An Ethnographic Approach to Developing Intercultural Awareness: A Case Study of EFL Learners at Najran University

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Abstract—The teaching of culture in foreign language classrooms has gained widespread acceptance in today's globalized world. However, the teaching resources and curricula at present in use promote stereotypes and otherization by supplying pupils with a "us vs them" worldview and knowledge. As a result, learners with little or no intercultural experience are unable to effectively communicate in an intercultural environment. The aim of this study is to assist learners in becoming active cultural observers and interpreters, in improving their comprehension of others, in anticipating and dealing with misunderstandings, and in decentring themselves during intercultural encounters. It is a retrospective account of an experiment that explores why and how intercultural awareness can be developed through an ethnographic-based intercultural syllabus at Najran University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thirty two male students participated in the experiment. A pre-and post-tests were used to determine whether or not participants improved their intercultural comprehension. The findings indicate that teaching culture through an ethnographic lens is feasible and worthy of developing learners' intercultural awareness and analytic attitude against culture and intercultural interactions.

Index Terms—ethnography, intercultural awareness, intercultural communication, native culture, target culture

I. INTRODUCTION

The majority of syllabi for teaching English as a foreign language have recently imposed a differing degree of importance on the advancement of students' cultural knowledge, mainly through the inclusion of correct information about British and American cultures. English has developed into a lingua franca in today's globalized world. It is no longer restricted to native speakers, but it remains common. This shift in the way English is conceptualized resulted in a difference in English language instruction expectations and perceptions. Indeed, English training is described in terms of intercultural learning, not linguistic learning. Its aim is no longer to instil native-like learners' abilities but rather to foster intercultural competence and understanding.

Intercultural communication includes the acquisition of a linguistic code and an understanding of the target language's culture. Linguistic knowledge is insufficient to foster intercultural ability on its own. The close link between language and culture is explained by Brown (1994) as 'complexed to the extent where you cannot distinguish the two without compromising either the meaning of language or culture' (p.165).

Tomalin (2008) claims that culture should be taught as a fifth skill alongside the traditional four (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) owing to the English language's global supremacy and globalization. He stresses the value of culture training in equipping students with the mindset and techniques required to adjust their English use to other cultures. Baker (2003, n.p.) adds, "If culture and language are inextricably intertwined and inseparable, we must strive to teach culture holistically, much as we do with other aspects of language."

According to Gao (2006, p. 59), language acquisition requires cultural literacy, and therefore language teaching entails cultural instruction. However, it is often debated if familiarity with an international culture is necessary to achieve intercultural objectives. And, more precisely, how is it handled by a foreign language teacher if it is? Gao (2006) emphasizes the value of foreign language teachers increasing students' cultural awareness while also assisting them in improving their intercultural communication skills in response to this topic. Additionally, Sowden (2007, p. 305) stresses the value of language teachers considering their own culture in the classroom, not just their students'.

The challenges, or inability, to conform to society derived from the uncertainty of the expression "history." As with language, the community is fluid and dynamic (Nieto, 2000), resulting in a multiplicity of cultural interpretations. According to a review of the literature on culture, it is viewed either humanistically or socially. The former views culture as a set of "attitudes and values, modes of thinking, behaving, and recalling" of native speakers; the latter views culture as a collection of "attitudes and values, modes of thought, acting and recalling" of native speakers (Nostrand,
Different positions are seen in the different approaches to cultural education. The extensive analysis demonstrates that the topics most often addressed include history, geography, literature, the arts and faiths, values, traditions, and actions. They see the mother tongue as necessary, viable or acceptable, whereas learners feel that mother tongues are insufficient. As a result, the learner's culture and contact style are underestimated (Byram & Zarate, 1997), even though "the processes functioning during intercultural interaction are similar to those operating during intracultural communication" (Byram & Zarate, 1997). (Byram & Zarate, 1997). x) (Gudykunst, 1994). Interventions focused on facts have had no impact on the development of students' intercultural comprehension. Apart from that, they often instil biases in students (Byram & Feng, 2005) and are often described as detrimental, instilling a "us and them" mindset. Rather than that, as Byram and Zarate (1997) put it, "learners must see themselves as social actors communicating with other social actors in a manner distinct from that of native speakers" (p. 21). Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed away from approaches that view a nation primarily as reflecting its language and citizens and to policies that take into account the shades of culture, whether targeted or studying.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Millions of people who do not share the same first languages use English normally as a foreign language (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p.155). In fact, English is spoken by about 1.5 billion people worldwide, in addition to their mother tongues (Graddol, 1998). In her tripartite worldwide English model, Kachru (1985) defines and classifies the transmission shifts in English and functions in the world as an inner circle, an external circle, and an expanding circle. There are parallels in the inner circle to areas where native speakers, e.g. the UK and the United States, understand English (US). The external circle shows countries in which English is used as a second language, including India and Nigeria. This circle extends to countries like Saudi Arabia and Japan, where English is the foreign language.

