ADOPTING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ISSUE
IN TEACHING ENGLISH

Hussain Ahmed Liton

English Language Centre, Jazan University,
Jazan, P.O. box-114, Saudi Arabia
husal@jazanu.edu.sa

ABSTRACT

Cultural assimilation and intercultural awareness has been an important hub of modern language and communication studies, underlining a shift that reflects a greater significance of the inseparability of language and culture, and the need to prepare students for effective intercultural communication to thrive in a global work environment. A thriving global workplace requires effective communication skill across cultures in this era of globalization and mass migration. Under the tutelage of such backdrop, this article addresses the terrain of adopting intercultural awareness in EFL classroom teaching/learning and aims at linking culture with language in pursuit of excellence in borderless effective communication. The study, in other words, investigated the linguistic aspects that could be affected by certain cultural dimensions (e.g., beliefs, traditions, taboo words, habits, and norms, religion, social factors, etc.) in intercultural communication. This paper uses a questionnaire device to receive some university teachers' self-reported feedback. This article maintains qualitative and quantitative research methodology. The analytical research result shows that in teaching English, it is necessary to incorporate and develop aspects of cross-cultural awareness as a part of course curriculum to immerse students in effective intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

Keywords: intercultural competence, language and culture, globalization, English Language Learning (ELL)

INTRODUCTION

The emerging trends and pedagogies in teaching/learning a foreign language do not require the merely teaching of linguistic skills like phonology, morphology, lexicology, and syntax, but also "...the vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness" (Bachman, 1990). At this era of digitalization and mass migration, the focus of learning any language aims to develop a sustainable and successful communication in social, political, academic, professional or any cultural contexts. In other words, learning a language effectively requires knowing something about the cultural aspects of that language as far as that cross-cultural communication is concerned. Communication that lacks appropriate cultural content often results in an odd/humorous situation, leading to misunderstanding and miscommunication. So, to promote the learners' cross-cultural perception, incorporating intercultural activities in teaching EFL (English as Foreign Language) or ESL (English as Second Language) is a matter of fact. Consequently, the adopting intercultural awareness

to language teaching/learning is believed to be one of the many paradigms in this complex global perspective. Behind such global perspective, this paper strives to demystify the terrain of adopting intercultural communication issue in EFL context, especially in Saudi universities.

For borderless and cross-cultural effective communication, it is important to incorporate intercultural aspects in EFL teaching to develop learners' awareness of intercultural sensitivity and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). It is indeed, "Simple mastery of the linguistic forms of a language is not enough for learners to be considered competent in the target language" (Krasner, 1999). Here, cultural dimension is seen to play a critical role in successful communication. In many occupational contexts, professionals' poor communication performance resulted in the loss of business which is closely connected to their lack of cross-cultural understanding of the customers' affairs. This challenge emerges because of the gap between the needs of the learning and target workplace. So, in a way or another, to address this existing gap, EFL learners need the awareness of cultural dimension in language instruction through an intercultural approach because

"...*in any society which expects its education system to prepare people for living in an internationalized culture and globalized economy, and also for the interaction between people of different cultures within and across national boundaries, the process of tertiary socialization and the acquisition of intercultural competence are clearly desirable*" (Alfred & Byram, 2002). Linguistic and cultural diversities are the significant factors for communication with the people of diverse race, custom, and ethnicity. So, it is important for the language learners to understand the cultural context of language because language is viewed as a culturally organized and culturally organizing dominion (Craith, 2012).

