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Cultivating Inter-cultural Communicative Competence in L2 Teaching in Multicultural Class: A Critical Appraisal

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
History: Accepted 30 Nov 2020 Available Online 31 Dec 2020	<i>Language, as a carrier of cultural identities, plays a vital role in cultural exchange amongst people of diverse ethnic, social, religious and political identities. Across the globe, communication has increased in scale and speed, therefore, Inter-cultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is required in order to avoid misunderstanding arising from differing linguistic cum cultural identities as an ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations. Second language (L2) teaching in a multilingual and multicultural large class is an ever growing field of research with a focus on all the aspects of language teaching along with an awareness of cultural knowledge. This Paper focuses on the need to cultivate inter-cultural communicative competence in second language multilingual and multicultural large classroom in University of Sindh. Critical appraisal of literature reveals that teachers should possess cultural knowledge of multicultural class population to connect language and culture. The role of language teacher, therefore, should not only be to enhance learners' linguistic knowledge but also to focus on nonverbal communication skills and ICC competence by creating a link through communication between learners in a mixed cultural identities class.</i>
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1. Introduction

The social scientists always look at interconnectivity among different cultures across the world. They speak of a number of factors that create and strengthen such connectivity and interaction for long. Along with other necessary factors like tourism, political ties, sports, business, education etc language also plays an important role in keeping the otherwise distant nations/cultures connected for all desirable purposes. Language is a main tool of communication and cultural exchange amongst people of diverse ethnic, social, religious and political identities. The major role and significance of language lies in the

communication exchanges (Little, 2020; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Kim et al., 2010). Since people of different cultures may share certain identical features of life, they tend to be attracted to one another on the basis of similarities in their life and culture. However, the problem of linguistic comprehension is achieved mainly by learning a common language by the people of different cultures. Hence, the use of a common language becomes a pivotal source of interconnectivity among various nations and culture. Language is central and most prominent part of any cultural identities since it reflects cultural content of its identity (Du Gay, 2000; Menard-Warwick, 2008). In order to acquire and learn any second language, it is imperative to understand several characteristics that people bear especially their cultural identities (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Just acquiring vocabulary and grammar may not enable us to teach second language (Paetcher, et al. 2001). Besides, linguistic knowledge, cultural comprehension is also necessary for language teaching in a multilingual large class (Eagleton, 2000). A deliberate effort to teach language(s), other than one's own native language, in order to achieve the mutual aim of the exchange of ideas and experiences desired for the global betterment is an important need of the time. By learning a non native language, especially one that is politically and socially stronger than one's own language, sometimes may pose threats of overpowering a seemingly weak language. Therefore, strategies must be developed to teach/learn a foreign language like English in such a way that the purpose of intercultural communication may be achieved positively and on the other hand the features of one's native culture may also feel no threat of being wiped out at the same time.

Cultural identities is a term which, in a sense, defines virtually every aspect of human life, including the beliefs, customs, norms, values, objects, institutions, techniques, social practices and language (Halimi, 2020; Soto-Molina & Sndez, 2020). And language is a means to transfer these identities from generation to generation successfully. Language has words, phrases, terms, expressions and longer discourses to define, narrate, vindicate and even preach and spread these aspects of a culture. Language and social experts have written a lot about the use of language in upholding such distinctive characteristics of a culture. Cultural identity is a total way of human life and behaviour and language is a central part of human life and carrier of cultural identities (Barros & Albert, 2020). Language is an integrated part of cultural identities and is the representation of it; both language and cultural identities are inseparable from each other (Little, 2020). According to Zhang, (2007) language contains extremely rich cultural identities and its reality and it is the product and component of cultural identities. Cultural signs and activities take their specific names and terms from within the speakers of the language of that specific area where these activities take birth and are performed regularly. Later on the same activities may be recorded in books or expressed orally to other people in the form of their language; hence, the function of language guarantees the vocalisation of such cultural identities for their own people as well as for the people of other lands/cultures.