This school of thought states that English "can not be attributed as a foreign language to every nation or society;" it must instead belong to those who use it" (McKay 2002, p. 1), as "their subjective interpretations" are expressed herein (Kachru & Nelson, 2006, p. 16). This allowed it more difficult to write about the cultures of what Kachru (1985) called "inner circle countries." This change in emphasis made it more difficult for students to study English as a foreign language (EFL). Teachers ought to recognize communities to be incorporated into their curricula from nations and countries. Many EFL curricula have historically taken their overarching cultural history from the United Kingdom or the United States. "All hypotheses will now be addressed in the field of foreign language education and learning" (McKay, 2002, p. 1). The EFL teaching spectrum can be expanded outside the inner circle to include classes. One alternative is to focus again on intercultural understanding and not on cultural understanding.

Regarding the relationship between cultural awareness and intercultural understanding, Baker (2015) points out that the former focuses on national cultures while the latter focuses on language-cultural interchanges which are "nuanced and adaptable" (p. 135). So, it could be claimed that cultural awareness assists to comprehend and perceive ways that influence one's beliefs, views, actions, preferences, and styles of communication. According to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993, p. 5), cultural awareness requires understanding of the influence of cultural practices on the usage of language and contact. This, therefore, implies understanding and recognition of other cultures.

According to this logic, the creation of cultural awareness needs to comprehend culturally-based actions and values. When it comes to English teaching, the focus can be on comprehensive programs that do not even have to be in British English or American English. English has been the focus of many other communities and communities due to the many different contexts in which it is used in comparison to the way it is spoken in the United States or the United Kingdom. Additionally, English's cultural meaning is context- and user-dependent (Baker, 2009). Thus, a rethinking of the contexts in which English is taught could displace the traditional national and monolingual focus on American and British languages and cultures in favour of, as Risager (2010) puts it, a transnational approach to English education.

Intercultural awareness is a term that applies to the know-how and the capacity to interact successfully in a number of socio-cultural contexts. In today's globalized environment, an understanding of how communities and traditionally defined differences affect contact (Shaules, 2007). Instead, the primary goal should not be tolerating, interpreting and comparing cultural customs in order to comprehend 'international views, beliefs and mindssets' (Byram & Zarate, 1997). This understanding should be the primary objective of foreign language teaching (Kramsch, 1996, p. 23). To summarise: intercultural awareness implies a step away from 'ethnocentrism' to 'ethno-relativism,' a capability to 'decentrate,' to see existence through a different context, to promote empathy and to appreciate the intercultural change process which occurs in people and cultures as a result of their interactions (Rantz & Horan, 2005, p. 211). As such, intercultural sensitivity relates to a careful understanding of the importance of culture in intercultural relations, in particular, if English is used internationally.

Many scholars concerned with the foreign language teaching profession (Corbett, 2003; Egan-Robertson & Bloom, 1998; Leung, 2005; Roberts et al., 2001, Byram and Feng 2005) promoted to teach ethnographic skills to foreign language learners. Byram and Feng (2005) in their all-inclusive review on intercultural education noted that “Culture teaching is moving toward an ethnographic perspective” (p. 911).

