

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

English is considered as a source of intercultural communication among the people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. However, acquiring English as a second language is a complex process which is associated with individual differences and related to the issues of various backgrounds such as culture. As my task to research one of the theories of second language acquisition I decided to provide learners with the issues and resolutions related to cultural differences in language learning.

KEYWORDS:- Intercultural Communication, Culture, Cultural Differences, Language Learning, Second Language Acquisition

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, researchers have shifted focus towards the role that culture plays in the language learning. This is due to the importance of culture as a facilitating tool for creating effective second language learning. Although this topic has been discussed around the world I would like to try this research with Uzbek school pupils.

The objectives of my research are the followings:

1. To discuss the ways of preventing cultural

misunderstandings in learners' language acquisition. Our knowledge of culture is largely based on very limited data. Culture is not about information but understanding the usage of language in a cultural context. With the help of this method, one can know how to express politeness in other cultures

2. From the point of language acquisition process, to extend the current knowledge of learners' academic skills about culture. Some concepts such as phrases, idioms can be difficult to translate as they do not exist in some languages. As a result learner can

make inaccurate sentences by translating word for word translation.

By doing this research I resolved to establish the importance of integrating culture into second language acquisition in Uzbek education system and ways of improving English learning process

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By the helping of this integration. This research can help learners develop their cultural competence in the second language communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While conducting this research I have discovered that the initial studies of culture were focused on the importance of culture in the human society. According to scholar Sheeraz Ali (2015), "Culture as a social process deals with the use of language and communication experienced by people in given circumstances. They tend to learn more than one language for the satisfaction of communicative needs in their academic and

professional career." As his research has shown that interactive classroom activities based on cultural strategies should be offered in a teaching process in order to enhance cultural behavior of learners. This research has proved that the learning process not only requires a learner to practice linguistic forms but also becoming aware of the culture of the target language.

It is observed by other researchers (Emitt & Komesaroff, 2003) "There are difficulties which are very complex to understand for foreign or second language learners according to required context to interpret and communicate". In a language communication, it is a crucial part to exchange ideas and share opinions by understanding the cultural settings. While receiving or sending information one should be aware of cultural behavior. As the research concluded that errors or misunderstandings in terms of culture might lead to failure in the language communication.

As Lado (1957) mentions in his book "Linguistics across cultures, if certain elements

of a second language differ greatly from the student's native language, that student is likely encounter difficulties." It can be assumed that there are differences of syntax, pronunciation, and structure between native and target languages. As Ming-Muo Kuo revealed in his research "Teaching a second language is not simply about giving speeches about syntactic structures or learning new vocabulary, but should incorporate cultural elements. Cultural activities and objectives should be carefully organized and incorporated into second language lesson plans to enrich the teaching context content." So, understanding culture can be solution for reducing learners' difficulties and stresses by offering new techniques into language learning classroom.

One research conducted by Lasekon Olusji (2016) proved that the main reason for better English outcome is because of the inclusion of cultural activities into school English curriculum. In the research he analyzed the regional medium and English medium school pupils in India by giving cultural activities for the English school pupils while regional school pupils were provided with the lack of this kind

of activities. English school pupils showed better results in learning language with activities related to culture. On the other hand, the efficiency of learning a second language was low in the regional medium class in India. By this research, the importance of culture was evidenced in learning language.

In the findings of Medine (1993), students who truly acquire high competence in the target language successfully are those who have mastered the cultural context such as songs, in which the target language exists. I strongly agree with this findings, from my experience, one of my friends at the university was eager to be part of the English culture by listening songs, watching movies and imitating to people's lifestyle. And she was very successful in learning language rather than others who considered the language as a linguistic structure.

Although there were enough evidences in terms of the significance of culture, there should be more research to investigate the role of cultural activities in Uzbek classrooms considering our mentality.

RESEARCH DESIGN

As I mentioned above, my participant had desire to be a part of my case study in order to achieve progress in her study. Therefore, I did not have difficulty in working with my participant who had problems on cultural misunderstandings in her learning. While beginning a research, the subject was informed the objectives and significance of the study. After all, she signed the Contest Form, which included all requirements of the research.

During a month, questionnaires and activities based on some methods were organized to improve the cultural behavior of the learner. All these steps helped the researcher to analyze the level of participant's current knowledge and improvements of cultural education in English.

At the beginning of the study, multicultural questionnaire was utilized to collect the required data. In this questionnaire, the participant provided her own experiences and ideas related to culture. The participant's answers to the questionnaire determined her attitudes towards the role of culture in her

learning process. Based on results the participant was considered to have insufficient interest and knowledge about English culture as she was grown up in another cultural environment. This questionnaire was regarded as a suitable data collection method to identify the problems.

As we discussed the answers of the questionnaire with the participant, I decided to conduct some activities so as to improve her cultural awareness which helps make her learning process easier and more effective. The subject was experienced with both in-class and out-of-class activities.

Initially, we started with in-class activities which enhance the subject's grammatical and cultural competence. In this kind of activity, the participant was provided with common proverbs in the target language and her task was to translate the proverbs into her native language by understanding the meaning. During the process, the participant faced some challenges in translating some cultural concepts in proverbs, which do not exist in both Uzbek and Tajik languages. So, she was

provided with the examples of some phrases, idioms, and proverbs that can show the culture of different nations. By analyzing these concepts in English, the participant was guided to explore the similarities and differences of culture in second language acquisition.

