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Rationale of Teaching ESL/ EFL Through Host or International Mixed Cultural Content

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Abstract

This study aims to explore and discover the reasons and justifications of researchers who support and call for introducing ESL /EFL to EFL learners through the host or international mixed cultural content. It presents in a narrative method the advantages and the positive impact of using such perspective on ESL/ EFL learners. This study also offers some empirical studies from different countries which support their believes and thoughts. Their empirical studies involved ESL/ EFL learners, parents and ESL/ EFL teachers.

Keywords: Language and Culture, TESL/ TEFL, Language Curriculum

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Introduction

The topic of introducing foreign cultures into ESL/ EFL classrooms has resulted in a considerable debate among researchers which created different views and interpretations. In this respect, two schools of thought have appeared into surface; the first one is in favor of teaching native speakers' cultures as it believes that the relation between English language and its native-speaking culture is inseparable. Examples for supporters of this school are: Seelye (1994), Byram and Fleming (1998), Bennet (1997) and Hendon (1980). The second school can be divided into: 2a a group which supports the introducing of the host culture only, and 2b which supports introducing of a range of representative cultures from around the world which would include both those of native speakers of English and of others where English is used as a second or foreign language. This latter school of thought with its two divisions opposes the first one and sometimes considers teaching native-speaking culture in English language education as a kind of linguistic or cultural imperialism. Those who hold the latter opinion are usually supporters of what is known at present English as an International Language (EIL), or the supporters of presenting the foreign language according to the host culture. Examples of supporters of this school are Alptekin (2002), Modiano (2001) and Alptekin (1993).

A very important point which is worth mentioning among the supporters of the two schools is that readers might find researchers who speak English as their first language supporting school 2 or find researchers who speak English as second or foreign language supporting school 1. McKay for an example is a native speaker of

English but is in favor of teaching English according to the host or the international cultures. We can also find non-native English speakers such as Risager who support school 1 which calls for teaching English through the prism of the native culture. In this descriptive study, the researcher tries in a descriptive method to lay out the rationale and evidence of the supporters of the second school with some empirical studies.

2. Methodology & Research Questions

As this study aims to explore and identify some researchers' reasons and justifications for introducing ESL/ EFL through the prism of host or mixed international culture, the researcher will use the narrative method of reviewing the literature upon this crucial issue. In other words, this study will try to find answers to the following questions:

- 1- What are the reasons and justification that lead some researchers to support introducing ESL/ EFL to learners through the host or mixed international culture?
- 2- What are their empirical studies which support their perspective?

3. Literature Review

Many researchers such as McKay (2003a) argue that English language has been considered as a property for English-speaking countries 30 years ago, but the situation nowadays is totally different, English is now the world language and the language of globalization. It is used in almost all aspects of life like science, technology, communication trade...etc. Most importantly, it is now considered to be the language of interaction between the non-native speakers in different countries. For example, it is the language of official meetings between officials, the language between people in books national exhibitions and fairs in many states and also the language of communication among the people of the same country such as India and Cambodia. Moore and Bounchan (2010) argue that the status of English in Cambodia has changed from English as a foreign language (EFL) towards English as an international

language (EIL) and, surprisingly, to English as a second language (ESL).

This current status of English Language of being a global and internationally used language makes the supporters of this school of thought believe that teaching the NS's cultures is unnecessary and as a result of that they stress introducing the local & host culture, a range of representative cultures from around the world including both native-speaking English ones and others or the new model of teaching English (EIL); "English as an International Language which is a value free or cosmopolitan English that is quite independent of any cultural background but able to represent, describe and illustrate all cultures with equal vigor" Smith (1983), to replace the NS's cultural content .

Some of those who call for introducing EIL also suggest that EIL must have its own independent norms of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary and not to be connected to the native norms. Graddol (1999) for example believe that the term "native speaker" is disappearing and declining for two reasons. First the number of native speakers is decreasing while the non-native speakers of English is increasing proportionately. Second, English will be soon mainly spoken as a second language in multilingual settings among non-native speakers. In the same vein, Rajadurai (2002) indicates that there are two disadvantages if we include native norms in ELT. First, native speakers in some countries are not always realistic or popular. Second, native speakers are not always the best representative of what is intelligible.

With respect to the views from the first school which believe that without the learners' exposure to the native speakers' cultures, learners would not be able to understand the cultural norms and behaviors of the NS people, some researchers as McKay (2003a) think that the growing number of English language speakers in the world which is more than NS's themselves, resulted in teaching English in different multilingual contexts and this makes the teaching of native speakers' cultures "unnecessary".