Saudi Ministry of Education is highly concerned with the pursuit of excellence in effective English language teaching-learning for preparing skilled outstanding professionals in leadership level. Here, universities and colleges offer credit and non-credit English language courses namely, EFL, ESP, EAP or General English, but they are not becoming so effective in developing students' intercultural communicative competence in their real life career. In teaching scenario, linguistic aspects of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax, and others are taught, but extra-linguistic aspects, such as socio-cultural aspects of language are very much absent in the classroom practices. To nurture learners' communicative competence in English, EFL teaching in Saudi context as well as in many other countries still lacks the inclusion of intercultural issues. Consequently, the EFL learners, in general, commit cultural *faux pas* while communicating with people of other cultures. It can cause cultural conflicts resulting in misunderstandings or misconceptions, let alone bridge a fruitful communication. From this perspective, it is vitally important for Saudi EFL students to learn and understand the culture and cultural context of language for meaningful cross-cultural communication.

The issue of intercultural communication emerges as a result of economic globalization and mass migration of people or as a backlash to the crisis of multiculturalism. Cultural critic Edward T Hall (1959) in his *Silent Language* has termed intercultural communication as a new discipline in human sciences. Rapidly, the term of intercultural communication becomes the part of the Communication Studies in the mid-70s. Subsequently, the schools in communication studies of American universities in the 70s made this course obligatory part of their syllabus. In reality, business, communication, travelling and states negotiations and many more reasons people need to interact and communicate with the people of different cultures across the borders. In so doing, successful communication largely depends on cross-cultural understanding. Here lies the value of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). In defining intercultural communication, Barnett and Lee (2002) has termed it as the "...exchange of information about culture between two groups of people with significantly different cultures."

According to Wiseman (2002), Intercultural communication competence (ICC) involves the knowledge, motivation and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures. In fact, Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures. Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately to a variety of cultural contexts (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Intercultural competence is considered as an inter-disciplinary field; it is like culture plus communication (Culture+Communication=IC). The context is a very important concept in intercultural communication and communication in general. Communication takes place in an enormous variety of contexts namely, psychological context, educational context, social context, or political context. It can be physical context, as the room in which we talk or an auditorium for a public lecture. Mira Bergelson (2016) has explained the interrelations between different types of contexts (cultural, institutional, professional, social, interpersonal and others) within the intercultural communication process citing Russian–Western communication. As it is shown in Figure 1: Culture ⇨ Communication ⇉ Content & Cognition.
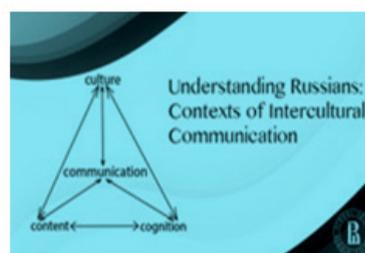

Figure 1 Intercultural Continuum
(Source: https://www.coursera.org/course/russians)

In the intercultural communication process, adaptation with the new context or situation is a significant aspect. A human being has an innate capacity to adapt the environmental challenges through communication. Adaptation is a complex and dynamic process that brings about a qualitative transformation of the individual (Kim, 2001). In the emerging global village, McLuhan (1962) has said that all parties must adapt and move towards a greater awareness of intercultural issues. So, adaptability is undeniably a certain focal point in intercultural communication as well as in cultural anthropology and communication studies.

In the era of globalization, professionals, learners, and others are involved in meaningful interactions and negotiations with people of same or other discourse community. Negotiation is considered as a powerful device in ESP professional situation enabling speakers to engage in cross-cultural communication. In this vein, Awicha Benabdallah (2012) has suggested "...adapting an intercultural approach to ESP (English for Special Purpose) teaching might be of great valuable if the ESP practitioner can manage the teaching materials to his learners' needs and requirements ...to impart them with the needed linguistic knowledge, enhancing, ...their intercultural competence through analyzing texts and comparing them to their culture".

Both linguistic accuracy and sociolinguistic appropriacy are crucial for effective communication, indeed. "Inappropriate performance, even if it is perfectly accurate linguistically, can never be effective as communication, not only because it does not produce the desired effect, but also because it sometimes produces the opposite effect" (as cited in Migdadi, 2008). In global standpoint, the cultural and linguistic diversities are the specificities in language teaching. Students' intercultural awareness can lead to success in communication process in their real life situation.

