

Exploring English Culture Through English Language Books

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Abstract

It is common to overlook or perceive culture as an extra component in EFL teaching. Modern linguistic theories emphasize the importance of focusing on culture as an essential part of language teaching. Since The communication approach was relied upon in teaching language at the end of the sixties, the concept of communicative competence has been highlighted, which many researchers believe develops not only through learning language skills, but We also mention this as well actual language interaction (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Kramsch From his perspective, culture is not considered a “fifth skill” that is part of the skill traditional skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), but rather represents a background that exists from the beginning of language learning, causing changes in learners’ perception of language and revealing the limits of their communicative competence (Kramsch, 1993: 1). Tseng’s sociolinguistic perspective links language and culture, highlighting that language proficiency involves not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts. He believes that understanding the culture that underlies a language is essential for successful language learning (Tsing, 12: 2002).

Keywords: Culture, Language, Books, Education, Teaching, ELT.

Introduction

This review will examine the literature on culture in language teaching, covering several main topics including: the definition of culture The importance of culture in language teaching curricula, its impact on EFL teaching, the challenges facing the teaching of culture, how to introduce culture in curricula, strategies for Culture in teaching, and finally the culture of teaching in the fields of Teaching English as a foreign language.

Culture can be interpreted differently by different people (Kakir, 2006). Culture is defined as one’s way of life by Lado (1957), as stated by Lessard-Closton (1997).

The definition encompasses both the physical and non-physical aspects of culture, which are the tangible and apparent aspects, and the intangible aspects, which are the hard-to-observe ones. It’s important to distinguish between macroculture and microculture in this context (Mansoor et al., 2022). Macroculture refers to a society’s outstanding achievements, such as the arts, music, literature, scientific discoveries, and sports, while microculture focuses on a society’s lifestyle And the right behavior (Karazai, 1999; Oguru, 2008; Omaggio-Hadley, 2000).

The American Heritage Dictionary (1996) provides multiple definitions of culture, including the patterns, characteristics, and products that represent a specific period, social class, community, or group, as well as the development of thought through practical experience and learning.

Lyons (1981: 301-302) argues that it is crucial to understand two distinct definitions of culture. Excellence in areas like art, literature, morality, and social institutions is the first definition related to civilization. Anthropology and social science have adopted the second definition, which asserts that each society has its own culture and that there may be distinct subcultures within each society.

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Brooks (1975, as cited in Omaggio-Hadley, 1993) and Kramersch (1995) provide similar definitions of culture; the former describes it as the best aspects of a person's life, while the latter views it as encompassing all aspects of a person's life.

The evolution of the definition of culture, from being viewed as the best aspects of a person's life, has expanded to encompass all aspects of an individual's life to encompassing all aspects of life, has been accompanied by an increasing emphasis on its importance in foreign language classrooms, although no single, A comprehensive definition was agreed upon, according to Damen (1987: 81), changes in these definitions have been constantly added without being Completely replaced.

Damen highlighted the complexity of the relationship between culture and the connections between different cultures, which makes it challenging to define culture with precision. She argues that because of the complexity The concept of culture and its connection to communicate between other cultures and language learning, brief definitions cannot capture its many aspects Conversely, when definitions are more expansive and comprehensive, they are of great benefit (p. 80).

Despite the existence of different definitions of culture, there is a consensus on certain fundamental aspects. Damen (1987: 81) points out three basic aspects that serve as a “global consensus” definition of culture: First, all human dimensions must be considered when studying culture, as these dimensions integrate to form a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Selectiveness occurs when an individual chooses cultural choices that align with their desires. The third factor is that culture can change over time.

The importance of culture in language teaching cannot be overstated, as learning cannot take place without culture; understanding the language culture enhances learning.

The Concept of Culture in Language Learning Books: Secondly

For some foreign language educators, the integration of culture into language instruction may seem like a recent innovation. However, an examination of language teaching methodologies reveals that this has long been part of the process. Before the 1960s, foreign and second language learning primarily focused on studying literature and fine arts through the grammar-translation method.