In congruence with McKay (2003a) is Alptekin (2002) who thinks that introducing the host culture is desirable since English language is now an international language and this has made it denationalized. Moreover, and with respect to some researches from the first school who believes that English language cannot be isolated from any of the range of cultures in which it is used as a first language, Alptekin argues that teaching native speakers' cultures nowadays is not possible. The reason behind that is, which culture is supposed to be taught? Is it the British culture, the American culture, the Australian culture or the Canadian culture? He also thinks that if it were another language except English ,it would be possible to teach the culture with the language ,because each language belongs to its country ,the Polish language for example belongs to Poland ,the Turkish language belongs to Turks and hence can be taught alongside with its culture .However ,for English ,the case is different because English does not belong to Britain ,it belongs to the global world who speak it in a tremendous number .The increasing number of non-native English speakers made many people in the world to agree that English nowadays has changed from ESL /EFL to a global lingua franca .That is, reaching this status of English language has occurred not because of the growth number of its native speakers but because of the growth of the number of the non-native speakers who think that it is very useful to acquire English as an additional language.

Alptekin as well thinks the time has come for ELT educators to put into consideration the implications of the international status of English in terms of suitable pedagogies and course books materials that would help EFL learners to communicate their English successfully in both local and international settings. He also continues that introducing English through native speakers' cultures and norms is invalid for teaching and learning English and could result in failure in using it internationally and in cross-cultural settings. He instead calls for a new pedagogic model to accommodate the new status of English as an international language and as a means of intercultural communication. According to

Alptekin, the new pedagogical model must take into consideration the following criteria:

1 Successful bilinguals with intercultural insights and knowledge should serve as pedagogic models in English as an International Language (EIL) rather than the monolingual native speaker.

2 Intercultural communicative competence should be developed among EIL learners by equipping them with linguistic and cultural behavior which will enable them to communicate effectively with others, and also by equipping them with an awareness of difference, and with strategies for coping with such difference (Hyde 1994).

3 The EIL pedagogy should be one of global appropriacy and local appropriation, in that it should prepare learners 'to be both global and local speakers of English and to feel at home in both international and national cultures' (Kramsch and Sullivan 1996: 211).

4 Instructional materials and activities should involve local and international contexts that are familiar and relevant to language learners' lives.

5 Instructional materials and activities should have suitable discourse samples pertaining to native and nonnative speaker interactions, as well as nonnative and nonnative speaker interactions. Discourse displaying exclusive native speaker use should be kept to a minimum, as it is chiefly irrelevant for many learners in terms of potential use in authentic settings (Widdowson 1998).

In fact, Graddol (1999) indicates that in the next half century, the balance between native speakers and non-native speakers will be changed critically. He maintains that:

Based solely on expected population changes, the number of people using English as their second language will grow from 235 million to around 462 million during the next 50 years. This indicates that the balance between L1 and L2 speakers will critically change, with L2 speakers eventually overtaking native speakers (Graddol, 1999). Some researchers view this spread of the English Language as a 'linguistic Imperialism' due to the negative effect it might have on

learners. Modiano (2002), for example, believes that cultural and linguistic imperialism is a reality and truly exists and needs to be more addressed. He also argues that foreign language teaching can have a negative impact on EFL learners' cultural integrity. This could happen for example when insisting on teaching EFL learners the near-native proficiency in ELT contexts. This might turn EFL learners who want to learn English language as a tool of communication in the global village, to auxiliary members of the culture presented in the prescriptive educational standard, something which is not in harmony with their own image. And this might affect their cultural integrity.

Modiano (2001) also goes beyond that in considering that ELT practitioners are considered to be, in a way, purveyors of English and American hegemony.

Instead, he offers teaching English as an International Language as a solution for language practitioners to avoid any negative impact on the learners' cultural identity which foreign language might have on them.

In my opinion, this could be valid because when we learn a foreign language we also, unintentionally or not, come to learn the culture and the view of the world of the country where such a language is most prominent. In discussing the European context as an example, Modiano argues that because of the increase in English language usage in last fifteen years, and of the appearance of English as a global language for communication, the existence of an Anglo-American view of the world has undeniably risen.

He believes that that if the European decision makers and educators really want to challenge and control the hegemony of the Anglo-American culture in the EU, a new model of English must be introduced "which allows Europeans, when communicating in English, to retain their divergent cultural distinctiveness". Modiano (2000) (p34)

The new model of English he offers is called "EIL", English as an International Language which is very challenging and most importantly multicultural- oriented. His model views the native

speakers of the major varieties of English as simply one group among many that collectively comprise the English-using community which accordingly means that the competent second- and first-language speakers are considered equal.