In cross-cultural encounters, learners' linguistic competence along with the knowledge of the culture of a given community is of great importance for successful cross-cultural communication. So, "In addition to grammatical competence, a culturally competent learner must possess sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence, socio-cultural knowledge, and intercultural awareness" (Chlopek, 2008). In this connection, Ellis (1997) has added that individuals who are motivated to integrate both linguistic and nonlinguistic outcomes of the learning experience will attain a higher degree of L2 proficiency and more desirable attitudes.

In portraying the interrelationship between culture and language, renowned cross-cultural critic, Hall (as cited in Mebitil, 2012) has pointed out that *"No two concepts are more intimately linked than language and culture. In our interactions with others, we use language not only to refer to or represent our sociocultural worlds. It is also the central means by which we bring our cultural worlds into existence, maintain them, and shape them for our own purposes."*

Needless to say, language is an inseparable part of what we call culture, and it also reflects and interprets culture. In a similar tone, Peterson and Coltrane (as cited in Kim, 2001) have laid emphasis on *"those language learners need to know what is appropriate to say to whom, and in what situations. Hence, the teaching of English as a second or foreign language should go beyond teaching the language as a linguistic skill to teaching the language in a way that incorporates intercultural awareness and understanding as well."*

Teaching culture thus becomes a vital part of teaching English as language is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways (Migdadi, 2008). So, to construct a possible communication without misunderstandings and breakdowns, according to Claire Kramsch (1993), cultural awareness must then be viewed as enabling language proficiency. Culture in language teaching is not a fifth expendable skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. While Jiang (1994) said that because a language is a part of culture and culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.

Culture and cultural awareness in foreign language learning is a motivating issue. Promoting cultural awareness among learners in the target language is essential, so far as the cross-cultural factors are concerned. Cultural compatibility and adaptation to cross-cultural issues are motivating factors in L2 acquisition. An individual's attitudes concerning cultural values and beliefs, usually towards the target language community are effective factors to EFL learning (Liton, 2012). In today's world of globalization, learning the culture of the target language is a step ahead of effective intercultural communication. In this respect, Kumaravadivelu argues that developing critical cultural consciousness enables one to learn and grow, to change and evolve, so as to meet the challenges of today's emerging global reality (as cited in Mebitil, 2012). Such a cultural consciousness is often referred to as intercultural awareness. An instance in a conversation is listed below between a Chinese girl, Miss Chen and her American boyfriend, Mr. Steven.

Mr. Steven: Hey, Puppy, you look lovely today!
Miss Chen: What? Am I your pet dog?
Mr. Steven: Oh, I mean baby, please.

From the conversation, the lack of knowledge about "Puppy" as a pet name in American culture obviously offends the girl, whose culture has attributed unfavorable meanings to dogs. Such misunderstandings occur because of learners' lack of intercultural awareness. Behind such a perspective, it is essential to address culture and cultural differences in between the cultures of the target language and that of the learners. (Djebbari & Belkaid, 2012).

For an effective communication in foreign language, Samovar, Porter, and Jain (1981) have duly observed and implicated that culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds. It also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted culture is the foundation of communication.

Intercultural language teaching is intended to help learners avoid communication breakdown in their learning and workplace settings. The importance of developing intercultural communicative competence alongside linguistic competence has resulted from learners' needs for acquiring intercultural competence for cross-cultural communication in which they may encounter linguistic and cultural barriers. The goal of intercultural language teaching under the umbrella concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence is to embrace "Linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence, as well as intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness" (Krajka, Marczak, Tatar, & Yildiz, 2013).

