رفع الوعي بأهمية التداخل بين الثقافات في الفصل الدراسي

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ملخص البحث :

تقدم الدراسة الحالية ملخص نظري وعملي لمفهوم التداخل الثقافي لغرض رفع وعي معلمين اللغة الإنجليزية باهميته في الفصل الدراسي للغة. الورقة قسمت لأربعة فصول: التداخل الثقافي وتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، تطبيق التداخل الثقافي في الفصل، والوعي بالتداخل الثقافي وبرامج إعداد المعلمين، ومن ثم تقدم مناقشة وتقييم للملخص المقدم. المناقشة أظهرت أن الباحثين في العديد من الدراسات قدموا واقترحو العديد من الأنشطة التي تهتم بالتداخل الثقافي والتي من الممكن تطبيقها مع طلبة اللغة ، الباحثون في بعض الدراسات استنتجوا أيضا أن الطلبة استخدموا بعض الأساليب العملية للتواصل مع زملائهم ذوي الثقافات المختلفة.

Intercultural Communication Awareness in Classroom

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Abstract

The current paper presents a theoretical review of the phenomena of intercultural communication. It tries to raise intercultural awareness among English language teachers. The paper divided into four chapters: intercultural communication and English language teaching, the practice of intercultural communication in the classroom, intercultural communication awareness and language teacher education programmes. It also provides a discussion and conclusion to review the research area. The discussion showed that researchers as well as teachers have conducted and suggested many intercultural communication activities to apply with language learners in several studies. They found that learners use some pragmatic strategies to communicate with other interlocutors.

1. Introduction

Teaching English language in a second or a foreign context usually raises many issues. One of the raised problems is the relationship between language and culture in which the latter either being ignored or misunderstood by some language teachers. Such phenomena frustrates those teachers who have struggled to communicate in classroom with some learners from different culture backgrounds. It is also frustrating for those teachers who have been striving hard to overcome learners' difficulties in relation to the culture of the foreign language. A huge research area called intercultural communication has emerged to explore how the culture can best contribute to the process of teaching and learning languages and not complicating it. The theories and the resulting paradigms in which language and culture is embedded have changed in recent research. Research has shifted from looking at cultural communication into intercultural communication. As it is part of a larger discipline, current practices in I C matriculate from practices in general Cultural Awareness that is best suitable for demands in the contexts where English used as a lingua franca ELF (Baker, 2011). The current article will review some issues related to intercultural communication to raise awareness among English language teachers. It will be divided into four chapters: intercultural communication and English language teaching, the practice of intercultural communication in the classroom, intercultural communication awareness, and language teacher education programmes. Finally, it will provide a discussion and conclusion regarded the reviewed research area.

The importance of culture for teaching languages in recent research has shifted from looking at particular community culture into intercultural issues in which teachers and learners should consider both their culture and others' culture and reflect on that. This entailed a shift away from the native-speaker norm as being the best language form to be taught. The focus of language teaching process has changed from following the grammar of a target language in specific community into considering the strategies and skills involved in coping with the complexities of teaching to communicate in problematic and dynamic contexts. Byram (1997) argues that in the case of foreign language teaching, it is important to provide students with linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence that enable them to be intercultural

speakers instead of a near-native speaker. Kramsch (2009) adds that the native speaker being the goal or the norm model for teaching language is no longer a valid assumption for an increasing multilingual and multicultural world. Looking at the target language culture as the only resource for communicative competence could become an obstacle in a growing use of English as a lingua franca ELF (Baker, 2011).

Despite their motives, their aptitudes and attitudes towards L2, language learners suffer from a lack of awareness about what are the strategies needed for intercultural communication. They often find themselves in a situation where their communication breaks down as a result of this lack of awareness (Thomas, 1983). This is also concerning teachers who may have set a very good teaching environment with clear objectives, interesting textbooks and teaching methods but still struggle how to implement these strategies effectively in an intercultural classroom. The teacher has been recognised as a contributing factor in raising intercultural communication awareness inside classroom. The intercultural communication has become a topic of interest for language researchers worldwide and language teachers are no exception. A very recent definition has been given for intercultural communication by Baker: "Intercultural awareness is a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices, and frames of understanding can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication" (2011, pp.5).

