



The Perspective of English Language Teachers on Intercultural Communication and Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT: *An intercultural communication and language teaching have been subjects of interest for researchers and language teachers over the past few years. Intercultural communication has already been established as part of the language teaching process worldwide. On the other hand, in the Pakistani context, teachers mostly have not adapted it because they lack adequate instructional design models to integrate intercultural communication and language teaching. The inadequacy of the instructional model suggests exploring the outcomes and benefits of the intercultural approach in Sindh. This study was conducted to investigate the perception of language teachers about intercultural communication in language teaching. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. The participants were asked ten open-ended questions in the interview. Their answers were recorded and interpreted. Content analysis tool was used to interpret and analyze the data. The findings of this study suggest the use of intercultural communication in language teaching has significant impact. The findings also prove that intercultural communication is beneficial if the syllabuses are designed carefully by looking at the similarities and differences between source language culture and target language culture. The participants were very positive about the inclusion of intercultural communication in the English language teaching at the college level in Sindh.*

Keywords: Intercultural communication, language, teaching content analysis, perspectives

Introduction

Research in language teaching has presented a variety of methods and techniques for language teachers. One of the recent developments in language teaching is the inclusion of cultural elements. Culture plays an important role in intercultural communication and language teaching and learning (Karabinar & Gulur, 2013). Culture in language teaching provides learners with authentic situations where the learners can acquire a language like native speakers. It is the need of the hour to answer if the inclusion of culture can strengthen the teaching of English in the

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Pakistani context. To find out the outcome of cultural elements, many researchers in the field of Applied Linguistics and sociolinguistics have tried to establish the fact that culture can enhance language learning skills (Choudhury, 2014).

From the perspective of the researchers, four views about the role of culture in language deserve attention. The first is that language and culture may be combined to acculturate language teaching. Culture may be introduced to the learners (Byram & Flemming, 1998). The second view states that culture should be excluded from language teaching, especially in the country having English as its institutionalized communication tool (Kachru, 1986). The third and fourth view supports the second idea and reject the use of the culture of the target language in the teaching of language. The debate over if intercultural communication and language teaching have a positive relationship is complex.

Statement of the Problem

After looking at the complex nature of the relationship between language and culture, it becomes imperative to explore the use of an intercultural approach in language teaching in the context of Sindh, Pakistan. Language teaching provides several methods and techniques to language teachers, and the struggle to make it easier, economical, and time-saving has never ceased. The present study will investigate the benefits of using intercultural communication in language teaching. The purpose of selecting the topic is to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the perspective of English language teachers on culture?
2. How do English language teachers anticipate the outcome of teaching language through an intercultural perspective?
3. What type of strategies and materials are used to teach language through culture by English language teachers?
4. Do English language teachers ignore culture in their language teaching?

Significance of the Study

Research in language teaching is not new. It has been carried out since language has been the subject of study. The traces of language teaching in history are found from the age of Aristotle to the modern-day study of

linguistics. Linguistics could be defined as the scientific study of language. Many linguists have given various theories of language acquisition and language teaching and learning. The topic of this study also is the struggle to find out whether acculturation, a linguistic concept of language acquisition, can be used in language teaching in the context of Sindh. The study will significantly contribute to the field of language teaching and learning in Sindh. The study has been limited to the teaching of language through an intercultural perspective. The other developments in language teaching, such as various methods of language teaching have been excluded. This study will also be used for a limited population of Sindh only. This study will generalize the result for Sindh only. Six English language teachers will be interviewed from district Khairpur. They will be asked open-ended questions. The questions will elicit implicit responses from the participants about the main questions of the research.

Literature Review

Culture

The term culture is multidimensional, so it is complex to define it. Culture has been defined with little variations in sociology and language teaching. Culture can be defined pragmatically in language teaching and learning (Byram & Grundy, 2003). Pragmatics studies utterances in context. This suggests that for language teaching culture of the targeted language is important. This helps to teach language to learners according to their needs, ideology, and attitudes towards the language they are learning. All these factors motivate the learning of a second language and help the teachers to teach the language with ease. Another way to define a culture is to see it as a body of knowledge people have about any particular society (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009). This definition includes various practices, beliefs, rituals, behaviors, and norms of a society. This definition is much broader to be included in language teaching. Language teaching needs very relevant knowledge of culture for teaching language properly. When using culture in the classroom, it is necessary to see how that culture presents information and creates meaning. People create meaning or interpret it by using their shared system of knowledge. Therefore, the information must be selected for language teaching based on the needs of learners. Because one cannot

teach the whole culture in a language classroom. Lado (1957, p. 111) defines culture as "cultures are structured systems of patterned behaviors". This definition explains the nature of culture that it is not a set of randomly placed together rituals and practices. However, culture is an organized system of people's behavior. Any English classroom does not include a whole system of practices. For teaching language, the selected behaviors related to language learning are utilized in the teaching of language.