Actually, intercultural language teaching encourages learners to work autonomously, perform, and reflect on experience exclusively and intercultural competence must, therefore, be seen as a generic competence (Matsumoto & et. al, 2003). So, the reason behind the teaching of culture in EFL classroom is to help L2 learners develop the ability to use the target language in culturally appropriate ways for the specific purpose of empathizing and interacting with speakers of the target language (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

METHODS

The study was conducted among teachers who were teaching ESP/EFL at Department of English (Abuarish) and English Language Centre (ELC) of Jazan University, Jazan as well as Najran University, Najran, Saudi Arabia. The participants were chosen on a random basis. A total of 29 teachers took part in this study.

The mechanism of data collection for this study encompasses one page written research questionnaire (see Appendix). The author sent a questionnaire to 36 ESP teachers via e-mail, Facebook and Skype in between October and November of 2014. There were multiple choice questions as well as a question asking for short suggestions, offering the respondents a free rein. The pedagogical goal of the survey was explained in the appendix. They answered the questionnaire pretty willingly. Virtually, this type of research reflects ground reality concerning the issue discussed as personal reflections are integral to the emerging analysis of a cultural group because they provide the researcher with new vantage points and with opportunities to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Out of 36, a total of 29 questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 81%. This part of this paper reviews the related

research and views underpinning of adopting intercultural communication issues in EFL teaching practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data of questionnaire are analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The collected data of questionnaire were sorted out, and the percentage of teachers offering the same answer is computed. Typically, throughout the data analysis processes, according to Creswell (2003), the researcher attempts to describe patterns and themes from the perspective of the participant(s), then attempt to understand and explain these patterns and themes". Figures are drawn below to sum up the frequency of responses to almost all the questions (see figures). Here, the most striking and contributing data of questionnaires have been cited.

The first question is set to determine teachers' opinion regarding the importance of culture in teaching English that can be seen in Figure 2.
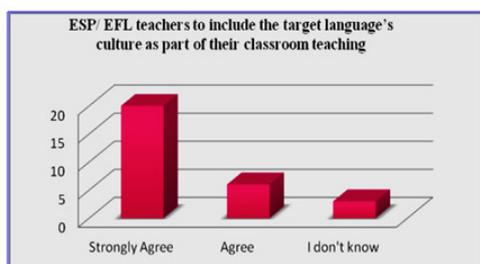

Figure 2 Incorporate Culture in Teaching Language

The majority of the teachers (69%+21% = 90%) reported that current ESP/EFL course in use does not address the cultural issues related to learners' future professional environment. The teacher participants' concern over learners' intercultural communication competence sounds very much positive. In intercultural communication, the importance of cultural factors and incorporation of culture in ELT (English Language Teaching) classrooms is highly suggestive because according to Mao (2009), our students' comprehension is frequently impeded not by linguistic features, but by cultural one language can never be divorced from culture.

The second question seeks to know the range of learners' reaction about the contents of existing ESP/EFL courses when they come across the foreign cultural element in the text. The responses of a huge number (72%) of the respondents draw attention to the fact that the contents of existing ESP/EFL text are not wholly learners' culturally relevant. This can be seen in Figure 3.

Obviously, suitability of the contents of authentic textbook is a highly significant factor to develop learners' learning motivation. Bacon and Finneman (1990) have added that the texts should be culturally relevant to the experience of the students. In this vein, Lee (1995) has stated that a careful and wise selection of materials focused on learners is a must if we want a positive response from them. In addition, Little et al., (as cited in Mishan, 2005) state that the more texts are related to learners' personal concerns and interests, the deeper and more rapid the processing will be. In reality, if the teaching materials are related to students' attachment to deep-seated values of their own, the learning motivation takes place simultaneously. So, to address the learners' real needs in intercultural communication, the text should expose a variety of cultural contents from home and abroad relevant to the learners' own values and cultural background.
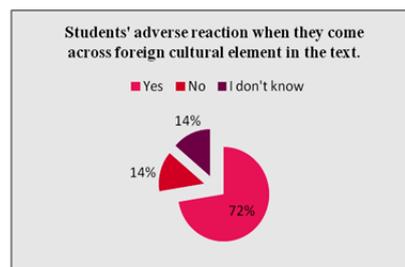

