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**Intercultural Understanding and Reading Comprehension: A
Study of Higher Secondary School Students**



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Abstract

This research aims at analyzing the effect of intercultural pragmatics in the ability of higher secondary school students in Sindh, Pakistan to comprehend lectures. Since culture forms the basis of peoples' interaction as the globe becomes a global village, mastering inter- cultural relations and differences plays a vital role in overall communication and understanding. This study uses a quantitative research design with an experimental research design with one experimental group comprised of culturally relevant reading texts and a control group that received neutral texts. Reading comprehension pre and post treatment tests were given to the participants and data was analyzed using t-tests analysis in SPSS Was used to evaluate pre and post scores of the group. The study shows a strong positive correlation of intercultural pragmatic awareness and the students' ability to read, which implies that culturally conscious texts improve reading literacy. Therefore, this research has vital implications for enhancing intercultural views for enhancing reading skills as well as developing a culturally sensitive classroom for higher secondary students.

Key Words: Intercultural Pragmatics, Reading Comprehension, Language Pedagogy, Experimental Study

Introduction

There are the linguistic and the extra linguistic factors that enable the performance of reading comprehension and the cultural background or setting is among the extra linguistic factors (Khan, 2019). One of the components that have been utilised to explain how learners make meaning of a text in second language is intercultural pragmatics which combine interpretation of the language beyond culture (Kecskes, 2014). In areas like Sindh, Pakistan, English is learned as a second language Different cultural context of the English text becomes another challenge on its own (Zhang & Liu 2017). This is because learners are sometimes overwhelmed with pragmatic aspects whenever the texts are culturally remote from their existence (Khan, 2019). The purpose of this research is to compare the impact of reading culturally relevant texts to culturally non-relevant texts on the comprehension level of Secondary schooling students. Thus, with an emphasis upon Sindh, this research aims at

increasing awareness of the functions of intercultural pragmatics in the development of reading comprehension skills (Kecskes, 2014).

Background of the Study

Intercultural pragmatics as described by Kecskes (2014) is a field of study that analyses how people of different cultures make meaning in an L2. This prior research reveal that it becomes difficult for learners to comprehend texts that are not culturally inclusive (Ali, 2020). As Khan notes in 2019, cultural references in the texts help or complicate comprehension, based on readers' cultural identity. For learners in multilingual contexts such as Sindh where English is common in learning institutions but rarely represents their cultural values, this presents lots of difficulties. Implementing culturally relevant texts and literature technologies may reduce students' distance from the knowledge and boost understanding due to the students' cultural relevancy of the texts' content (Moeschler, 2004). Specifically, this research seeks to establish the extent to which the use of Sindh culturally sensitive texts positively affects the learners' performance when reading compared to the use of culturally unfamiliar texts.

Objectives of the Study

The study's objectives are threefold: to study the Mediating role of intercultural pragmatics between attitude and achievement of secondary students in Sindh; to examine the impact of cultural contexts and cultural unrelated texts on comprehension zone and to find out some ways how culturally diverse content can be introduced in the English curricula for second language learners. Thus, the achievement of these objectives will help to advance the knowledge regarding the role of intercultural pragmatics in the articulation of reading and suggest useful practical implications for language teaching.

Research Hypothesis

There are differences in how effectively students introduced to intercultural pragmatics grasp the second language to those who do not undergo such training.

Literature Review

The relationship between intercultural pragmatics and reading comprehension is a new focus of interest in research, which contributes to the explanation of how cultural factors affect the student's literacy. Most authors have noted that, students

participating in intercultural education programs, display greater sensitization to cultural differences and increased sensitivity and awareness in perceiving cultural meanings of texts as well as an improved ability in perceiving cultural contexts (Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018). Their intercultural communication interactions and self-efficiency to interact with, cultural differences are crucial in a globally integrated society (Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018).

Inter cultural pragmatic approaches have also been given much attention as scholars investigated how different implemented strategies builds the competencies of students dealing with differing cultural patterns used in the texts. Several studies discuss details of specific teaching of pragmatic markers, which help people to better understand cultural differences and to interpret them (Kecskes, 2019). Intercultural communication is a common component of school-related academic support interventions, including so-called Attention Training Exercises that focus on analyzing and addressing authentic intercultural communication tasks (Rose, 2019). In addition, cultural training makes people more aware of how and when people from other cultures communicate and enhances the way one communicates with them when dealing with intercultural texts (Chen, 2017).