Moreover, in order to prevent cultural misunderstandings in communication, I used another activity. In this activity the subject was required to ask permission, apologize or complain in English. After her responses, I taught him a way of expressing herself in a polite way with some examples. Then, we organized a role-play with the participant to utilize these ways of speaking in communication. Some instructions were given to her about communicative misunderstandings related to culture.

These exercises were measured by the participant as effective ways to acquire the cultural knowledge. The participant was satisfied with the development of her grammatical and cultural skills by the helping of these activities.

When it comes to out-of-class activity, the

subject was provided with appropriate materials to engage in real cultural experiences. Considering the level and age of participant, I gave her some movies and videos focused on cultural communication and behavior to watch and analyze at home. She was required to complete the outline in the provided paper while they were listening.

While doing out-of-class activity, the participant informed that she became interested in other nations' cultural identities such as holidays, traditions, and foods. It helped her to understand the value of culture in the target language.

Data collection and findings

While I was planning my research, I decide to choose learner journal as a way of taking notes about results of the questionnaires and the process of improving participant's cultural knowledge by doing some activities during a month. Actually, learner journal, which was completed by the participant, included a collection of notes, observations, and experiences of the subject in a given period. In this journal, the participant was required to

provide the process of identifying her weaknesses and strengths as well as improving her knowledge on this field. My chosen participant was completing her journal as a diary while I was analyzing her results in a checklist. At the end of the research, we exchanged our notes and discussed in order to conclude our points.

The first questionnaire, which aimed to determine the level and background knowledge of the participant, was not successful enough. According to the result of the questionnaire, it was appeared that her interests to the cultural aspects of language were not so good. The reason was that she learnt the second language based on grammatical and linguistic structures so far. Participant did not use the language in a communication very much, so she was not aware of cultural contexts in language.

My chosen activity was focused on teaching culture through grammar and conversation. As a grammatical way of learning, the participant worked with some proverbs related to cultural issues. In the process of comprehending the

meaning of proverbs, the participant faced some challenges regarding the lack of cultural concepts in her knowledge. For that reason, she was provided with some visual aids, handouts, which included some words and phrases, related to culture with equivalences in her native language, as well as supported to learn more by the researcher. By the helping of this activity, she started to analyze some cultural patterns. Although her results were not so satisfying in this activity, the subject was eager to continue the research by learning some language expressions in a language to indicate her politeness considering the cultural values of the target language.

This activity was very useful for her to show her attitudes towards to culture and learn more about the relations between language and culture in learning language process.

As in out-of-class activity, the participant was provided with audio and video materials, such as movies and discussions that informed the cultural life of English speaking countries. As her task was to complete the outline paper by paying attention to some cultural contexts in

the movie, her results were not so positive. However, I recommend her to watch once more with a person who was keen on English lifestyle and culture. As she shared her experiences with me about watching movie, her friend was engaged to watch and analyze it better than her. After that, the participant worked on herself to improve her awareness about culture by searching the information and becoming interested in this issue. Moreover, due to her background that was grown up in a bilingual family, she acquired the cultural concepts easily by comparing them in three languages.

In a month, we worked with the participant together. It gave me opportunities to analyze the process of learning second language through cultural aspects. From my observations, it was seen that in-class activities was less effective than out-of-class activities. The reason why the participant could not know her progress in her learning was lack of motivation by taking sample from the person who had an experience on this topic. The real example in her life inspired her to learn more about culture and its importance.

As a final part of the research, I again used the old questionnaire, which helped to determine the progress in her learning. This time, results were positive. The participant was engaged in cultural learning being part of the cultural society.

CONCLUSION

After completing some methods such as questionnaires and activities based on the research, we discussed our notes about the process and developments of our research with the participant.

Findings based on the study showed that any learner to have a good communication skill in international interaction should acquire cultural awareness. As reported by Crozet and Liddicot.

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(1999) "If students' knowledge on the second language is not proficient enough culture should be addressed by their instructors in SLA. While determining the relationship between culture and language I connected my

findings with one of the SLA theory. As we discussed SLA is referred to the language, which we use every day in order to communicate and be part of the society in which we live. To be exposed to SLA, their educators (Mehtar Acar 2016) should apply cultural concepts to learners' development of intercultural competence.

However, I discovered some other factors to discuss while I was doing research. Important factors such as age, ethnicity and so on may lead to researchers to conduct further research. After research, I also realized the positive and negative effects on culture in learning languages. As a negative influence of culture, learners' native culture can be replaced by the target culture that was called as subtractive bilingualism. This can be an important research to be conducted in the future. I also recommend my participant to be aware this kind of issues in learning languages. Overall, my first research based on the role of culture in learning environment gave me indescribable experiences related to teaching. At the end of research, I also started to realize

more clearly that target language cannot be obtained without culture. Moreover, culture can make learning process easier and closer to language by giving unlimited materials, which describe the lifestyle of the English countries. Although fundamental knowledge can be acquired without culture, cultural awareness is very crucial to be a successful leader in learning language.

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