

Integration of Foreign Culture in English Instruction: Iranian EFL Learners and Teachers' Views in Academic Context

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Abstract

This study focused on the integration of foreign culture in English instruction in an academic context. More specifically, it analyzed the Iranian university EFL students' and teachers' views towards the integration of foreign culture in English instruction. Moreover, the possible difference between the participants' views towards the integration of foreign cultures was assessed. In doing so, 30 English EFL university teachers and 40 B.A. students were selected from four universities in Kerman (Bahonar, Azad, Payame Noor, & Institute of Higher Education). In order to collect data, a related questionnaire developed by Han (2010) was employed to examine the participants' views. After completing the questionnaires, the acquired data were analyzed by conducting descriptive statistics and the t-test of two independent groups. The results emerged from data analysis indicated that a great percentage of students asserted that learning foreign cultures was significant for them. It was necessary for them to get information about the target culture and spend more time on it. The university teachers remarked the same views as learning foreign cultures was important for them. It was essential for them to provide information and to spend more time on foreign culture teaching. The results of the study revealed no significant difference between the participants' views towards the integration of foreign culture in English instruction. Findings will contribute to the theoretical research gap in the field of culture and foreign language teaching and can serve as a guide to lead teachers and learners to the desired cultural goals of a specific language course.

Keywords: Academic Context; English Instruction; EFL Learners; EFL Teachers Foreign Culture

1. Introduction

The spread and utilization of English is also prominent in Iran at the results of several reasons. A great number of Iranian learners select

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English-speaking universities to go on with their studies, and thus they require to learn English as a foreign language (EFL). Also, scholastic scholars learn English to promote their studies and provide papers or articles to English-speaking communities, and the trend has enormously enhanced in recent decades (Erfani, 2014). Language learning is thought to be a social and cultural phenomenon as there is a correlation between language utilization and social and cultural values (Kahraman, 2016). In this sense, culture forms an essential part of language instruction and culture teaching has become more crucial in EFL pedagogy than ever (Şen, 2010). Languages are integral parts of cultures, and there is a close association between a language and the culture of the community it is spoken; therefore, in teaching/learning a language, the culture must also be taught/learned. Language and culture are closely related to each other, as the process of language learning always involves learning cultural concepts (Erfani, 2014).

Culture has always been considered a significant part of any language teaching/learning situation (Akbari, 2008). Due to the importance of culture in any language teaching in general and English language teaching in particular, many researchers and professionals including Gray (2000) and Kramsch (2013) have been interested in this field of study during the recent decades. Such researches are focused on teaching English language culture. Culture has an essential function in foreign language learning. According to Marcal (2010), learners require to learn foreign cultures to comprehend the viewpoints of others, prepare for personal encounters with foreign cultures, and put the language into context; Thanasoulas (2001) remarked that culture can increase and enrich the communicative competence of learners as well as lead them to empathy and respect toward diverse cultures and develop objectivity and cultural perspicacity. In Byram's (2008) view, language has no function independent of the context in which it is utilized, thus language always points to something beyond itself; the cultural context. This cultural context defines the patterns of language being utilized when specific individuals come together under certain circumstances at a specific time and place. This combination of elements has a cultural meaning, which has an impact language utilization.

Cultural awareness becomes an unavoidable concept to take into consideration in the EFL classroom. Johnson and Chang (2012) performed an investigation in English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom offering that the teacher should implement culturally conscious instruction generating an all-encompassing space for learners raising cooperation and learning. Jabeen and Kazim Shah (2011) examined the

role of culture in English language teaching and investigated learners' attitude towards the teaching of target language culture. Moreover, Önalın (2005) demonstrated that cultural information is an important section of language instruction and learning shifting the beliefs of learners. When learning a language, the learners are affected by the values or the value system of another culture, and a number of those values may be passed on to them (Işık, 2004). That is to say, apart from being an important component of language instruction and learning, conveying transferring cultural information may include diverse alteration in the modes of thinking of the language learners. More importantly, culture instruction is a concern amongst language instructors and teachers should be more than just instructing cultural aspects of the target language. The learners of language require promoting their linguistic competence as well as their intercultural competence. This way, communicating with other individuals would be easier and less awkward. Once the intercultural communicative competence is reached, the learners will be engaged in the communicative interaction with individuals of other cultures.

