to a teaching plan and a specific time, they cannot use additional materials on cultural awareness in the educational process.

With regard to the questions on incorporating cultural aspects in language teaching improves students' motivation to learn, %50 of instructors agree that the use of cultural elements make language learning more relevant and fascinating for language learners. When learners engage with cultural content, they can perceive the practical applications of the language they are learning, which can increase their motivation to learn. However, the other 50% of the teachers did not agree with this. The reason is that they did not include cultural elements in their teaching and therefore they are not aware of the expected results nor the role that cultural elements may play in the language learning process.

Questions related to the third part (skills)

Frequency and percentage				
Indictor	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree
8	7(70)	3(30)	0	0
9	10(100)	0	0	0
10	8(80)	2(20)	0	0

In the part of cultural awareness and skills, indicator 8 reveals that %70 of instructors feel confident in their ability to integrate cultural elements into their language teaching strategies. Although some of them stated that they do not use it in their teaching, they realize their ability to include cultural awareness in their teaching, but there are obstacles that prevent them from doing so, such as adherence to the curriculum, language level of their students, and the time specified for the semester.

All instructors (%100) state that they like to adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate diverse cultural learning styles when there are opportunities to do so.

%80 of instructors believe that as teachers they should encourage their students to share their cultural experiences and perspectives in the classroom. For them, incorporating cultural experiences into lessons makes learning more relevant for students. They can connect language concepts to real-life situations, which aids in comprehension. In addition, using cultural topics in class provides students with authentic opportunities to practice their language skills in meaningful contexts. This kind of instruction in turn assists them improving their vocabulary, communication skills, and cultural competence.

Generally, the findings reveals a nuanced understanding among instructors regarding cultural awareness in language teaching. While there's a consensus on its significance and benefits, challenges such as insufficient training, institutional constraints, and time limitations hinder its effective implementation. The findings suggest a need for comprehensive training programs and institutional support to enable instructors to integrate cultural elements seamlessly into language teaching. Despite these challenges, instructors demonstrate a willingness to adapt teaching approaches and encourage cultural exchange in their classrooms, indicating a commitment to fostering inclusive and culturally responsive language education.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the essential intersection of culture and language learning, particularly in the context of Libyan instructors and learners at the University of Benghazi. The findings underscore the importance of cultural awareness as a crucial factor in mastering a language, with both instructors and students demonstrating positive perceptions regarding its significance.

Two questionnaires were used as data collection of the study. One was for students and the other one for instructors. Beside, both instructors and learners were asked for the reasons of choosing their answers in order to obtain more details to ensure accurate findings.

In the part of students, the findings showed that while students demonstrate a desire to engage with cultural diversity, there is a gap between their awareness of the importance of culture and its integration into language learning practices. This highlights the need for language learning curriculum to better integrate cultural content, thus enhancing students' intercultural communication skills and promoting a deeper understanding of the language within its cultural context.

Furthermore, regarding instructors, although they acknowledge the importance of cultural awareness in language learning, there are various obstacles hinder their efforts to integrating cultural content effectively in teaching.

Overall, the results highlight the imperative for instructors and institutions to prioritize the integration of cultural awareness into language teaching strategies and techniques, thereby facilitating more holistic language learning experiences that equip students with the necessary skills to navigate intercultural communication successfully.

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