Changes happened to the way research is studying the cultural dimension of language are roughly correspond to the emergence of intercultural communication. The division of these frameworks is by no means static and their progression on a historic continuum of language teaching paradigms is not uninterrupted. The remaining contradiction is how to raise teachers' and learners' awareness of intercultural communication, and how can they successfully challenge contexts where the native speaker model still considered the norm. In order to understand what is meant by intercultural communication awareness, its relation with English language teaching practice will be briefly reviewed. Some studies will be reviewed to illustrate

the multifaceted nature of intercultural communication awareness within various language teaching contexts. The exploration of intercultural communication as it is realized by English language teachers will be organised around two questions:

1. What is meant by I C within English language teaching contexts?
2. How can it contribute to English language classrooms and teacher training?

In order to achieve such a goal, researchers as well as teachers have conducted and suggested many activities to aware language learners about I C in several studies. They found that learners may use pragmatic strategies to communicate with other interlocutors. For example, ELF speakers deal with non-understanding conversations appropriately in a range of situations: Strategies like code-switching and repetition to accommodate the meaning of some utterances (Cogo, 2009), (Harmer, 2007), or putting learners in possibly challenging conversations (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005).

2. Intercultural communication and English language teaching:

In an attempt to answer the raised issue, it is important to look at what is meant by Intercultural Communication Awareness within the context of English language teaching. It is also important to understand the practice that researchers recommend to raise the teachers' awareness of intercultural communication. The current section will critically review some papers that deal with the issue theoretically and practically in which the main focus will be on the classroom settings. As teachers' role is very crucial in implementing such strategies, teachers' awareness of I C will be discussed as well. The meaning of intercultural communication within the context of ELT has been introduced by many researchers. One of these definitions is presented in Byram's book which mainly focused on teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. He pointed out that: "The advantage of focusing on an English speaking country where English is the subject rather than the medium for other subjects, is that Western – especially American and British – cultures are so dominant even where learners will have no need or opportunity to interact with native speakers, that a critical study of them and their relationship to learners' own is likely to be more beneficial than to ignore their presence" (1997).

The first research, "Towards Intercultural Communicative competence in ELT'' was conducted by Alpenkin. It questions the validity of the communicative competence as it was built on the notion of the native speaker that contradicts the use of English as an international language. He suggests that more relevant pedagogic approach that accounts for the position of English as an international tool of communication is urgently needed. The interesting theoretical point about the current paper is that it raises three issues. It provides a clear understanding of why such approach is not valid for communicating in the ELF settings. He mentions that it is 'utopian' as it suggests only the native speaker forms and culture. It is also unrealistic due to the fact that it ignores the status of English as a lingua franca. He adds that it is constraining because it does not take into account the autonomy of learners and teachers by following the authenticity concept which is associated with the native speaker social and cultural behaviours and forms. (2002)

In his article: *From cultural awareness into intercultural awareness: culture in ELT,* Baker, offers deep discussion about the theoretical and possible practical background for I C A in the context of ELT. He suggests 12 elements to be regarded as the more suited features of I C A from a static communicative model to more fluid and dynamic communicative approach which is more appropriate for English as a global language or ELF settings. This classification offers a detailed discussion that the intercultural communication awareness research went through from the early communicative approach, cultural awareness until the most recent intercultural awareness (2011). Baker's classification presents the intercultural communication awareness as a process of knowledge which starts with basic cultural awareness. The basic cultural awareness remarks the awareness of the learners' own and others' cultural behaviours and values and the impact of the culture on the linguistic behaviour. It moves further into advanced cultural awareness that looks at the shared grounds between some cultures. The latter, as he suggested, will establish the most important element of this process which is intercultural awareness. The interlocutors will later reach a point where they become aware of cultural frames and practices

related to certain and emergent cultures as well as an awareness of how to accommodate between distinct communication frames.(Baker, 2011)

The article suggests several possible applications that can be used to raise the awareness of I C in the classroom. The author refers to six proposals to develop I C A in the classroom settings such as: exploring local cultures in which the learners use their knowledge of local and national cultural groupings to develop their understanding of some global cultures. The other three suggestions are; exploring language-learning materials, exploring the traditional media and arts through English, and exploring IT/electronic media through English to enhance learners' critical evaluation of how local and global cultures are described and represented. Cultural informants such as non-local and local teachers can also use their experience of I C to provide an example of I C situations. Finally, through face-to-face intercultural communication, learners can develop a real I C A in practice in contexts where they are in touch with some non-local learners. These strategies are hoped to put the I C A in practice for teachers as well as learners. The paper has also recommended many activities to be applied in the classroom and it has revealed a broad picture of what researchers and teachers have conducted in the classroom (Baker, 2011). In the following section, we will see what is meant by depth coverage