Ethnography includes learning and participating in a particular social context such that a group can be more visible about the position and experience of the environment and its inhabitants (Harklau, 2005). Ethnography is an approach...
according to the literature to understand the "richness, ambiguity, interrelationship, connections and disjunctions" (Cohen, et.al., 2007:167). Ethnographical methods are well established in the literature for their utility in foreign language teaching. Ethnography is used in pedagogy to describe instructional methods, rather than doing ethnographic studies into the usage of teaching environments or languages outside the classroom. Following Corbett (2003), ethnographic methodology helps learners to learn how to communicate appropriately with individuals outside their cultural group and develop an analytical understanding of their system of meanings. The English stand as a lingua franca drives this technique. Today, English is no more preserved by native languages and is used in several ways in many spoken dialects, each with its own cultural background. As a result, efforts to mimic mother tongues are almost insignificant. English students today need to learn skills that enable them to successfully connect in intercultural environments, establish their own worldview, see differences as strengths and understand personal and social experiences (Sellami, 2000).

The approach of a student as an ethnographer to culture teaching is motivated by the principle of 'learning by observation' rather than 'description of persons;' to increase the intercultural awareness of the students as part of intercultural communication skill. The guiding principle of the method is, in addition to respecting other cultures and communication techniques, the learner has the potential for housing, consensus, mediation or adaptability. These abilities allow them to grasp both an insider and an outsider's foreign language and culture. However, it is also a matter of concern how ethnographic study methods can be replicated in classrooms in which the native language is not used as a way of improving intercultural consciousness among students. This research suggests a method of passing information in the teaching of culture from theory to the classroom to grow the intercultural experience of learners.

III. THE STUDY

Previous research into the teaching of Saudi English language teaching context has demonstrated concern that existing teaching methods do not encourage intercultural understanding of students and argued in support of more culturally focused approaches and of providing more intercultural teaching materials (Aldosari, 2013; Fageeh, 2011; Hazaea, 2018; Osman, 2015). This concern is not uncommon in the English Department at Najran University. Indeed, during some informal discussions the researchers had with staff members in the English Department, many teachers reported the neglect of culture oriented foreign language teaching. This study is an attempt to redress this gap by investigating the process of adopting an ethnography-based methodology practice in an English as a foreign language course.

IV. STUDY OBJECTIVES

This research aims to find ways that enable teachers to carry out ethnographic activities utilizing ethnographic methods. It is intended to incorporate more cultural approaches as a teaching methodology that encourages teachers to do ethnographic work. To help teachers and learners from Najran University in Saudi Arabia to move away from their traditionally information-oriented approaches and practices to intercultural experience-based education — to enhance the cultural comprehension of the target language and their cross-cultural knowledge and understanding. In a nutshell, it is motivated by the following objectives:

- To help English teachers and learners at Najran University in Saudi Arabia make a shift away from the traditional knowledge-oriented teaching approaches and methods currently in use towards intercultural experiential learning.
- To raise the learners’ cultural awareness of the target language, and their cross-cultural awareness and understanding.

V. RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

The study looked at 32 Saudi males who have enrolled in the Department of English at Najran University for their fourth and fifth years. They were all aged between 18 to 20 years and were fluent in Arabic. Most of them have studied English for at least nine years. They are graded as high-intermediate in their language proficiency. Either of the two groups: the experimental (treatment) group or the evaluation group was assigned randomly (control).

Both participants received a pre-and post-test at baseline and 45 hours after practice. The preliminary examination is provided by means of a tale adapted from Hofstede et al (2002, p. 47). Participants were responsible for identifying terms and sentences indicating cultural distinctions, understanding the cultural concepts, perceiving the condition culturally and having qualitative meaning.