One of the greatest views of opposition towards introducing NS's cultures in English language teaching materials and supporting the use of the host culture is expressed by Suzuki (1999). I used the word greatest because the Japanese author uses very offensive adjectives in his article describing the spread of English language in his country as will appear later. In his article "Why the Japanese people are no good at English", Suzuki explains the reasons why the teaching of English language should **not** be presented according to the NS's cultures. First, he believes that Japan is a superpower industrial country which does not need the culture of any western or English-speaking country by any means. Secondly, he believes that Japan must "**fight** against the subtle form of **Western imperialism**" that suggests the need to emulate everything Western, including the English language. For Suzuki, such emulation is a form of mental colonization. This is clearly shown in the following quotation:

When Japanese come into contact with foreigners; Westerners, specifically, Americans, they have been historically predisposed to accepting that person's way of thinking and acting, that person's value system, and even that person's habits. And if they seem better than one's own, they don't hesitate to imitate them and take these differences in as their own, even hoping to become like them. This is the mental predisposition to what I referred to earlier as auto-colonization. (p. 145)

Instead he offers what he calls reforms for language Teaching in Japan to fight the invasion of westernizing the Japanese society such as:

- 1- At present, the cultural content of the course books in Japan contains too much emphasis on the history and culture of Britain and America. This should be excluded from language lessons and replaced by lessons from the host culture.

2-. The purpose of English lessons in schools should be to learn how to speak about Japan in English. At university, English should be learned from English translations of Japanese texts.

3. English language should be an optional subject. Only those who really want to study it should take it.

Finally, Suzuki urges Japanese people to defeat their enclosed lifestyle and their psychological state of self-colonization. He adds that it would be a tragedy if Japan became a “small America”. Although he is very confident that Japan is nowadays a great industrial country, he criticizes its people for having the feeling of being a minor power. He describes this current situation as a tragedy for Japan.

If we relate Suzuki’s interpretation of English and Japan to the Kuwaiti context, we will find that many Kuwaitis follow and agree with what Suzuki thinks. I remember when I was studying my BA in English Language in Kuwait university at the Faculty of Art, Department of English Language in 1989, a Kuwaiti Professor named N. G. was always criticizing students who speak and practice their English outside classrooms although all of us wanted to speak English to improve our language. He became angry if he heard any conversation in English. For him, he considered it as ‘Americanizing the Kuwaiti society’ and “the cultural invasion of the west”. The professor is still teaching in Kuwait University.

In the same vein, Hino (2009), argues the current movement of introducing English language in Japan in both private and public sector is considered to be a dilemma because of its possible negative effects on the Japanese native language. As solution for this dilemma, he proposes the teaching of EIL or what he calls "de-Anglo –American English" to be the suitable and safe means of expressing indigenous values in international communication.

In his article ‘The teaching of English in Morocco: The place of culture’, Hyde (1994) discusses Moroccans’ attitudes toward English language instruction and usage and argues that because of the country's complicated violent history of European colonization, the people of Morocco tend to be very aware of the issue of

imperialism. The French and Spanish languages were forced upon them by colonial powers in the 19th century. This compulsion of learning French made Moroccans to learn it and become their language of communication. As a result, most of them have almost forgotten about their Arabic, their native language until the movement of Arabization which started in the 1960's after the gaining the dependence. Nowadays, most Arabs do not understand what Moroccans say when they speak due to their French accent. This complex could make a case for making pro-active strategies in ELT to protect the national culture and languages from cultural and linguistic imperialism. As an example of their threat of teaching English is shown during the Annual Conference of Moroccan Association of Teachers of English (MATE) in December 1991. In that conference, some Moroccan EFL teachers raised the topic "ELT as being a vehicle of cultural imperialism". Others raised the flag of 'Let us use English for our specific purposes, and not let English use us for its specific purposes'.

As a result of this complicated situation in Morocco and as a fruit of his experience of teaching EFL in Morocco, Hyde suggests solutions for the Moroccan context. He starts by stating that ideological nature of ELT needs to be faced, not avoided, second more focus should be on the EFL learner not the language. Third and most importantly; introducing English course books with good selection of practices and contexts from the host and the international cultures.

3.1. Examples of empirical studies: The Chilean context

In this regard, McKay (2003a) conducted a very important empirical study in Chile where English is taught as a foreign language. The aim of her study was to investigate views and opinions of EFL teachers in Chile towards the role of cultural content in ELT materials, teaching of English as an international language there, the status of including appropriate materials from the host culture into the Chilean course books and the recognition of the strength of bilingual EFL teachers compared with the native ones. She had three research questions:

- 1- What is the cultural content of widely ELT textbooks in Chilean primary and secondary schools?
- 2- What ELT methodology is being advocated in Chilean schools?
- 3- How do Chilean EFL teachers view their own strengths and weakness in relation to native speaking teachers?

In order to find answers to her research questions, she designed a questionnaire in Spanish and was distributed to 50 EFL Chilean teachers: 29 teachers from public schools, 10 from semi-public schools, and 11 from private schools. The majority of the teachers (34) had been teaching English for more than five years. This involved visiting different schools in various parts in Chile.