Many educators now realize that language is strongly related to its culture, therefore, culture plays a greater role in language acquisition and vice versa Wardhaugh, 2005; Mercuri, 2012). While recognizing the relationship of language and culture, Wardhaugh (2005) states that "it is not possible to understand or appreciate one without knowledge of the other" (p, 220). Inter-cultural communicative competence (ICC) is considered as an individual's ability to exchange ideas adequately (Poyas & Elkad-Lehman, 2020). That is, to be able to understand and use the gestures, spoken and unspoken word's meaning clearly with cultural insight. That is why, both the linguistic knowledge as well as cultural knowledge of the target language are highly important to be cultivated in L2 learners (Widodo, Fang, & Elyas, 2020). Hence, there is a need of cultivating ICC competence in learners at university level. The target of second language teachers, therefore, should be to prepare learners to acquire L2 with fluency and accuracy along with the competencies required to communicate with people of target language with different cultural identities appropriately (Irfan, 2019). This should be included in the syllabus, teacher's objectives and teaching methods. Appropriate and well defined use of language teaching can help us uphold our own identity as well learn the ways and ideas of other cultures without involving any risk whatsoever.

Second language teaching in multilingual large class is an ever growing field of research, which

focuses on all the aspects of making second language teaching in multilingual large class achievable (Ellis, 1985). According to Little (2020) one of the areas that needs to be further researched crucially is the assessment of cultural dimension in language learning. In second language teaching in a multilingual large class, cultural identities and their awareness is of vital significance (Gerwitz & Gribb, 2009). Educational institutions are expected to prepare those entrusted to them for the inter-lingual and inter-cultural experiences of the contemporary world. While a careful review of the literature on the subject of current research, it has been observed that scant attention has been paid on cultivating inter-cultural communicative competence in L2 learning in a multicultural large class at university level teaching especially in developing countries especially in Pakistan. As a result, this study embarks on to fill this gap by contributing empirical evidence from large multicultural class population at university level.

2. Critical Appraisal of Literature

2.1 Inter Cultural Communication and Identities (ICCI)

Across the globe, communication has increased in scale and speed, therefore, communicative competence is required in order to avoid misunderstanding arising from differing cultural identities, expectations, diverging beliefs, values and language use (Cameron, Lee, Anderson, Trachtenberg & Chang, 2020). In Inter-cultural communication, people from different countries and cultural identities (CI) act, communicate and perceive the world around them (Koerner & Pillay, 2020). It takes place across different cultural identities and social groups; within an organization, institute or social set up, made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds (Little, 2020; Barros & Albert, 2020). Such communication may experience a range of communication problems and processes and so cultural identities aim to highlight and solve those issues. Gudykunst (2003) defines it as communication between individuals from different nationalities and cultural identities.

CI plays a vital role in determining how individuals encode messages, through what medium they transmit them and how interpretation of these messages takes place (Cameron, et al. 2020). Cultural communication is a kind of communication that aims to share information across different cultural identities and social groups (Widodo, Fang & Elyas, 2020). Inter cultural encounters are so common and ubiquitous; they take place all around us, in neighbourhood, in personal relations, in business, in education, in politics, in tourist travels and across national borders (Halimi et al., 2020). Our whole life experience is full of such interactive encounters and therefore, communicative efficiency and competence is required to maintain cultural identity and make certain necessary adjustments while dealing with cultural differences.

2.2 Inter Cultural Identities Communicative Competence (ICICC)

According to (Byram, 2001) inter cultural identities communicative competence is defined as “the ability to interact with others, accepting other’s perspectives and the conscious awareness of their evaluations of difference. Another definition relates to competence by Bennett, (2004) who says that Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts. Therefore, competence is another name of mutual understanding and respect, and tolerance of cultural differences. In today’s world, competence has been highlighted by many researchers in various disciplines including Second/Foreign Language Acquisition (Little, 2020). This competence includes not only sharing and enjoying the similarities of different cultures but it also demands respect and acceptance of dissimilarities. Language learning helps us learn what gestures and expressions are used at different times when people of identical group meet one another on formal or informal occasions. If a non-native language is learnt well, cultural identities are accepted and respected well. In the development of competence, various people identify themselves as belonging to a particular social, ethnic and cultural group (Halimi et al., 2020). Cultural identity is the part of socialization process; people develop an identity as belonging to a particular group with distinctive features as labels to describe them.