Figure 3 Students' Adverse Reaction to Foreign Cultural Content in The Text

The third question proposed that cross-cultural issues should be a major integrated part of EFL/ESP curriculum. Cross-cultural issues in the text facilitate students to compare their native culture to other cultures, to evaluate critically and interpret the results of such comparisons, and to apply this knowledge successfully in both verbal and non-verbal communication, in transactional and interactional purposes. So, cross-cultural contents need to import in existing EFL/ESP textbook (66%). It can be seen in Figure 4.
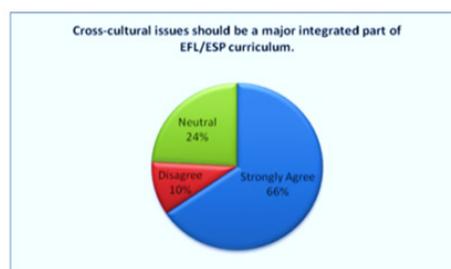

Figure 4 Cross-cultural Issues to be integrated in TEFL/TESL

Here 24% participants express their neutral position which underlines their unawareness of current global trends of ELT curricula and workplace needs. Cross-cultural consciousness enhances effective communication skill, developing learners' awareness of cultural differences as the positive catalyst. So, educating oneself about the other culture is an advisable initial step. Next, open-mindedness and communication are the subsequent ingredients of successful cross-cultural management (Dumetz, n.d).

The fourth question seeks to receive the teachers' estimation on the learners' needs of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), as seen in Figure 5.
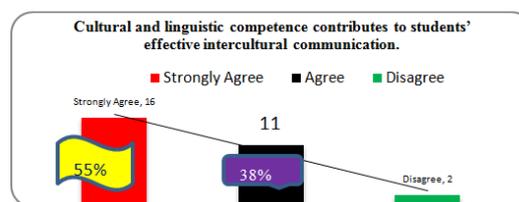

Figure 5 Linguistic and Cultural Competence Contributes Learners' Intercultural Communication

The overwhelming responses of the participants (55% + 38% = 93%) show their awareness of learners' real-life needs to develop effective intercultural communication skill. So, it is suggestive that in teaching English, the course content should address the intercultural issues to improve learners' both linguistic and cultural competences in a complex networked global village.

Finally, the fifth question offers a free reign to the participants to give a more self-reported opinion for formulating pragmatic course imparting intercultural issues. Teacher participants' suggestions are reported into structured answers. Table 1 shows the rate of participants' percentage and numbers are also jotted down:

Table 1 *Teachers' Reflections and Suggestions from Data Analyzes*

Sl. No	Suggestions	Answer	Percentage (%)
1.	Extra-linguistic aspects are absent in the text. Textbook must include a variety of world cultural information, not conflicting with learners' own.	23	77
2.	Integration of Linguistic & extra-linguistic issues in ESP/EFL classroom – a step ahead of teaching effectiveness.	24	80
3.	Unavailable Intercultural communication practice options. So, the learners should be exposed to video-led lessons related to a variety of intercultural conversations.	22	73
4.	Cultural artifacts such as food, clothing, music, art, or literature as well as a TV show, newspaper, movies can be used to incorporate cultural knowledge.	25	83

Source: data analysis of questionnaires

Indeed, the varied suggestions from the majority of the participants underline promising teachers' concern over the upshot of their students' needs in the real life situation. Interestingly,73% participants suggest that learners should be exposed to the opportunity to video-led lessons related to variety of intercultural conversations to develop intercultural communication competence which is the main concern of today's global workplace.