By referring to her questionnaire questions, I found that she asked her participants very useful questions. One them is question 5 which asks:

Q 5- Which type of cultural content would you prefer to use in your class?

- a- Content that deals with local Chilean places and people.
- b- Content that deals primarily with aspects of United States or British life and culture.
- c- Content that deals with the life and culture of various countries around the world.

An interview was developed as well to interview pre and in-service Chilean EFL teachers in addition to educators in the Ministry of Education in Chile. She firstly begins her paper in arguing the following:

1- The cultural content of EIL should not be limited to native English-speaking countries. She thinks that as one of the main objectives of EIL is to enable EFL learners to use their English in different cultural contexts, then local or host cultural content should be introduced.

2- An appropriate pedagogy of EIL needs to be informed by local expectations regarding the role of the teacher and learner. Here, she clarifies that some countries look at native speaking countries as the right source for ELT textbooks, for this reason they adopted the

teaching of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) which is widely used by native speakers teachers in their own countries. McKay (2003b) argues that because the cultural content of EIL is separated from the approach using cultural content from a range of native-speaking countries, local educators must plan and make their own textbooks. If we have a look at some of the EFL books available in the market such as Touchstone, Passages, Connect and Voyager, we find that that they contain more and more international cultural content. They contain international issues and content about other countries and their traditions.

3- The strengths of bilingual teachers of English need to be recognized. In this regard, she believes that if EIL and its cultural content is de-nationalized, so the strengths of local EFL teachers must be uncovered especially their familiarity with the local culture. In her study paper, she describes the current status of EFL education in Chile and that English is taught as a compulsory subject from year 7 to year 12. The English curriculum has been widely changed by the Ministry of Education and the current cultural content was designed through the host culture in a textbook called Go for Chile having in mind the important role of English in the world today.

3.2. Iranian context:

In the Islamic Republic of Iran which a neighboring country to Kuwait ,the status of ELT has gone under waves of ups and downs due to the political situation there. Aliakbari (2004) notes that before the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979, ELT gained a considerable attention from the government due to strong political relations between Iran and USA and UK. This attention was clear in many ways such as teaching English using English course books, the use of native speakers as language teachers and the large number of American institutions and British Council centres in the country. However, after the Islamic Revolution, the attention has seriously changed and ELT received waves of hostility because Iranians considered the Americans to be the great and lone supporters of the ex-regime or as they call it ‘the dictatorship’.

Aliakbari also notes that the gradual change in the status of ELT in Iran has started with a very urgent movement called "the book purging" for the purpose of "de -culturalization" the course books of schools and universities. Many items and concepts were changed to more ' proper ' cultural or local ones. The second step that came later was the design of the national course books which replaced the old ones. The cultural content of the new national books represents the local and host culture that students might find in other subjects like history, Islamic and religious studies.

Aliakbari's explanation to the situation of ELT in Iran leads to the conclusion that it is clearly a very political issue. This raises a very important question of how far can ELT be a political question and how far it can be affected by politicians? In Iran as in some of the Middle East countries, politics plays a very important role in altering the ELT and how it is presented and sometimes omitted and replaced by other foreign languages. In 1986 when the United States of America and the United Kingdom made the night military raid over Libya, the first official reaction to that raid was the **suspension** of teaching English language in government schools and higher institutions and replacing it with Russian. Although this decision did not stay long, it is very clear evidence that in some countries, ELT can be a political issue and can be affected by politicians. Another example is the ELT in the Iran as Aliakbari described the change of the status of ELT in his countries from a very important language taught by native speakers using authentic text books in a country full of English private schools and British Council centers to a foreign language presented in the host Iranian culture. That situation took place because USA and UK were the closest friends of the emperor of Iran and they were the allies of the kingdom whereas after the Islamic revolution in 1979 the ex-friends turned to be 'the great Evil'. Because of that, native language teachers were asked to leave the country immediately and the British Councils were closed in addition to the change of the textbooks that were taught at the time.

The situation of EFL in Kuwait could also be considered to be a political issue. First of all, the State of Kuwait was a post-colonial state and was under the protection of the British Empire on which the sun never sets. As a result of that, English was chosen to be the foreign language to be introduced in public schools and higher institutions in addition to the official communications outside the country. Also, for some reasons including the political reasons, EFL in Kuwait is introduced and presented through the prism of the host culture because some politicians and policy makers might see that teaching a foreign language along with its culture as a kind of a cultural imperialism.

4. conclusion

From the above review of literature regarding the importance of introducing ESL/ EFL to learners through the host or international culture and in addition to the empirical studies which were done in different countries, it is concluded that this issue should get more attention when designing the ESL /EFL curriculum especially in countries where the societies are very closed or conservative such as some Islamic countries. This new perspective could help the people of such nations to accept exposing their children to a foreign language without the fear of any potential negative impact.

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