The concept of culture and language learning have a multi-dimensional association. The knowledge of culture embedded in a language is vital for its speakers, on one hand; and on the other, this knowledge has an influence on the philosophy of its learners. Correspondingly, foreign language learning is a window opening to new horizons by building up connections to other cultures, but may also be a form of assimilation developed by the domination of its culture, especially when the language itself is dominant in the world arena. Thus, the teachers of foreign language may occasionally find themselves in the dilemma of making any effort to avoid generating fluent fools, but at the same time making any attempt to avoid becoming a tool of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2002). Except the above-mentioned studies and some other related investigations to the best of the researcher knowledge, there is not much research regarding culture embedment in foreign language instruction, particularly on EFL teachers and learners' views towards the integration of culture into English classes. Since research on culture integration into English classes is practical and necessary, the following research questions have been formed to analyze:

1. What are the Iranian EFL students' views towards the integration of a foreign culture in English instruction?
2. What are the Iranian EFL teachers' views towards the integration of a foreign culture in English instruction?

3. Is there a significant difference between the university EFL students' and teachers' views towards the integration of a foreign culture?

2. Literature Review

In a recent study, Maeder-Qian (2018) analyzed the interaction between intercultural experiences and the cultural identity reconstruction of Chinese international learners in Germany by concentrating on their cultural learning, and utilization of multiple languages comprising English as a lingua franca, German and Chinese. The data were collected through interviews and results showed that most learners foregrounded their core Chinese identity against other intercultural identities. Moreover, Shabani and Alipoor (2017) examined the existence of any possible interaction between cultural identity, intrinsic motivation, and of Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation knowledge at the intermediate level. To reach the objectives of the study, Mathews' cultural identity questionnaire and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation questionnaire were distributed to 49 learners in Birjand. The EFL learners' knowledge of pronunciation was also assessed via an interview. The results revealed that cultural identity depicted no association with the knowledge of pronunciation of the learners, participants who were more intrinsically motivated acquired higher scores on the test of pronunciation. In the same year, Hosseinpour and Farahani (2017) examined the influence of cultural intelligence and cultural identity on Iranian EFL learners' utilization of the strategies of politeness. To reach this objective, 52 intermediate language learners were required to fill out the questionnaires of Cultural Intelligence, L1 Cultural identity and Discourse Completion Tasks. The results of data analysis indicated no interaction effect of cultural intelligence and cultural identity levels on the utilization of the strategies of politeness.

Mahmoud (2015) conducted a study on whether culture should be instructed in an English language teaching classroom. The issue at hand concerned the local culture and the target culture and its pertinence in the classroom. The author shows that conflicts might arise that lead to miscomprehensions, when the local culture is integrated in English language teaching. The cultural background of the learners should be addressed and taken into consideration to assist them promote efficient communication. Teachers have an essential function in choosing what culture to teach to a particular group of learners, so as not to clash with the learners' culture, from religious and sociocultural viewpoints. In another study, Choudhury (2013) conducted an investigation that examine the significance of addressing target culture in the EFL classroom,

discussing the barriers that teachers encounter when they include these aspects. This researcher debates intercultural competence and explained it as the ability to ask questions; listen and interpret; negotiate and discover a mutual comprehension; and avoid cataloguing others. The author believed that foreign culture should prepare the mirror to the learners in which he can see his own culture reflected. So, when learning the culture of a foreign language, the learners are provided with information that assist them to comprehend the others and take into account the similarities and differences.