This point is highlighted by Lessard-Clouston (1997). With the advent of the audiolingual approach in the 1960s, the focus began to shift towards what is known as “micro” culture, which includes patterns of daily life, acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and everything related to the interaction between the individual and society, rather than focusing on the “macro” culture represented by music and literature.

As Seeley (1984), citing Omaggio-Hadley (1993: 362), noted, “many foreign language teachers considered an understanding of the language and knowledge of the patterns of everyday life to form the necessary basis for the appreciation of the arts and literary studies.” Due to the introduction of the communicative approach, there was an increase in attention to communicative competence in the late 1960s.

This is not limited to the ability to use language with grammatical accuracy but also includes the ability to use it appropriately in various contexts, as highlighted by Richards and Rodgers (2001), Çakir (2006), and Turkan and Celik (2007).

This interest is since the communicative approach to language educating is based on the concept of language as a tool for interaction and communication, where the primary goal of language teaching is to enhance what Hymes (1972) called “communicative competence.” The book written by Richards and Rodgers in 2004 and Widdowson in 2007 is referred to as.

Our Focus is on Learning About Culture and Teaching English as A Foreign Language.

To study language, one must comprehend the connection between language and culture. Sapir observed in 1921 that language is not a separate entity from culture; it is linked to a set of socially inherited customs

and values that form the basis of our lives. For his part, Alptekin sees learning a foreign language as a form of acculturation, whereby the learner acquires new cultural frameworks and a different perspective that reflects the culture Speakers of the target language and its logic (2002: 58).

Many scholars have contributed to emphasizing the integration of language and culture, including Cakir (2006), Lessard-Clouston (1997), Thanasoulas (2001), Kramsch (1993), and Hinkel (2001), who have explored how culture is incorporated into language teaching. MacLeod (1976: 212) asserted that the teaching of language is intrinsically linked to the teaching of culture. It appears that culture has been integrated into the language teaching process.

The Challenges That Are Associated with Teaching Methods

Language educators are mindful of the significance of integrating culture into education, but they are frequently criticized for their limited involvement in this aspect in the classroom (Oguro, 2008).

There are multiple factors that contribute to the lack of culture focus on language teaching, including:

Time: Teaching culture requires a lot of time, and language teachers are subject to time pressures that may reduce their ability to integrate culture into their lessons (Galloway, 1985, from Omaggio-Hadley, 1993; Oguro, 2008; Onalan, 2005).

Teaching culture can be insecure for teachers because of their lack of background knowledge (Omaggio-Hadley, 1993; Oguro, 2008).

Sensitive nature: Some teachers are concerned about the culture of teaching because it requires adapting to new and different methods topics that may be sensitive, ambiguous, and not clearly measurable, making it a greater challenge (Galloway, 1985, from Omaggio-Hadley, 1993: 358).

Hinkle emphasizes the complicated process of teaching culture, stressing that culture is not distinct from second language learning. In his opinion, understanding the culture of a language can enhance learners' ability to communicate, as language usage reflects the culture of its speakers. He proposes combining the teaching of culture and language skills to emphasize the strong connection between language and culture (2001: 456).

The difficulties represented by the challenges can discourage teachers from emphasizing culture in the classroom and prompt discussions on which cultural elements should be taught and how they should be presented.

Fifth: Including the Cultural Dimension in Educational Curricula

Textbooks are one of the most prominent tools used in teaching languages in the classroom According to Turkan and Celik (2007), these books are made with the aim of teaching English as a foreign or second language globally, as they aim to meet the needs of learners and enhance their linguistic and cultural development in the English-speaking context.

Turkan and Celik underscore the significance of books that incorporate the language's culture and are adaptable to the learner's needs, levels, and cultural backgrounds. However, the researchers note that these books often focus on the students' native culture, and do not always include important it encompasses elements of the target culture, including history, literature, music, and visual arts, information ceremonies, and the lifestyle of native speakers. The cultural exchange between peoples does not always reflect these resources. In national textbooks, students' local cultures are often more prominent than those of English-speaking countries.