The participants also completed a demographic survey (adapted from Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996; see Appendix 1) designed via Likert-style items to evaluate the participants’ intercultural awareness. The aim was to gain some insights into the learners’ ability to explore the diversity and complexity of their own local and national cultural groupings and their understanding of the culture of English-speaking people which in turn will help to assess the impact of ethnographic technique on students’ intercultural awareness.

After the intervention, a post-test was administered to both groups to measure the impact of the treatment. As in the pretest, the participants were presented with a culturally loaded story entitled ‘Adam and the Napkin’ adapted from
Hofstede et al. (2002, p.48) and were required to spot culturally loaded words and phrases that reveal cultural differences with regard to a collectivist “insider” and an individualist “outsider” perspective. At this point, it should be noted that care was taken to ensure that any differences observed in the performance of the subjects in the two groups in the pretest and posttest were caused by the treatment itself.

For the first half of 2019/2020, the treatment lasted 14 weeks (3 hours a week). Students were trained to begin with an interpretation and understanding of a range of scenarios. The objective of this experiment was to determine the effect of cultural conditioning on their own lens. A variety of situations were backed up with verbal and written responses. When their preparation was finished, they were not introduced to the ethnographic interview technique. The ethnographic method of interviews was used in this research since experience of cultural similarities and distinctions was considered to be capable of some kind (Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). Participants were told to consider the interviewees and their own collectivities to preserve the historic focus of these interviews. Multi-level trials measure the efficiency of the tests.

VI. THE INTERVENTION

An experiment was deemed necessary to improve the efficiency and accuracy of the learners-as ethnographers process. The aim was to analyze the set of hypotheses it encompasses in order to ascertain the potential impact on the learners.

Using the learners-as ethnographers approach, a personalized intercultural syllabus, helpful tools, and methodology were developed using the guiding principles mentioned above. The experiment was divided into four stages. Classroom implementation was carried out by one of the English Department staff members.

The first move included lecturing the participants on ethnography. The lectures included an overview of the concepts underlying ethnographic research, including methods, tools, and result interpretation. The emphasis was mainly on adopting an ethnographic perspective, which emphasizes community as a way of life and being in the world. The goal was to provide them with insight into how they view aspects of others’ everyday lives and cultural norms and enable them to reflect on their own via a method of decentring.

Throughout this phase, participants were exposed to the idea of culture and its multiple conceptualizations. Additionally, they acquired observation and examination skills through activities based on their own personal interactions, as well as detailed instructions for reflecting on those experiences.

The second move was to improve participants’ comprehension of and sensitivity of their own cultural traditions and practices, as well as those of native speakers, in order to develop a deeper understanding of their own and others’ perspectives. To that end, the team member in charge of implementing the project was instructed on how to plan and develop classroom-based lessons focused on specific intercultural topics. His ultimate purpose was to assist participants in shifting from a monocultural to an intercultural mindset (Bennett, Bennett & Allen, 2003).

The third move emphasized behaviors that necessitated reflection and discussion regarding cultural features that are often experienced during intercultural interaction, such as personal interactions, societal expectations, behavioral preferences, work beliefs, time and space trends, and cultural conflicts. Participants were asked to observe and comment about how these elements were portrayed in their own and indigenous cultures. The aim is to show how these features are explored during intercultural interactions. Most of the activities involve the following three steps.

a. Problem Identification: Participants were shown images/short stories explaining social intercultural interactions and encouraged to identify cultural aspects they were unfamiliar with or desired to learn more about.

b. Formulation of Theories: Participants were supposed to jot down pertinent questions and then develop hypotheses.

c. Explanation/Interpretation: Participants were required to justify their conclusions in order to establish/test the validity of their/other classmates’ theories.

The final stage requires participants to choose one aspect of culture associated with English-speaking countries from the inner circle and create a mini-project based on it. This study aimed to assess whether or not the interpretative ideas shared in the learners’ native culture have persisted or have been adopted into the target language culture’s realms.