Gonen and Saglam (2012) carried out research of culture and culture instruction in various environments of foreign language instruction in Turkey. They discovered that even though there existed a number of distinctions about aspects of the target culture to give priority, teachers were generally aware of the significance of instruction, and integrate culture in the classroom foreign language. In addition, teachers' foremost goal to instruct culture was to promote an openness and tolerance towards the target culture. This was in congruent with what culturally responsive teachers performed in the classroom. Additionally, Han (2009) examined the perceptions of Chinese teachers about culture instruction in secondary school in order to identify the beliefs of teachers about the nature of culture and their classroom teaching. The results about the views of school teachers regarding culture/intercultural instruction in language instruction revealed that teachers gave definitions of culture which were ambiguous at the level of school, and this could be at the result of the teachers' educational background and their experiences of life in general, and the truth that their comprehension of culture commonly pointed to folklore, food, festival, and facts. Findings also indicated that teachers were currently instructing cultural knowledge to arouse learners' interest in language learning; they claimed that the final goal was to promote learners' intercultural communicative competence; teachers were not completely comfortable with the instruction of culture in the language classroom.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Design

Since the main objective of the present study is to explore the EFL teachers' and students' views towards the integration of foreign culture in English instruction, a survey study and quantitative method was used as a design of this research to answer the research questions. It should be noted that the present work was designed to assess EFL teachers and students' views as dependent variables, and integration of foreign culture in English

instruction as the independent one. Thus, the quantitative data were gathered through survey questionnaires exploring teachers and students' views.

3.2. Participants

Thirty English language teachers of both genders (M=15 & F=15) were selected based on the available sampling method from four universities (Bahonar, Azad, Payame Noor, & Institute of Higher Education) in Kerman. They were Ph.D. in English language teaching and all were experienced professors ranged from 10 to 23 years. In addition, forty B.A. students of language teaching (M=20 & F=20) were selected randomly from the mentioned universities.

3.3. Instruments

In order to collect the required data, a related questionnaire was employed to examine the participants' views towards the integration of foreign culture in English instruction. It was developed by Han (2010). The aim of the questionnaire was to identify the participants' views towards the integration of foreign culture in English instruction. The questionnaire utilized a Five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The participants of the study were required to rate each statement on the base of the level of agreement/ disagreement with regards to their beliefs about the integration of culture in the language teaching. It should be noted that the questionnaire was made valid and reliable by the researchers. The reliability of the questionnaire was analyzed through Cronbach's Alpha, reported as .79 which is acceptable. Moreover, validity, just like reliability, is a positivist requirement. It means that a valid instrument should gather what it supposed to gather or it is actually measuring what it is intended to measure. For validity, two experts in this field checked the items before it was administered and they did not report any irrelevant points. They have also reported high validity in fulfilling the research objectives.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The study was conducted in four universities of Kerman, Iran. In the first step, the permission was taken from the participants to take part in the study. They were ensured that their information would be kept confidential and would be utilized just for the purpose of the study. They were also required to write their demographic information. Then, after providing a brief explanation regarding the purpose of the study and the concept of culture and its integration in English instruction, the

questionnaires were distributed to the participants and they were required to complete the questionnaire and send them to the researcher through Email or WhatsApp. Since the participants were English students and teachers, it was not necessary to translate the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, the papers were collected and the data were sent to SPSS software for analyzing and interpreting.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The first and second research question analyzed the participants' views towards the integration of foreign culture in English instruction. The data were analyzed through questionnaire and the results indicated in the following tables.

Table1. *EFL Teachers' Views towards the Integration of Foreign Culture in English Instruction*

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. As an EFL teacher, it is important for me to teach cultures of English-speaking countries.	4	13.3%
	2. It is important for me to teach foreign culture.	5	16.7%
	3. It is important to me to spend more time on foreign language.	3	10%
	4. It is important to provide/get information about the target culture.	4	13.3%
	5. It is important to provide/get information about shared values & beliefs of the foreign language culture.	3	10%
	6. It is important to provide/get information about daily life & routines of the foreign language culture.	3	10%
	7. It is important to provide/get experience with a rich of variety of foreign language cultural aspect.	1	3.3%
	8. It is important to develop positive attitude and tolerance towards foreign language culture.	3	10%
	9. It is important to widen students' horizons through culture learning.	2	6.7%
	10. It is also important to promote increased understanding of students' own culture.	1	3.3%
	11. It is important to promote students' sensitivity to different cultures.	1	3.3%
	Total	30	100%

According to the results of Table 1, most of the EFL teachers stated that it was important for them to teach foreign culture, it was important for them to teach the cultures of English, it was important to provide information about the target culture, it was important to them to spend more time on L2 culture teaching, it was important to provide information about daily life and routines of the target (L2) culture, it was

important to provide information about shared values and beliefs of the L2 culture and was important to develop positive attitude and tolerance towards L2 culture.