Causal related designs have been found to be imperative in intercultural pragmatics given that they make it easier to compare positive adaption fetched interferences and numerous other aspects influencing an individual's comprehension in two or more cultures. These designs usually involve pre- and post-treatment, treatment Pt groups and, controlling and manipulating intercultural factors. Latent and retrospective self-assessments should take place before and after an examination in order to measure change in comprehension due to interventions or influence of intercultural factors (Samiee & Jeong, 1994). A control group helps in laying a benchmark that assists the researchers to eliminate effects of interventional influences (Watson et al., 2023).

One of the major lines of research that have fascinated scholars is deciphering interactions between linguistic ability, cultural competence, as well as reading skill. It is here that the uptake is to find out to what extent language knowledge and cultural awareness help to understanding of intercultural texts (Sykes, 2017). Language skills are not limited to vocabulary and grammar; they include packaged in the ability to

decode complex text. Research often focuses on the effects that students' first or second language has on their capacity to comprehend culturally infused texts. Cultural proficiency – sensitivity and ability to interact in culturally diverse environment – is also positively linked to students' success in their understanding of intercultural texts. Cultural experience, including knowledge of cultural expectations, beliefs, and traditions, may improve degree and nature of particular identification of certain implications or presuppositions of the texts. Scholars pay special attention to the relationship between language and culture and in particular language's ability to carry cultural meanings and vice versa its impact on meaning interpretation (Cummings, 2017). The study focuses on intercultural pragmatic strategies in the middle as the moderator, giving an understanding of the overall added effect of language and culture on understanding intercultural texts. The overall purpose of this research shall be to contribute towards advancing teaching methodologies and curricula with a view to improving the overall students' reading fluency in a global society.

Some of these sources suggest how it is possible to help students gain intercultural reading competency, though the general consensus is quite limited. Teachers should include a range of Intercultural texts with their learners that consist of different types of text and literature from different cultures. This diversity fosters cultural literacy as well as increases students' competencies in relation to ways of conceiving intercultural texts (Tourimpampa et al., 2018). This article suggests that teachers can embed pragmatic knowledge into lessons thus helping learners to grasp cultural practices in texts. Strategies as simple as searching for pragmatic markers or better still decoding message cues are some of the fundamental approaches in intercultural acquisition.

As a result, the so-called cultural sensitivity training helps to initiate non-traditionally polite conversations concerning cultural diversities (Matthews et al., 2018). Teachers need to teach students to self-reflect, to identify intercultural factors within the context of cultural differences that can impact evaluation of received texts. Moreover, combining the multiple types of materials including the videos and interactive materials will also facilitate the understanding about the intercultural communication (Alemi & Haeri, 2020). Encouraging safe spaces where intercultural texts can be seriously and productively engaged helps discussion engagement and

group rapport within the classroom.

Several assessment tools are available to specially assess the intercultural reading comprehension which have been in enhancement (Timpe-Laughlin & Choi, 2017). They allow the identification and improvement of students' intercultural reading skills among educators. Participants are given tests to check their readiness to comprehend intercultural glosses often in connection with culturally distinct texts and indirect communication styles. Assessing cultural attuneness, one of the significant components of intercultural communication competence, offers you understanding of the students' predisposition and willingness to entertain diverse cultures.

Therefore, identifying valid and reliable measurements, the educators could analyze the results and develop effective interventions as to improve intercultural reading performances among the students. Consequently, the study calls for more attention and practice of intercultural pragmatics in enhancing reading comprehension to learners within one or multiculturally divers Angle.

Methodology

In this particular work, the experimental quantitative research method was used to analyse the effects of intercultural pragmatics on students' reading ability. The study used t-test as the main statistical tool to compare results between the group of students treated as the experimental group as well as the group of students in the control group. The researcher fully understood and was fully aware of all the factors that could present bias into the study hence made sure to eliminate them and ensure their effects were evaluated in the most systematic manner possible. The research framework involved random assignment of participants into two groups: an experimental group who were given intercultural treatment and a comparable group that did not. Intercultural pragmatics was the independent variable while reading comprehension and students' performance were dependent variables. The work of Lev Vygotsky (1975) was used to inform the study with an operation base on the socio-cognitive development theory, which stressed social interaction as vital to the development of cognition. In the assessment of the intervention, pre-intervention and post-intervention tests were used. The study employed the use of the independent and paired sample t-tests with SPSS 26.0 to improve the understanding of the effect of the intervention on the students' academic achievement.