In light of the methodology discussed above, it is reasonable to conclude that the objective is dual: the first is to enable learners to become active cultural observers and interpreters. This eventually improves their intercultural competence and lets them disassociate themselves from both the indigenous and target communities. The second aim is to allow learners to reflect on their experiences with representatives of what Kachru (1985) referred to as the inner and outer circles.

VII. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Pre and post-tests are an effective tool in gauging the reach of the intervention in research. In this study, we used English passages similar to those that learners are regularly exposed to in their classes, but not seen before: Adaptations from Hofstede et al. (2002).

The results obtained from the pre-test, the post-test, and the gain scores for the control group are presented in Table 1.
The experiments were administered using the parties as independent variable with pre-test outcomes as dependent variable to ensure that the two groups of participants chosen for this analysis were equal in their observational and analytical abilities about the community. In the pre-test scores between the two classes, there is no significant difference (t = (1,30) = 0.07; p > 0.1). This shows that before the research behavior, there were no significant differences in behaviors between the two classes.

The results were tested using a two-way, mixed ANOVA as a variable between topic and study (pre-post) with category (control/experimental) as the variable in question. The findings revealed a significant major impact of form (F(1,30) = 30.9, p=0.001), a higher post test score (M=12.2) than pre-test (M=9.8), and a major community score (F(1,30) = 30.9, p=0.07). The interaction between the research community and the test style was nevertheless considerable (F(1,30)=8,9,p,006), which implies that the principal impact for the test type could vary per participant group. As a result, several post hoc analyses with each category of participants were performed separately.

There is no statistically meaningful discrepancy (p>0.05) for the post-hoc study between pre-tests (M = 9.84) and post-tests (M = 10.97). Furthermore, the study community found that the experiment had a substantial influence on students and their learning outcome (M=13.74), substantially higher after evaluation (M=9.75), than before (M=9.75).
As the data in the tables illustrate, there are substantial variations in pre- and post-test output between the research and control classes. The experimental group’s use of ethnographic techniques to convey and focus on their local and foreign language cultures can help to explain these distinctions. Additionally, these strategies assisted in the acquisition of cultural resources, which facilitated the growth of mutual understanding between the two communities. The ethnographic approaches and practices used determine the degree to which this cultural awareness evolves.

According to previous studies, students’ viewpoints widen as a result of their engagement in ethnographic interviews with target language speakers (Bateman, 2003; Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, & Street, 2001; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). This thesis followed the same logic as the preceding one. The frequency distribution of answers to Likert-style questions was used to analyze the attitude surveys.

Previous studies have found a positive effect on students’ attitudes after participating in ethnographic interviewing of target language speakers (Bateman, 2003; Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, & Street, 2001; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). This study was based on the same premise. The attitude surveys were analysed using the frequency distribution of responses to Likert-style questions.

The first question in the survey concerned the reasons for the students’ choice to study English at the university (see Figure 2). A majority (55% vs 53%) of the students answered “other” and reported that their choice was due to their low grade point average (GPA), meaning that the English major was their only option, studying English was of personal interest to 30% vs 34% of the students, finally, 15% vs 13% decided to study English because of family pressure in the pre and post tests respectively.

As illustrated in Figure 3, students’ answers to the second question, which enquired about their need to learn English, varied. Linking back to the students’ responses to item 1, it can be seen that almost the same percentage (57% vs 57%) who answered “other” selected the first option, “job prospects”, whereas 35% vs 33% viewed English as necessary for personal enrichment, and the remainder (18% vs 19%) responded “interest in travel” in the pre and post tests.
respectively.

![How would you describe your need to learn English?](image)

The third question was about the goal of studying English. Most students (45% vs 53) opted for “get a better job”, and the rest were almost equally divided between “requirement” 29% vs 27 and “other” 26% vs 20 in the pre and post tests respectively (see Figure 4).

![How would you describe your goal in studying English?](image)

The fourth question concerned the number of native English-speaking friends the participants had. Of the 32, only 3 had native-speaker friends before as well as after the intervention.