Table 2. *EFL Students' Views towards the Integration of Foreign Culture in English Instruction*

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1. As an EFL learner, it is important for me to learn cultures of English-speaking countries.	8	23.3%
	2. It is important for me to learn foreign culture	7	20.0%
	3. It is important to me to spend more time on foreign language culture learning/teaching.	6	16.7%
	4. It is important to provide/get information about the target culture.	3	10%
	5. It is important to provide/get information about shared values & beliefs of the foreign language culture.	3	6.7%
	6. It is important to provide/get information about daily life & routines of the foreign language culture.	2	3.3%
	7. It is important to provide/get experience with a rich of variety of foreign language cultural aspect.	3	6.7%
	8. It is important to develop positive attitude and tolerance towards foreign language culture.	2	3.3%
	9. It is important to widen students' horizons through culture learning.	2	3.3%
	10. It is also important to promote increased understanding of students' own culture.	2	3.3%
	11. It is important to promote students' sensitivity to different cultures.	2	3.3%
Total		30	100%

The results of Table 2 revealed that the statements, it is important for me to learn cultures of English-speaking countries, it is important for me to teach/learn foreign culture, it is important to me to spend more time on L2 culture learning/teaching, it is important to provide/get information about the target culture were selected by the EFL students more frequently.

4.2. Inferential Statistics

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test is used to investigated the normality or non- normality of the data. Then, the research hypothesis is examined. First of all, the following question should be taken into consideration in order to identify the data normality or non-normality:

Do the research variables have the normal distribution?

Based on the question, the following hypotheses are formed:

H0: The research variables have the normal distribution.

H1: The research variables have no normal distribution.

Table 3. *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
N	70	
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	3.2667
	Std. Deviation	2.92196
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.168
	Positive	.168
	Negative	-.132
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	1.299	
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.069	

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

As Table 3 shows, the amount of significance is more than the error level of 0 /05; therefore, the H0 is confirmed and H1 that indicates the non-normality of the data is rejected. So, it can be concluded that the research variables had a normal distribution.

Table 4. *Frequency Distribution of the Participants' Means*

Group Statistics				
Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Teachers	30	3.8000	2.88157	.52610
Students	40	4.7333	2.93532	.53591

Table 4 reveals that the mean of the university students' view towards the integration of foreign culture in English instruction was less the EFL teachers' views.

Table 5. *Difference between EFL Teachers and Students' Views*

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.138	.712	-1.24	68	.219	-.933	.750	-2.43	.569
Equal variances not assumed			-1.24	57.98	.219	-.933	.750	-2.43	.569

The results of Table 5 indicate that the mean of the attitude score of the EFL university teachers and students towards the integration of foreign culture in English instruction, was more than the error level of 0.05 in the freedom degree of 58, at the significance level of $\text{sig} > 0.05$. Thus, it can be remarked that there is no significant difference between the Iranian EFL teachers' and students' views towards the integration of foreign culture in English instruction.

5. Discussion

Results of this study indicated that most of the university students remarked that it was important for them to learn the cultures of English-speaking countries and also it was essential for them to learn foreign culture. Also, based on the results, it was important to spend more time on L2 culture learning and it was crucial to get information about the target culture. Furthermore, they stated that it was crucial for them to get information about shared values & beliefs of the L2 culture and it was of significance for them to get experience with a rich of variety of L2 cultural aspect. Moreover, the results of data analysis showed that most of the teachers remarked that it was important for them to teach foreign culture and the cultures of English-speaking countries. It was also important to provide information about the target culture and to spend more time on foreign language culture teaching. It was also important for them to provide information about daily life of the foreign culture and provide information about shared values and beliefs of the foreign language culture. Besides, it was important to develop positive attitude and tolerance towards L2 culture. According to the results, it can be stated that if EFL teachers assist their students to be proficient in language learning only without assisting them to promote a desirable understanding of the target culture, an imbalance in their language awareness and culture will be emerged. Accordingly, the learners may reach to a high level of linguistic proficiency, but simultaneously they may not possess an identical level of cultural proficiency in the target language. Culture shock in communication is likely to happen if this is the case. Since cultural awareness becomes an unavoidable issue to take into account in the EFL classroom, language teachers need to obtain awareness of the effective techniques or methods to improve the students' knowledge about cultural distinctions and to teach culture efficiently to second or foreign language learners. Without accurate and effective training, it is irrational to expect the teachers of language to instruct culture to their learners with the optimal results. In addition, taking into consideration the necessity of culture learning for learners, it is of utmost significance for the teachers

of language to have cultural awareness and positive beliefs about the place of target culture.