Sample

The study's sample consisted of 50 secondary students from Ghtoki, Tehsil Ubauro, Sindh, divided equally into two groups of 25: the experimental group and the control group. Random sampling was employed to ensure that each participant had an equal chance of being selected. This method aimed to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings by creating equivalent groups. The sample was predominantly comprised of Sindhi-speaking learners, which emphasized the significance of the research within a culturally relevant context. Each group received a series of one-hour lessons over a month, focusing on the influence of intercultural pragmatics on reading comprehension.

Instruments

Data collection tools included standardized pre-tests and post-tests designed to assess reading comprehension among participants. The pre-test aimed to evaluate baseline reading abilities, incorporating multiple-choice questions, true/false statements, and fill-in-the-gap tasks. These instruments were carefully crafted to measure participants' comprehension skills before the intervention. The post-test followed the same structure as the pre-test, allowing for direct comparison of results to gauge the impact of the intercultural treatment. All assessments were reviewed and validated by four English teachers to ensure reliability and rigor. The pre- and post-tests were critical in determining the effectiveness of the intervention and understanding how intercultural elements influenced reading comprehension and overall student performance.

Treatment

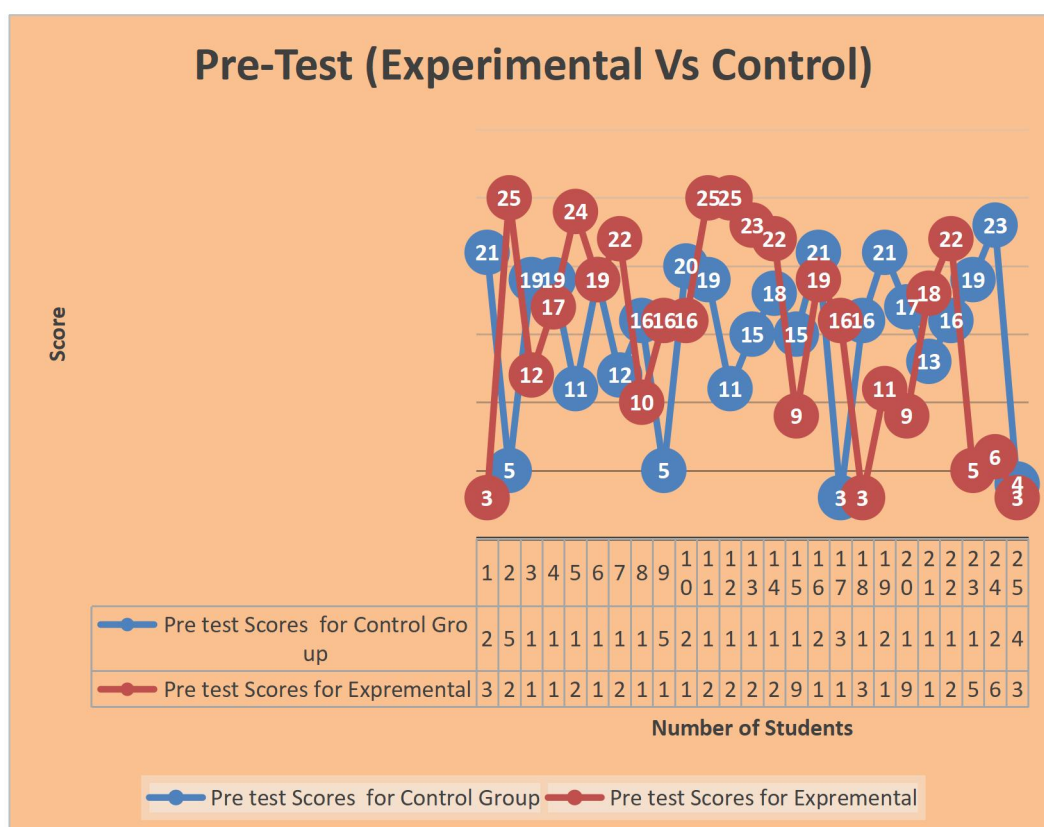
The treatment included a structured intercultural pragmatics intervention delivered only to the experimental group. The purpose of this intervention was to improve student's ability to comprehend what they read by incorporating culturally appropriate literature. The implementation of the approach was based on the Vygotsky's socio-cognitive development theory under which Social participation and culture play essential roles on cognition. The experimental group was engaged in the readers' meetings where students focused on discussing cultural aspects of the texts. The control group was taught reading normally with no aspect to the intercultural aspect. The intervention took a month with an average of one hour's lesson for each group and all lessons were well structured following the research objectives. Finally

statistical measures were used on the data elicited from the post-test to establish the effectiveness of the intervention on the students' performance on tasks related to reading comprehension.