Ensure that cultural elements are included by reviewing and evaluating educational materials when teaching English as a foreign language to achieve desired results. The introduction of culture to learners is facilitated

by curriculum designers, teachers, material developers, and learners with specific needs and interests, as noted by Robotjazi (2008).

For language and culture to be closely linked, it is crucial to introduce culture to learners at the beginning of their educational journey. To cater to the learners' lives, it is crucial to identify the cultural elements that are taught. Budrick (2004) and Baker (2003) recommend introducing culture gradually, depending on the age and interests of the students. It's possible to introduce basic topics about the culture of the target language during the early stages of learning, even if it may be more complex. Advanced levels are given to topics according to their cultural contexts.

Budrick (2004) emphasizes the importance of matching cultural content with students' interests and ages, so that culture can be integrated at later stages after a certain level of language proficiency has been achieved, through more complex and comprehensive tasks and activities.

Fifth: Methods of Teaching Culture

Teachers need effective methods and tools to introduce culture in the classroom and support them through the complex process of teaching culture. Omaggio-Hadley (1993: 360) emphasizes the importance of providing teachers with an organizational framework to guide them in selecting appropriate cultural content, as he believes that the absence of such a plan may lead to random and incoherent teaching of culture. Various strategies exist for teaching culture that aim to aid teachers in integrating culture in a pedagogical manner that is effective.

Sixth: Traditional Approach

In the past, traditional approaches to teaching culture relied on imparting information. Broad insights into the target culture are offered, including its history, geography, institutions, arts, traditions, and ways of life. (Tomalin and Stemplesky, 1993 cited in Baker, 2003).

Four common ways to teach culture were recognized by Galloway (1985) and Omaggio-Hadley (1993).

Bringing together elements from different cultures, including dishes from one culture, folk dances from another, customs and traditions from another, is what the Frankenstein approach is all about.

The 2-F approach is designed to emphasize folklore, festivals, celebrations, and food.

A tour guide's approach is to provide information on landmarks, rivers, and notable cities.

To demonstrate cultural differences, the 'by the way' approach involves presenting facts or behaviors in a scattered and unorganized manner.

The way culture is presented is often restricted to brief glimpses of multiple cultures (Ogoro, 2008; Salover, 2004). Avoiding this method is advisable as it is very limited and only presents information in a limited way.

Seventh: Cultural Comparison

The modern approach to teaching culture has shifted away from just teaching facts and towards a more in-depth understanding of cultures. This approach relies on cultural interaction and comparison between the learner's home culture and the target culture. When the language learner begins to become familiar with the target culture from a comparative perspective, he or she sees it not as an alternative to his or her own culture but as a space that allows him or her to learn from both cultures.

Kramersch (1993) suggests that learning a foreign language creates a "third place" where the learner could look objectively at both his or her home culture (C1) and the target culture (C2), enabling him or her to build a personal understanding that reflects his or her own perspective. This concept emphasizes the

importance of personal interpretations instead of relying on rigid interpretations and stereotypes (Baker, 2003).

Comparing their home culture to the target culture allows students to develop critical thinking and participate actively in the learning process. The teacher can help students improve their critical thinking and gain a better understanding of both their home culture and the target culture by aiding them in making cultural comparisons. Learning a culture involves more than just experiencing a new culture but also comprehending how it interacts with the learner's own cultural experience (Liao, 2006).

Eighth: Educating Culture as A Continuous Performance

Crawford, Lang, and Lang (1987: 258-259) contend that teaching culture should be an essential component of language instruction, as culture is a process that arises with language learning and should therefore be taught as an integrated process with it.

This process has eight stages, with the first five focused on teachers and the last three focused on students. It is acknowledged by researchers that some stages may overlap with each other, and not all of them can be incorporated into one lesson.