3. The practice of intercultural communication in the classroom:

Morgan, (2001), conducted a big project called: *the international partnership project.* The main aim of the research was to get an ethnographic experience of a specific culture aspect in both home and foreign culture of the learners. The activity was preparing a package by two different classes in two countries, France and the UK, in which the learners have to explain a specific cultural topic in their country to the partner class in the other country. The topic was about how can you present the features of 'law and order' in your culture. The context was a foreign language classroom but they were asked to prepare the materials in their first language. The first beneficial point about Morgan's activities is that the learners have gained more insightful understanding of their own culture and that of others. They also show an interactivity to prepare the package that raised their cultural and intercultural awareness. Their choice of the materials reflects a developing awareness of

intercultural communication. They were starving to make the topic as clear as possible for their partner class in the other country and make sure that the information will be accessible. The current paper reveals the fact of developing I C A from cultural awareness into intercultural awareness which is emphasized by many researchers in a way that it goes into different gradual stages (Byram, 1997; Baker, 2011, Alpenkin, 2002).

Another point concluded from the study is that learners were not redirected to choose specific sources such as teachers or textbooks. The way they have chosen these materials depends on the learners themselves. Learners were vital components in the process of intercultural communication awareness, and they developed autonomy and evaluation of their own work. They were also allowed to use their first language which had a great impact on their work and reflected the concept of code-switching in the classroom. However, the issue with the current I C activity can be divided into two main problems. The teacher as a significant element of these activities has to be trained very well as a good ethnographer to help the learners cope with such knowledge. Teachers should appear as facilitators in this process and aware of their learners' needs so they successfully handle the used information. The other issue is the suitability of such activity for other contexts where the schools have set strict rules to only use the target language in the foreign language classroom. The challenge could remain as an obstacle for using this useful activity in some teaching settings.

Burwitz-Melzer, (2001), through his paper: *Teaching intercultural communicative competence through literature* has provided the field with another I C A activity that can be implemented in the classroom with intermediate level students. The activity introduced secondary school students to a story that has foreign cultural elements and the learners were asked through certain techniques to identify them from the text. The most important point about this activity is the value of the literary texts as a reflection or a mirror for peoples' culture. It emphasizes the benefit of looking at fiction to get a deeper understanding of other cultures. It introduces an accessible source for learners to understand these cultural aspects. Teachers could save time and money by using the current activity. For example, they will not transfer materials between countries and lose money

doing that. The materials will be available locally or they can get them from the internet and will result in an effective technique to develop the learners' intercultural communication awareness.

The activities that learners have done, reading the story, forming hypothesises about it, researching for possible endings, and finally re-write the text and change some scenes have internalise these learners. Their comparison of the target culture with their own culture resulted in a new place between the two cultures. The activity succeeds in creating what byram (1997) called the "third place". This third place emerges where the two cultures become combined to help learners develop their I C A in the classroom. The use of literary texts has also a great positive effect with intermediate level of learners. Although they may encounter difficulties reading fictional texts, learners have shown an ability to share and reflect on similar opinions, values and experiences in Burwitz-Melzer study.

The current paper has raised a discussion about setting clear criteria with a reference to the most known practices in the field. Assessing the intercultural communication competence remains as an issue in the language classroom. Teachers usually struggle to effectively evaluate their students' progress. To overcome this potential challenge, the writer has set what he calls intercultural objectives to avoid its overlapping with other linguistic and educational aims. He chose to assess his students by using the observable behaviour method which focuses on learners' answers, actions and texts.

Eslami-Rasekh (2005) has also suggested several activities that can be used in the ESL and EFL classrooms to raise the learners' awareness of I C pragmatic strategies. The activities aimed to avoid miscommunication that stereotypes second language learners as rude or insensitive when they miss cultural aspects that lie behind the use of the target language. Some of the applied activities were introducing the students to potentially problematic incidents and translation activity. She reported that these activities were very effective in both contexts.

The main valuable point of this article is that raising learners' awareness of intercultural communication pragmatics is not only by giving different activities, but also by encouraging learners' to reflect and evaluate on those strategies. It indicates that learners can be trained to become ethnographers

and take field notes. And this emphasizes the recommended theoretical point of empowering the learners' reflection and individual ability to survive in such situations (Harmer, 2007). The challenging activity presented by Eslami-Rasekh is giving examples of potentially intercultural miscommunication. The activity is recommended for interlocutors to establish deep understanding of how unintended speech acts could result in either a complete misunderstanding of the message or further communication breakdown.