Participant Demographics

The participants in the study were 50 students; the age ranged between 12 and 18 years; both male and female were included. All subjects were of Sindhi ethnicity, and Their grade level was 10th grade. The subjects' native language was Sindhi and the participants were selected from rural areas only. This demographic condition is relevant because students' characteristics may affect cultural experience which, in its turn, can affect the ability to read and respond to the provided materials.

Pre-Test Scores of Control and Experimental Groups



It is observed from the scores obtained in the pre-test that the students in both the control as well as the experimental group vary a lot in terms of their knowledge level. The control group had the range 3 to 23 while the experimental group mark was slightly higher that ranged between 3 to 25. This means there is a variability in the students' initial read from their comprehension levels which is important when measuring the effectiveness of the intercultural pragmatics-based materials used in

this study

Pre-Test Group Statistics

Table: Pre-Test Statistics of Both Groups

	Pre-test Scores (Control Group)	Pre-test Scores (Experimental Group)
N	25	25
Mean	15.12	15.20
Median	16	16
Std. Deviation	5.783	7.566
Minimum	3	3
Maximum	23	25

In the present study, the mean scores of the pre-test generated by the two groups were almost comparable, with the control group scoring slightly lower with a mean of 15.12 in comparison to the experimental group with a mean of 15.20. The standard deviation for the Control group was slightly less than that of the Experimental group where the Control group was 5.783 and the Experimental group was 7.566. This means that, on average, the scores of the students in the experimental group were slightly more spread out – or variable – than those in the control group, reflecting a range of prior status in reading comprehension. These results mean that the two groups were similar numerically before the start of the experiment.

Independent Sample Test (Pretest)

Table: Comparison of Test Results

Test Statistic	Value	df	Sig.
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	1.095	
t-test for Equality of Means	t	48	-0.570
Mean Difference	-1.120		
Standard Error Difference	1.964		
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	-5.068		
	Upper	2.828	

The significance test used in the study was an independent samples t-test to check the

hypothesis that there is a significant difference in pre-test scores between the control and the experimental group. At the onset of the study, it also shows that there is no significant difference between the two groups since the t-value, -0.570 and the p-value or Sig. value is greater than 0.05. This is in agreement with the hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the two groups baseline reading comprehension, making the comparisons made after the intervention more valid.

Control Group Results

Pre and Post-Test Scores of Control Group

Table: Paired Samples Statistics of Control Group

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1: Pre-test Scores	15.12	25	5.783	1.157
Post-Test Scores	14.08	25	6.258	1.252

The paired samples statistics demonstrated that the mean pre-test score for the control group, therefore, was 15.12, and in the same group the mean post-test score was 14.08. This decline in average performance suggests that the control group did not be exposed to the effect of the intervention showing that traditional instructional methods only were inadequate to style the comprehension of reading amongst these students.

Paired Samples Correlations of Control Group

Table: Paired Samples Correlations of Control Group

N	Correlation Sig.
Pair 1 25	.177

The obtained correlation coefficient of the control group for the pre-test and post test was 0.177 that is not significantly different from zero level ($p = 0.397$). This implies that there is actually no highly significant correlation between the pre and post scores, which actually points to the fact that the intervention made almost no difference on the control group's reading comprehension.

Paired Samples Correlations Statistics of Control Group**Table: Paired Samples Correlations Statistics of Control Group**

Variable	Mean	SD	SE	95%	CI 95%	CI
			Mean	Lower	Upper	
Pre-test Scores for Control Group - Post Test Scores Control Group	1.040	7.732	1.546	-2.152	4.232	

The mean of the control group at post-test is slightly higher than the pretest mean at 1.040, but again, the confidence interval varies from -2.152 to 4.232 which says the results are not statistically significant. Consequently, it can be stated that the intervention increased the reading comprehension of the control group by a small amount only.