Choosing a cultural topic is the initial step. Issues or topics related to culture that question the values of both the original and target cultures are considered cultural topics. The effectiveness of the topics depends on whether they are relevant to the learners' experiences.

Stage 2 involves the presentation of cultural phenomena to students through pictures, presentations, and other educational media. The cultural topics in question are represented through their interactions and applications.

The primary focus of Stage 3 of intercultural dialogue is to describe cultural phenomena, analyze object characteristics, and express responses from the learner's culture.

Stage 4: Shift towards language acquisition As students become increasingly interested in culture, their language needs become clear. It is advisable for them to either ask language questions or consult available reference materials.

The textbook is the primary source of necessary language materials in the language learning process, which contributes to improving language skills practice and providing communication opportunities.

In stage 6, students utilize their acquired language skills to explore resources and either confirm or revise their initial ideas about the target culture and their culture of origin.

The purpose of Stage 7: Cultural Awareness is to improve students' awareness of their cultural understanding, allowing them to apply it in various future scenarios.

At Stage 8, language and cultural competence is assessed together as part of a comprehensive process.

When reviewing previous approaches to teaching culture, it becomes clear that language classes have switched to presenting two cultures instead of just one. Understanding the shortness of the learner's home culture when compared to the target culture enhances their learning about the target culture. Facilitates their acquisition of a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of both.

Ninth: Studying Culture Within the Framework of Learning English as A Foreign Language

Much research has been conducted to examine the role of culture in teaching English as a foreign language, including studies by Turkan and Celik (2007), Stapleton (2000), Oguro (2008), and Ali Akbari (2004). These

studies are grounded in recent changes to language teaching curricula that prioritize culture in the learning process.

The review will include studies from Turkey, Japan, Spain, China, Estonia, and Iran, as well as several other studies in multiple countries in the following sections. The aim of this review is to improve understanding the importance of culture in teaching English as a foreign language in the Palestinian context, which shares similarities with other educational settings.

These studies focus on the perceptions of culture in English language textbooks, the use of multimedia in cultural education, and the impact of culturally based educational programs.

Teachers' perceptions and English language textbooks are impacted by culture.

The significance of culture in textbooks used in Turkish universities was studied by Onalan (2005) through their analysis of the opinions of Turkish English language instructors. The study indicates that teachers hold a belief in the importance of culture for their students, but this subject is not prioritized as much as other topics in language teaching.

In Japan, Stapleton (2000) reviewed teachers' views on the role of culture in the English language curriculum, where he found that teachers include culture in their lessons randomly, and show a preference for "overt" culture over "hidden" culture when discussing cultural topics. Inconsistencies in the content of textbooks were noted by teachers regarding American bias and the superficial portrayal of culture presented in them.

In Spain, Castro et al. The 2004 focus was about the degree to which secondary school teachers support the cultural learning objectives stipulated in the Spanish national curriculum. Language learning objectives are prioritized by foreign language teachers over those related to culture, as per the findings.

Salover (2004) investigated the teaching and learning of culture in English classes at secondary school in Estonia. The study found that teachers recognized the significance of culture in education, but did not prioritize it during the teaching process, and students had a limited understanding of the target culture.

The role of local culture in English language curricula:

Turkan and Celik (2007) cites that Turkish culture is largely featured in English language textbooks in Turkey, which implies that students would converse more with their country's visitors than with English-speaking countries. Their English culture was hindered by their local culture, which could lead to miscommunication with native speakers.

Modification of cultural content in textbooks:

Oguro (2008) examined cultural materials in fourteen textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education in Japan, discovering that the original texts were frequently altered or portions of them were removed, resulting in a weakening of the cultural aspect. The exercises accompanying these texts were based on a literal understanding, which did not sufficiently enhance cultural understanding.

In Iran, Ali Akbari (2004) studied in the treatment of culture in textbooks, and found that these books suffer from superficiality in cultural content and do not effectively contribute to enhancing students' intercultural competence, which does not help them expand their cultural understanding.