The Results are agreeable with the results of study that performed by Tran and Dong (2014) who demonstrated that foreign language teachers had positive attitudes towards the teaching of culture and claimed that the teaching of culture has an essential function in English language teaching. Also, the results are in line with Abbasian et al. (2016). They revealed that the Iranian undergraduate and postgraduate EFL students viewed culture as a fundamental factor in learning the target language. Both the culture of the source language and the culture of the target language were deemed essential while learning an L2. They also revealed that postgraduate EFL participants have more intension to learn more about the culture of both source and target language in comparison with undergraduate EFL learners in Iran. Besides, findings are in accordance with the findings of Belli (2018) who identified the attitudes of Turkish university students at the English Language Teaching Department towards culture and its integration into language instruction and their cultural knowledge. The results yielded positive attitudes of most of the participants towards culture and its incorporation in language instruction without paying any attention to their birthplace, the kind of high school, and the experience abroad.

However, findings are in contrast with Jabeen and Kazim Shah (2011) who tried to investigate the attitude of Pakistani learners towards the instruction of target culture. The participants have an overwhelmingly negative attitude towards the instruction of the of culture target language in government college university. Moreover, the results are in congruent with the results of a study by Javdani and Mahboudi (2009) who showed that except for the participants whose level of language proficiency was elementary, other participants with other levels of language proficiency favored bilingual/bicultural teacher.

6. Conclusion

Based on the careful analysis, it can be concluded that most of the EFL university teachers agreed to teach the foreign cultures and provide information and speak about them. Moreover, they agreed to provide information about daily life and routines of the foreign culture. It can also be concluded that students liked to learn foreign cultures and they favored to spend more time on learning them and it was significant for them to get information about the target culture. This study indicated sometimes the identical results and sometimes various results and in short, it can just state that teachers teach and learners learn what they perceive as essential. That

is language teachers and students conceive the concept of intercultural competence pretty much. If this reality is understood by both parties, then we are one step close to the reality of the practicality of incorporating cultural elements in EFL classroom contexts. Although culture in the instruction of English language is still one of the debatable concepts, in the globalized world, the teachers of language should act as flag-bearers who have to be proficient and educated well to be capable to meet the needs of the learners in today's fast altering world. To educate the teachers of language who have an awareness of the necessities of the century, teacher education programs should be revised and may be added courses like intercultural communication in order to equip prospective teachers with intercultural knowledge and intercultural proficiency. Once language teachers become more skillful and proficient regarding this matter, they will finally be more capable to integrate cultural practices in their instruction and meet the learners needs in today's altering world.

It can be concluded that it is essential to embed culture instruction into the instruction of language as language teachers and to set cultural objectives in the environments of language learning to promote a comprehension of cultural expectations, behaviors, knowledge, language utilization and skills of members of a specific group of individuals. While setting cultural objectives, the important issue should be to take into consideration to what extent culture should be integrated, what cultural aspects should be considered and how it could be presented to learners. In this respect, requirements of the learners of language should be taken into account via precise election and planning of cultural resources by the teachers of language (Corbett, 2003). As the final conclusion, it can be state that one essential barrier that often encounter large number of EFL teachers is their non-existence of cultural competence in the language they instruct, because not many have had an opportunity to live in the country where the target language is spoken, because they may not have had ample training in their teacher training programs, and because the materials they utilize in their classes fail to present suitable and helpful information about the target culture to them. In order to effectively instruct culture to second and foreign language learners conspicuous attempts have to be made in three areas: the training of teachers, the design of curriculum, and materials progression.

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