Based on varied suggestions from the participants, to develop learners' effective communication skill and intercultural awareness, Stern's (1992) module of teaching culture in language classroom in the figure below can be taken as effective suggestion in Figure 6.
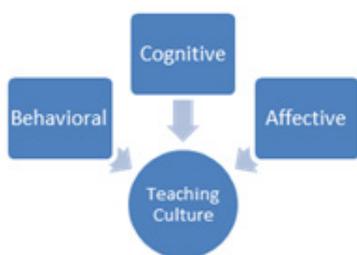

Figure 6 Stern's Module of Culture teaching in the EFL context/classroom

This paper examines the diverse information on the terrain of intercultural communication awareness and issues based on statistical data analyses and revealed the following points of hypotheses:

Variable: The incorporation of interculturality of language teaching enables the learners to grasp the difference between their own cultural metrics and other cultural differences.

There are several problems that appear in adopting intercultural communication issue in teaching English. The first problem is the unsuitability of the textbook. Existing ESL/EFL text does not address the intercultural communication issues related to learners' future professional environment and contents of the course are not wholly learners' culturally relevant. This problem can be seen in figure 1 and 2 (90% and 93%) above. The second problem is learners' adverse attitude towards course materials. In figure 3 above, it can be seen that 72% of the participants reported that EFL/ESP learners have an adverse reaction towards foreign cultural element in the text which is not relevant and compatible to their own cultural values.

The third problem is intercultural communication skill ignored. The current textual material fails to facilitate the learners' intercultural communication practice option which is the crying needs of today's digitalized global workplace (Table 1, 73%). Next, the fourth problem about this issue is extra-linguistic aspects totally unavailable. The existing EFL/ESL textbook only focuses on the linguistic aspects in the classroom and extra-linguistic issues are totally ignored (77%, Table 1).

Some viable suggestions based on research results are cited and curriculum department of Jazan University & Najran University should be attentive to facilitate intercultural communication issues in the textual gallery. In cross-cultural aspects of the text, cross-cultural contents need to import in the existing textbook to develop learners' awareness of cultural differences as a positive catalyst and enhance intercultural communication skill (Figure 4, 66%). While in intercultural communication practices, in the textbook, the learners should be exposed to a variety of cultural contents from home and abroad and video-led intercultural conversations to develop intercultural awareness and effective communication (Table 1, 73%). The authentic course material is suggested that course should cover cultural (extra-linguistic) and linguistic components to widen learners' knowledge of cross-cultural variations and improve their intercultural communicative competence and awareness of cultural differences (Figure 5, 93%). While doing the pedagogical shift, the teachers need to shift from a traditional teaching stance to an inter-cultural one to develop both linguistic and intercultural competences of the learners (Figure 5).

CONCLUSIONS

The present research divulges certain effective implications emerging from the findings of data analyses. First, ESP/EFL course contents should cover linguistic and cross-cultural components to create intercultural situation in classrooms, and to tackle the challenges students may face like intercultural phenomena, such as- culture shock, cultural adaptation, cultural adjustment, and other cultural conflicts. Secondly, cross-cultural contents relevant to the learners' own values and cultural background need to import in existing course curricula for students'

awareness of cultural differences in intercultural situation to avoid cultural conflicts- as a result of misinterpretations, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and prejudice. Thirdly and very importantly, ESL/EFL teachers need to shift from a traditional teaching practice to an inter-cultural one. Finally, it can be suggested to supplement the textbook by extracting issues of cultural artifacts such as food, clothing, music, art, or literature as well as TV show, newspaper, magazine or movies to incorporate idea of cultural awareness and variations. Hopefully, after all these adaptations and incorporating the linguistic and intercultural activities discussed in this article will be a motivating and contributing point to help our students being more culturally aware and confident in intercultural communication. This study, in the final analysis, suggests accommodating linguistic and non-linguistic aspects in teaching EFL/ESL what Kramsch (1993) has termed this learning process as a sphere of interculturality. In addition, it is expected that the results of the present study however can shed significant light to other Saudi universities, and many other Middle Eastern countries that share same socio-economic and cultural backdrop.

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