Kramsch (1993, p. 205) defines that "culture is a social construct, the product of self and other perception". By looking at this definition one can infer that culture is not only the practice of social groups collectively, but it can also be identified as individual activities. Saville-Troike (1978, p. 5) purposes the definition of culture as "the concept of culture represents differing ranges of human behaviors, products, and institutions to the people, with different academic and experiential backgrounds". This approach also presents culture comprehensively. All the human behaviors other than the behaviors related to language learning may prove to be irrelevant in language classrooms. Culture also produces many things such as artifacts, sculptures, and many more cultural signs and symbols which may fit into the class of cultural teaching not in the language teaching classroom. From the discussion above, it can be inferred that culture is interrelated with society and its methods of interpreting meaning. Therefore, culture is thought to be the part and parcel of language learning. Language and culture are closely associated with each other.

Language

Language is a medium of communication through which human beings interact and communicate. They share ideas, emotions, feelings, and information. It is a phenomenon linguists have been trying to study scientifically. Layons (1981) compares language with life. According to this definition, language is not as simple as it seems. It is as complex as life. Another suggestion of the definition is that language can also be the subject matter of biological sciences so it must be treated like other natural sciences. For Krauss and Chui (1998) language is present in human social life. It is the major source of carrying cultural knowledge, it is the basic medium through which human beings reach to the mind of others. The way language is used

in social life, the social factors also make the intrinsic part of language use. Social factors such as age, gender, class, and relationships determine the use of language. All these factors influence the way people have to speak to children, adults, friends, and parents. If not properly taken care of these factors, there are sheer chances of misunderstandings between interlocutors. "Language is a complicated business" (Downes, 1998, p. 1). The word language is used in many different ways. Some people use the word for a particular language spoken in a particular region. For other, language is the general ability of human being. The communication of other creatures such as honey bees, chimpanzees, and cricket is also called language by the common man. Even the gestures used for certain communication signals are also termed as language by ordinary people. Language and culture contain meaning and perform the function of communication in society (Hsin, 2008, p. 3). Language has syntactic, semantic, and pragmatics meaning through which the speakers of that language reciprocate the ideas and messages (Brooks, 1968). Whereas structured behaviors become the carrier of the cultural meaning. Both of these aspects can be used collectively to boost the teaching of language in the classroom. Language stands as a central factor in education (Porto, 2013). The reason for the centrality of language in education is commonsensical. The teachers use language to explain various forms of knowledge in different disciplines.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication can be defined as sharing ideas and emotions across cultures through language. The word inter here means across and the culture is a set of social norms of any society. According to Byram as cited by Risager (2007) there are seven major intercultural competencies such as linguistics competence, sociolinguistics competence, discourse competence, attitude, knowledge, skills of interpretation and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction. The term intercultural appeared in education and intercultural communication in the eighties (Kramsch, 2013). The motive behind the approach was mostly political. This orientation started in Scandinavian countries. For bridging the cultural gaps among language learners, the intercultural approach was introduced in the field of education and applied linguistics. Language, culture, and intercultural

communication set the foundation of this research in the context of Sindh and will guide the new researchers, language teachers, practitioners, syllabus designers, and learners of language about the application, benefits, and outcome of the new approach.

Research Methodology

To have a deeper insight into the perspectives of the language teachers on intercultural communication and language, the content analysis technique was used to interpret the semi-structured interviews. Content analysis systematically examines the recorded data of interviews, official records, printed forms, textbooks, documents, and many more forms of data. It is also called document analysis (Singh, 2006). In content analysis, the keywords, phrases, and sentences in context are analyzed. The possible meaning and the relationship between concepts collected through data were analyzed and possible inferences were made in this study. The categories such as words, phrases, sentences were derived from the text of the interviews and were examined through the systematic procedure of content analysis in this study.

The data were collected from six English language teachers from various colleges of the Sukkur Division, Sindh. Three teachers were from Khairpur district, two from Sukkur, and one from Ghotiki district. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. The participants were interviewed and their interviews were recorded properly and then transcribed. The teaching experience of the participants was from 3 to 10 years in various institutes. Three teachers were M.A degree holders two M.Phils and one was having Bachelor (Hons) degree from reputed institutes. All these teachers were requested to share their perspectives on intercultural communication and language teaching respectively. They were also asked to share the teaching techniques and material they use in dealing with such new and important aspects of teaching the English language in their respective colleges.

Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted from the teachers who participated in the study. There were six teachers from various colleges

whose answers were recorded. The eleven open-ended questions were asked from each participant teacher. The interview questions were formulated to seek the perception of the teachers about culture, intercultural communication in English language teaching in the context of Sindh. The purpose of the interview was to gather information about the concept of culture, language, intercultural communication, promotion of intercultural language teaching, using syllabus having intercultural elements and its drawbacks.

Data Analysis

Definition of culture, intercultural communication, and the relationship between language and culture.

The interview questions 1, 2, and 3 were formulated to find out the perception of culture, intercultural communication, and the relationship between language and culture of the English language teachers.

Table 1

Participants' Answers to Questions 1, 2, and 3

Q1: How would you define culture?		
Categories	f	Teachers' Code
Commonly shared values, rituals, stories, practices	4	T1, T2, T4, T5
Social behavior, identity	2	T3, T4,
Social agreement norms	1	T6
Q 2: How do you define intercultural communication?		
Sharing message through culture, using same language	2	T1, T3
A new concept for me	1	T5
communication across different cultures	5	T1, T2, T4, T5, T6
Q 3: How would you see the relationship between language and culture?		
Positive, represents form & culture of society	3	T3, T5, T6
Interdependent, characterize social behavior	3	T1, T2, T4, T6

The results of the first question about the definition of culture, majority of the participants, i.e. four, agreed-upon common shared values, rituals, stories, and practices. Two of the interviewees believed that culture is 'social behavior' and the identity of the people. One of them defined culture as 'social agreement' among the masses and 'norms' of the people.

Question 2 was answered by two of the participants as intercultural communication refers to 'sharing messages through culture, by using same mutual language' of the people. One of the participants answered that the concept of interpersonal communication was 'new' for him, therefore, he was not sure how to define it. Five respondents defined intercultural 'communication as communication across cultures'.

Three respondents agreed on question number that the relationship between language and culture was 'positive'. Language represents the 'form and culture of society. The other three responded that both language and culture are 'interdependent and both 'characterize social behavior' of the people.

Purpose and anticipated outcomes in language teaching

Questions 4, 5, and 6 aimed at to seek perceptions of English language teachers about the benefits and importance of using culture in teaching and their priorities for local cultural elements in language class.

Table 2

Participants' Answer to Question 4

Q 4: Are there any benefits of having intercultural information in English language teaching?		
Categories	f	Teachers' Code
Awareness of culture, minimizing biases,	4	T3, T4, T5, T6
Less communicative misunderstanding,	3	T3, T5, T6
Catch attention	1	T6
Accurate interpretation	1	T1
The motivation of interaction	1	T6
Interest in each other's cultures	1	T2

Table two highlights the key phrases of question number four. Four of the participants responded that there were various benefits of having cultural information in syllabuses such as, 'awareness of culture' and minimizing biases among the people. Three interviewees replied that the awareness of cultural elements helps lessen the chances for communicative misunderstanding. One respondent stated that it 'catches attention and motivates learners. Another interviewee answered that cultural information helps in 'accurate interpretation'. Respondent number two stated that it develops 'interest in each other's culture'.

Table 3

Participants' Answer to Question 5

Q 5: Do you think that teaching about intercultural communication is important in language class?		
Categories	f	Teachers' Code
Students learn the foreign culture, get friendly	2	T1, T2
Yes, culture promotes equality	3	T2, T3, T4
Yes, languages are derived from cultures	2	T5, T6

Table three presents the summary of the results of question number five here. By highlighting the importance of the teaching of culture, two teachers replied that culture teaching helps 'students learn foreign culture and gets students friendly' with other students. The other three respondents replied by saying 'yes' to the importance of the teaching of culture in the language classroom. The two other interviewees also stated 'yes' by giving reasons that 'languages are derived from cultures'.

Table 4

Participants' Answers to 6

Q 6: Do you think teachers use target culture elements in teaching language?		
Categories	f	Teachers' Code
Yes, through stories, dramas, role plays, literature	5	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5
Somehow yes	1	T6

Table four presents the summary of question number six briefly. Five interviewees agreed upon that teachers use target culture which is implicitly present in 'stories, dramas, role-play activities, and literature in general. One of the participants partially agreed and said 'yes', teachers 'somehow' use target culture elements in teaching language.