The current paper adds another responsibility for teachers to be observers and collect data from using such activities. Language teachers are considered as a key factor in the success of such a framework. It introduces the teachers to more open areas to create and produce useful intercultural communication activities. An account of the learners' autonomy, interactivity and challenge are seen in these activities. They put language learners in situations that encourage these cultural elements which were recommended by many researchers (Ur, 1996; Swarbrick, 1994; Alpenkin, 2002). And it enables the learners compare their experience and value with those of other learners coming from different culture backgrounds. For instance, the students by translating some speech acts from their L1 into L2, they establish some evaluative and intercultural skills.

4. Intercultural communication awareness and language teacher education programmes:

Williams (2001) in his article: *"It must be cultural because I do not do it": Cultural awareness in initial TESOL teacher education* has presented a rich framework that helps aware teachers who are taking teacher training programmes. This strategy is introducing teachers for some activities and teaching them how to teach and evaluate I C competence. The activities were suggested to help these trainees develop I C A and also help them teach and evaluate intercultural communication competence. Strategies like, word association, where trainees write a word and it is associated with four words that the teacher says and discuss if the relation is cultural. Another activity was meeting culture where language teachers make a group of three. One of the students plays the role of a researcher and the other two are the representatives of the language. The representatives should communicate in

that culture whereas the role of the researcher is to observe them. Activities such as Culture bump or culture incidents, evaluative adjectives, behaviours and values, and written genres were used and showed its effectiveness.

The current example of implementing intercultural communication training into teacher education programs can potentially have valuable advantages for foreign and second language teaching. It reflects the teacher's vitality for the process of teaching intercultural communicative competence. Putting teachers in situations where they observe and discuss intercultural topics. It polishes their skills and abilities to be ethnographers. It also enables them to use these skills to create different activities in their future classrooms.

Dogancay-Aktuna, (2005) in his paper: *Intercultural communication in English language teacher education,* highlighted the importance of intercultural communication awareness. The study showed that intercultural communication can be combined with methodology training to raise the trainee teachers' awareness of the relativity of sociocultural features of their learners and those of the target language. It helps teachers to reflect on those features when they decide their methodology. The researcher focused on a discourse approach of intercultural communication that is already suggested by Scollon and scollon(1995). This approach is built on four questions that have been posted by the mentioned authors. These questions are:

1. What are the historical/social/ideological characteristics of the group?

2. How does one learn membership and identity?

3. What are the preferred forms of communication?

4. What are the preferred or assumed human relationships?

These questions are very effective in examining the underlying knowledge of culture inside classrooms and help trainee teachers go behind them as they make methodological decisions for specific contexts. The author states that: "The value of using such a framework in ELT is in giving teachers concrete questions to focus upon, as opposed to merely exposing them to common ICC concepts without much contextualization, while they learn to reflect on their own sociocultural assumptions in relation to others".(pp.102).

Failure to raise trainees' awareness about their own culture and that of others can result in a more problematic issue which is the ethnocentric perspective (Nelson, 1998). The situation makes language learners perceive intercultural situations more negatively compared to those of others, as they usually think that their community has the perfect culture practice.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This collection of studies shows evidence of noticeable gaps in intercultural communication awareness among both language learners as well as teachers. Teachers and learners notice the difference between what they want to express and what they can express. The resulted conclusion of such situations suggests them to give priority for developing their intercultural awareness in both theoretical and methodological basis. (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005)

The second conclusion is that when learners are engaged in producing intercultural communication situations, they learn to analyse and solve miscommunication problems. The process was found to be helpful in future potential contexts. It means that when learners use what they have discussed or produced, they become more reflective in using intercultural contexts. There will be a relation between the theory and practice of intercultural communication. (Morgan, 2001).

Teachers also have important role in the process of intercultural communication awareness. The implementation of more subjects that deal with I C into TESOL programmes will develop trainee teachers' reflection and evaluation of the topic. It enriches their reflective skills in deciding the methodology and materials when they teach intercultural communication in classroom. (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005).

There are many factors involved in teaching and learning English language, of which intercultural communication is one and should have more valuable presence. Based on this discussion, it is argued that intercultural communication offers a positive contribution to ELT through two elements: teachers and learners. Therefore, it is recommended to be taken into account in contexts where it is urgently needed.(Baker, 2011).

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