In terms of the correlation between the pre and post surveys, it is worth noting some statistics regarding the pre- and post-test questions. A paired t-test showed no significant difference between the pre-intervention survey ($M = 5.1$) and the post-intervention survey ($M = 5.6$) ($t = -1.5066$, df = 4, $p = 0.2064$). The reason why the $p$-value is not significant is due to the small number of questions (five in total). Thus, it is suggested that the result instead be interpreted based on the mean difference. The post-intervention mean is higher than for the pre-intervention, which indicates that the participants presented more positive views after the intervention compared to those before the intervention.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The simple demographic profile of the participants allowed analysis of their attitudes toward English, which aided in the creation of appropriate teaching methods for the experimental study’s treatment phase. These practices aimed to either change participants’ predominately negative attitudes toward English learning or to discourage them from...
forming negative attitudes toward English. This was prompted by the participants' answers to item 1, which showed that 55% claimed their low GPA precluded them from selecting a secondary subject other than English. As a consequence, they felt as if they were expected to learn it. This type of depressive conviction can result in class anxiety and negative attitudes.

Additionally, the above-mentioned approach of learners as ethnographers is an excellent way for teachers and students to continue improving intercultural comprehension. Participants showed an appreciation of how positioned social and cultural dynamics work in communication and how social experiences are facilitated and maintained toward the conclusion of the treatment period in terms of social and cultural use of English. Their intercultural awareness of possible sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences between their native and target language cultures is now being created. In summary, they gained knowledge and skills necessary to function as intercultural communicators. As a result, we can infer that they developed a self-critical outlook. They now have the opportunity to reconsider their preconceived notions and prejudices about their own and English communities.

The recommended solution emphasizes students' work, group work and pair work and students' work both written and verbal. It's a pattern-based strategy, not a factual approach. It extends beyond the educational role of cultural education. Its primary aim is to cultivate an ethnographic viewpoint in students and not to facilitate automation and imitation; in other words, to render learners' attentive cultural observers and actors.

The tests prove that the observation and interpretation of the research group are important and positive. The findings of this study would help overcome the deficiencies identified in previous intercultural research by Saudi English students (Aldosari, 2013; Fageeh, 2011; Hazaea, 2018; Osman, 2015). During the discovery period, ethnographic techniques such as those proposed in the intercultural program were used to encourage the experimental group to develop ethnographic abilities for the grasp of cultural standards, to reflect on its own society, to communicate cultural distinctions and to understand and explore culture as a target and its potential. In consequence, this paper seems to provide a theoretical framework of sound and sound.

APPENDIX. ONE PRE-POST SURVEY

Part A: Please provide the following information:
1. Gender: Male/ Female
2. Number of years living in an English-speaking country:
3. In your opinion, what is the level of your English? (Circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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Part B
1. Please answer each of the following questions by writing in the space provided the number of the answer which best describes your case:
   1. Why did you choose to study English? ..........  
      1. Prerequisite  
      2. Family Pressure  
      3. Personal Interest  
      4. Fun  
      5. Other (Describe) ........................................
   2. How would you describe your need to learn English? (you may use more than one.) ..........  
      1. Requirement  
      2. Personal enrichment  
      3. Interest in culture  
      4. interest in English people  
      5. Interest in travel  
      6. Job prospects  
      7. Other (Describe) .........................
   3. How would describe your goal in your study of English? ............  
      1. Requirement  
      2. Get a better job  
      3. Learn more about other people and cultures.  
      5. Other (Describe) .........................
   6. Do you have English/American (any native speakers of English) friends?  
      1. (0)  
      2. (1-5)  
      3. (3-5)  
      4. (10+)
II. Please answer the following items by circling the number which most reflects your feeling about the following statements. The numbers correspond to the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Disagree moderately</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Agree moderately</th>
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1. English will help me make more English-speaking friends.
2. English will help me make more English friends.
3. A language requirement exposes students to a necessary subject.
4. Knowing English will allow me to help others who are not as lucky as I am.
5. Knowing English will increase my income potential.

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