Materials and techniques used by ELT teachers to promote intercultural communication

The participants were asked to share their ideas to promote intercultural communication in the language classes. They were also asked to share their techniques of how they will evaluate syllabuses and textbooks? They were also questioned to share if they included cultural lessons in their teaching.

Table 5

Participants' Answer to Question 7

How can you promote intercultural communication?		
Categories	f	Teachers' Code
Through awareness, stressing upon it, cultural activities	4	T1, T2, T5, T6
By giving seminars, differences performances	2	T3, T4

Table five presents the summary of the findings of question number seven. Four of the teachers answered this question by saying that they can promote intercultural communication ‘through awareness programs, by stressing upon the importance of intercultural communication, and through cultural activities. Two of the respondents replied that they could promote intercultural communication by giving seminars and different performances.

Table 6

Participants Answer to Question 8

Q8: Do you think the currents books, syllabuses you use are sufficient, insufficient in terms of cultural elements?		
Categories	f	Teachers’ Code
Insufficient, lack explicit cultural information	6	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6

Table six presents the summary of the findings of question number eight. All the six respondents replied that the current books and syllabuses they were using were ‘insufficient and lacked explicit cultural information in them.

Table 7

Participants Answers to Question 9

Q 9: If you are allowed to design your own syllabus for reading class, would you include intercultural elements?		
Categories	f	Teachers’ Code
Yes, to create native-like environments for learners,	6	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6

Table seven presents the summary of the findings of question number nine. All the teachers stated that if they were allowed to design their own syllabus they would definitely include cultural elements in it. The reason behind their positive attitude was 'to create native-like environments for learners in foreign or second language teaching.

4.4. Specific reasons for ignoring cultural elements in classrooms by teachers

Question 10 was formulated to find out the particular reasons for ignoring cultural elements behind the perceptions of English language teachers.

Table 8

Participants' Answer to Question 10

Q 10: Are there any drawbacks to having cultural elements in teaching language?		
Categories	f	Teachers' code
No, rather help learners respect each other	4	T1, T2, T3, T5
No any idea	1	T6
Yes, cultural clash, cultural shock	1	T4

Table eight presents the summary of the findings of question number ten briefly. Out of the six participants, four stated that there were 'no' any drawbacks of having cultural elements in language teaching, 'rather, they believed that it would 'help learners respect each other. One participant answered that he had 'no any sound idea' of the question being asked. One participant believed that 'yes cultural clash and culture shock' may become the possible outcome of such syllabuses.

Findings

The majority of the participants defined culture that it was value system of commonly used rituals, ceremonies, traditions, and social behaviour of a group of people. The participants stated that intercultural communication was sharing of messages across cultures and this element was important in language teaching classrooms because students understand and respect each other. They believed that there was a strong relationship between language and culture. Both were interdependent. One shapes the form of the other. By considering the relationship between language and culture, teachers could teach language effectively. The interviewees also agreed on the benefits of having cultural elements in the language

classroom. They argued that culture builds strong and positive relationships among the learners. By understanding intercultural differences, they could avoid being biased towards each other. They can accurately interpret each other's communication. The inference suggests that they believed that culture could bridge the information gap among the learners. The participants believed that learners get friendly when they are exposed to intercultural differences and similarities. The majority of the teachers also believed that the syllabuses and textbooks they use lack adequate information about culture. Whereas, some of the teachers believed that the books and syllabuses they use have implicit information of the culture. Especially textbooks which have stories, dramas, and literature, in general, were full of cultural elements. The participants also believed that intercultural communication could be promoted through activities such as holding seminars, arranging stage programs, and role-plays. They also believed that through awareness programs the intercultural communication could be promoted. They answered that if they were given chances to design their own syllabus they would happily include the intercultural approach in language class. However, they also believed that the intercultural approach had some drawbacks as well. They believed that the elements from different cultures cause biases and cultural clashes among learners.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that most of the teachers know the importance of culture and role of intercultural communication in language teaching. The analysis and findings suggest that the teachers wish to include intercultural communication or cultural elements in their language classes. However, their courses and textbooks are designed in such a way that they cannot properly include the cultural elements in their teaching. They have clear idea about using the culture and intercultural communication aspect in language teaching class, but they are not given free choice of teaching other than that is given in the syllabuses and they have to stick to the material provided to them. The analysis and findings suggest that teachers must have a role in

syllabus designing. They should be allowed to participate in designing the activities for their classes. It is recommended that a proper syllabus design committee should be formed which designs a balanced syllabus where the cultural clash should not occur.

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