Experimental Group Results**Table: Paired Samples Statistics of Experimental Group**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1: Pre-test Scores	15.20	25	7.566	1.513
Post-Test Scores	17.60	25	3.990	.798

The result obtained from each group's paired samples statistics demonstrate a significant raise towards the mean scores of the experimental group from pre-15.20test to post-test17.60. The standard deviation for the post-tests, 3.990, is significantly less than the point 7.566, which corresponds to pre-tests; this proves that students' scores are oriented towards better understanding of questions on the test. This implies that the culture appropriate texts enhanced the comprehension among the students.

Paired Samples Correlations of Experimental Group**Table: Paired Samples Correlations of Experimental Group**

N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	25	.040

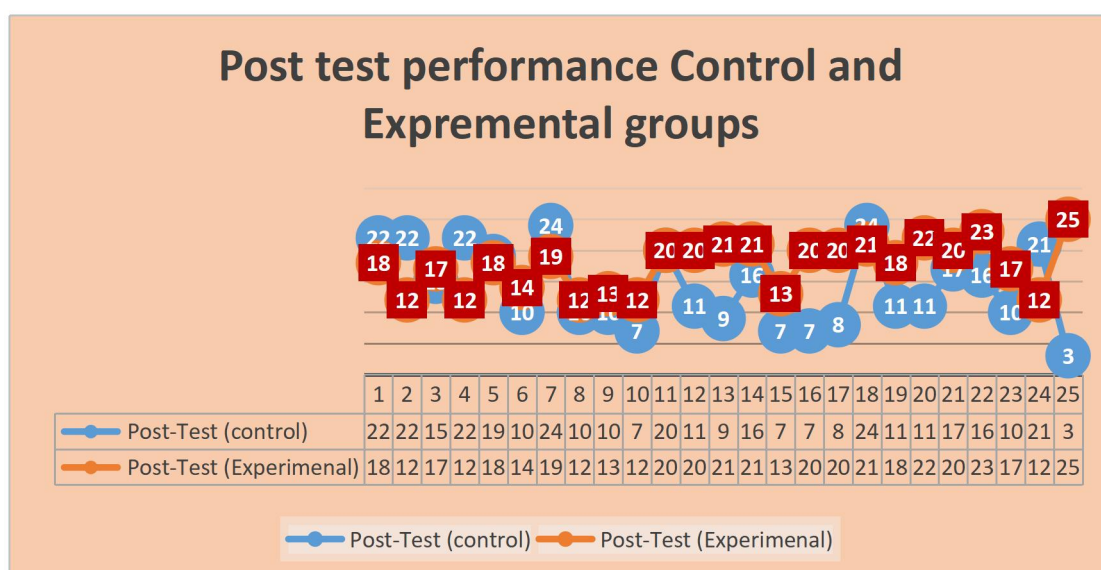
The paired samples correlation tested gave values; $\rho = 0.040$ which suggest low correlation between pre-test score and post-test score, but it is not a statistically significant value ($\text{sig} = 0.849$). In therefore implying that the intervention might have

had an impact on the post-test scores irrespective of the pre-tests Achievements, its supports the role played by the culturally appropriated reader. **Paired Samples Test of Experimental Group**

Table: Paired Samples Test of Experimental Group (Pre vs. Post)

Variable	Mean	SD	SE Mean	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Pre-test Scores for Experimental Group – Post-Test Scores for Experimental Group	-2.400	8.411	1.682	-5.872	1.072

Since the mean difference is negative (-2.400) in the post test indicating that means were relatively higher in the post.test as compared to pre-test. Given the confidence interval of – 5.872 to 1.072, it means that infact there is high chance that the increase in scores is statistically significant and thus supports further the conclusion that the CR LRM enhance the reading comprehension of the experimental group.



Therefore, the line chart indicates that experimental group scores higher in post test scores than the control group. The trend when summing the scores is confirmed, and an experimental group has shown consistently higher scores, except for a few data points. Along with this more stable performance overall, the experimental group has less variability compared to the control group.

Summary of Results

Thus, the comparison of the results of control and experimental groups shows the effectiveness of using the materials culturally significant for students at cultivating

their comprehending abilities. The result on the experimental group reflected an enhanced mean achievement for reading comprehensions compared to the control group where no such progress was observed. These findings stress further the significance of cultural relevance in the developed instructional materials because such factors could significantly contribute to students' interest and understanding.