These studies reflect that teaching culture in EFL education varies from country to country, with varying levels of emphasis on culture and the extent of its integration with language teaching, which reinforces the need for a comprehensive understanding of these aspects to develop a curriculum that suits students' needs and opens a broader horizon to different cultures.

Tenth: Learning Through Multimedia to Understand Different Cultures

Technology has been utilized to enhance both language and culture teaching. Many researchers have been interested in using modern technologies to facilitate the teaching of second language culture and The goal of this process is to facilitate understanding of the target culture and make it more approachable to the learners. Adequate attention to pragmatics (practical language) and culture, which are often neglected in language teaching, is highlighted by Al-Atawneh (2003). Stressed the significance of integrating these elements into English language teaching materials to bring language learning closer to the natural acquisition process. With the spread of flexible learning thanks to digital technology, Atawneh suggested the use of electronic programs to teach culture, especially pragmatics, to reduce the cultural gap that may arise from the learners' lack of knowledge of the target culture.

In this context, Kramsch (1999) conducted a study on the interplay between text and context in a multimedia program dedicated to teaching the Quechua language, where he presented suggestions for the use of multimedia in teaching foreign languages.

Both learners and teachers must put in effort to apply multimedia to language teaching in its original cultural framework. To comprehend the language in a practical context, the learner must observe and select cultural features that are appropriate to the context and put them in a linguistic framework that is understandable.

The Impact of Educational Programs That Are Based on Culture

Cenk and Bada (2005) conducted a study on students of the Department of English Language Education at Cukurova University, Turkey, with the aim of investigating their opinions on the impact of the culture lessons they underwent in the first semester 2003-2004 academic year. The study found that these classes were highly effective in developing language skills, fostering cultural awareness, improving attitudes towards different cultures, and supporting academic careers.

Tsou (2005) conducted a study to assess the willingness of English language teachers in Taiwan to teach the culture of the target language. The incorporation of cultural lessons into EFL instruction significantly improved students' language proficiency and heightened their interest in learning the language, as evidenced by the results.

A study was conducted by Juma (2008) to examine the influence of a cultural educational program on the academic performance of secondary school students in Palestine and their attitudes towards English culture. The study's results indicated statistically significant differences in achievement levels favoring male students, while no impact of the program was observed on students' cultural attitudes toward the English language.

Conclusion

Genuine connections between cultures can only occur when we acknowledge and trust in the values and beliefs of our society. If language is invented without considering its cultural context, social communication is lost. To understand culturally, culture must be considered an essential part of language learning. In this topic, I reviewed the extent to which English as a foreign Language educators acknowledge the pivotal role of culture in the teaching process and the extent to which cultural understanding objectives are integrated into linguistic curricula. The findings indicate a growing recognition of the significance of incorporating culture in language education, but its effective inclusion still needs more focus. This study aims to examine how culture is addressed in EFL teaching using this field as a framework for this context, based on this background.

Exploring English culture through books written in English can lead to a rich and rewarding experience. These are the main points to remember:

Diversity of topics: English books cover a variety of topics that reflect the history and culture of England, including literature, poetry, history, and customs and traditions.

Classical literature: The works of writers such as Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, and Jane Austen are an introduction to understanding English culture, as they reflect the values and societies of different time periods.

Language and slang: Learning English requires understanding popular phrases and proverbs that reflect everyday life and how language is used in social contexts.

Social and political history: Many books provide insights into historical events that have shaped English culture, such as the Industrial Revolution and the two world wars.

Arts and music: There are books that address the influence of English arts and music, reflecting the cultural diversity and creativity in this area.

Regional differences: Some books reflect the cultural differences between different regions of England, helping to foster a deeper understanding of English identity.

Conclusion: In general, studying English culture through English language books provides you with a deeper understanding of the English-speaking world, and highlights the interrelationship between culture and language.

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