The results of the study indicate that culture of learners should inform curriculum development and also formation of teaching methodology. The use of culturally appropriate content will have strong positive effects towards students' learning and understanding hence promoting the development of an effective learning environment.

Findings and Discussion

The current research sought to assess the impact of integrating cultural context in teaching of ESL among 10th grade students in a Sindhi speaking region of Pakistan. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, the research compared the academic performance of two groups: In the experimental group, the students of ESL were learning with cultural aspects included in their lessons while the control group was learning with ESL that did not incorporate cultural perspectives. The study discovered that the experimental group from the ESL class performed better than the control group on the post-test in the aspect of English reading comprehension. As such, the theory that exposing students to cultural content in ESL classes might raise the learners' achievements is worthy of consideration.

Also, the participants in the experimental group better understood cultural psychology, which heightened their interest in learning. This is in accord with the prior theoretical studies addressing the issue of cultural background to second language acquisition (Cummins, 1982; Krashen, 1982). Besides, when delivering ESL training, it is effective to incorporate cultural context because it is associated with the acculturation knowledge and student motivation and participation (Gay, 2006). All these findings support the notion that culture plays an important or essential factor in the teaching of ESL.

The given findings have important implications for the field of ESL education. Cultural resources should be incorporated into the strategies used by teachers in their classrooms. This may include the use of raw materials, endorsements of cultures, and

facilitating the children's relationship between their cultural endowment and classroom. They are important tools for building a positive classroom climate, which enables ESL learners to learn effectively.

However, the study recognizes some limitations and they include; Small sample yields which may limit generalize ability and Focus only on one institution. Furthermore, it was apparent that the research was mostly based on separate testing of learning outcomes to measure the effects of the intervention, and, therefore, could not reflect the overall advantage of the intervention on different aspects of learners' lives and learning processes.

The study also hints a need to undertake subsequent studies regarding the impact of culturally appropriate ESL pedagogy at different learning institutions and among the various learning communities. Furthermore, the issue of long term impact of incorporating cultural context in ESL learning requires research.

In this light, the results of this study provide directions for the inclusion of cultural content into the learning of ESL and would be of great value to educators with a special interest in teaching English to the speakers of other languages.

Conclusion

This research investigated the correlation between comprehension of reading and intercultural pragmatics of Sindhi learners in District Ghotki, Pakistan. Therefore for the research to answer the generic question of how intercultural pragmatics could enhance language understanding, reading comprehension was defined as an interactivity process that was based on cultural context. The experimental study included 50 10th-grade students with equal split between control and experimental group where instruction included elements of both target (English) and local (Sindhi) culture.

Several of the studies revealed that students who were taught intercultural pragmatics comprehended English texts better than those students who underwent culturally unbiased teaching. Such result evidence the hypothesis that incorporating cultural aspects in the learning of language enhances second language acquisition. The study supports previous research done on language and culture, and an argument for the incorporation of culture aspects in learning the English language is presented. The consequences are not limited to theoretical validation; they provide tactics for

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practicing language instruction. Stressing the need of cultural relevance can be incentive for students, as well as it contributes to the development of students' language profiles. Culture and language are inseparable and to acquire and teach a language one has to understand this association that it has with culture.

Recommendations

This study thus recommends that to effectively apply culture based language teaching (CLT) into ESL/EFL classes educators should integrate cultural aspects into their teaching and learning approaches. Apart from improving the way of learning language, it also increases students' motivation by learning through such fun activities as role play, singing, cross-cultural search. It is recommended that teachers use texts, movies and the internet to enhance the linkage between language and culture that the teachers are teaching to their students.

It's crucial to stress that only active participation really helps students to learn. Teachers should engage the students in research by asking them to investigate and report their experiences about the target culture. That is why it is crucial for teachers and educators to select the materials that are closer to the target culture and many references to the cultural aspects, especially phrases and concepts, are explained in detail.

Also, final for successful conversation in the second language is to get language and cultural knowledge. ESL teachers are always in a dilemma of accepting the learner's culture or encouraging the right culture for the learners to practice when in the target language context. By using active acquisition strategies and accessing real-life resources, it is possible to develop and share effective knowledge about the language and the culture in which is used. This study's finding will inform future similar research and assist in strategies development for instructional delivery across different culture.

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