2.3 Second Language Teaching in Multilingual Large Class

In second language teaching in multilingual large classroom, cultural sense education has to be

strengthened, by making clear the connection between language, cultural identities and language teaching (Zhang & Zhan, 2020). There is a need to cultivate Inter cultural identities communicative competence in second language classrooms. The language teacher should focus not only on enhancing learner's linguistic knowledge but also focus on nonverbal communication skills and ICCC. In a second language classroom with a mix of cultural identities and differences among learners, there is a need to create the link through able communication between learners (Poyas & Elkad-Lehman, 2020). The role of ICCC in a mix cultural identities class is to maintain the cultural differences as well as cultural identities of the learners through communicative competence.

Second language learning involves learning about other cultures through language to enable oneself to acquire not just linguistic knowledge but also the socio-cultural dimensions for a deep insight about life around. Byram, signifies the importance of learning about other cultures through language learning as;

“What we may learn by studying other cultures are not merely possibilities of different ways of doing things, other techniques. More importantly we may learn different possibilities of making sense of human life, different ideas about the possible importance that the carrying out of certain activities may take on for a man, trying to contemplate the sense of his life as a whole.”

At present, cultural identities are a main global issue which humans face and for that reason, there is a dire need to maintain the cultural identities of the speakers, hence language teaching can solve this issue by creating an environment where communicative competence can best be achieved (Piątkowska, 2015). In a second language classroom, linguistic knowledge, i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation can be achieved through teaching but the sufficient knowledge about the target language cultural identities can hardly be focused and achieved, which rather is the most important aspect in achieving the accuracy and appropriateness in the target language use (Irfan, 2019). There is a cultural background of every language (Zhang & Zhan, 2020). Therefore, the cultural knowledge and awareness of second language should be enhanced so that the learners could acquire and improve their performance in inter cultural contexts of communication (Widodo, Fang & Elyas, 2020). In a second language classroom, the teacher could help cultivating ICC competence by creating an awareness among learners about the inter connection between language and cultural identities (Little, 2020). Language not only reflects cultural identities but is an integral part of it. There is a significant role of socializing learners for a better ICC competence (Soto-Molina & Šnchez, 2020). The teachers can enable their learners in socialization in the second language classroom (Byram, 1997). Second Language teaching has changed from its focus on merely linguistic knowledge to cultural awareness. The 20th Century researchers have shown significance of cultural components into L2 teaching in multilingual large class curriculum (Sysoyev, 2002).

3. Discussion

3.1 The Context of University of Sindh, Jamshoro

University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan is one of the oldest and largest public sector universities in the country. Higher education commission (HEC), Islamabad advises and monitors curriculum development, assessment and pedagogical methodologies across the country. However, university of Sindh has its own statutory bodies to regulate HEC's advice on curriculum and pedagogies in the university. Institute of English Language & Literature deemed responsible to prepare curriculum and arrange faculty for whole the university regarding designing the syllabus and teaching of English language at different levels. Teaching English as a second language is based on literary texts with the stories from English cultural identities. Whereas, students of L2 classrooms come from various cultural identities from within the country and Middle East and Africa. The linguistic components are taught through literature reflecting English cultural terms, in order to familiarize students with their cultural terms. The curriculum is grounded

in the book titled as *English for Undergraduates* for undergraduate across the university. The text introduces lessons from mixed cultural backgrounds, including English European cultural context. Not just the curriculum, but the communication that takes place between the teacher and the students from diverse cultural identities include the roleplay of cultural identity as well as maintaining cultural diversity.

The L2 teachers have realized the intertwined relation between cultural identities and language. This implies that L2 teachers should possess multi-cultural awareness to deliver best communicative competence. Because, L2 teaching in a multilingual large class is a process of acquiring not just syntax and Lexicon but the cultural awareness as well. Well-trained L2 teachers could make difference. As a result, L2 classroom communicative competence would be improved with efficiency gained in reading and listening, along with improvement in speaking and writing as language skills. Previous research has identified that that language is inseparable from cultural identities (Little, 2020; Poyas, & Elkad-Lehman, 2020). In SLA, the interrelatedness of language and cultural identities has been recognized and acknowledged (Cameron et al. 2020). Researcher have also observed influence of cultural knowledge that helps L2 teaching in multilingual large class enhances language acquisition (Widodo, Fang, & Elyas, 2020; Zhang & Zhan, 2020).

In Pakistan, according to (Kachru, 1992) where English is taught as a second language, explicitly requires the curriculum where linguistic skills could be taught with training of cultural knowledge and communicative competence on the discourse level. Alptekin (2002) supports the view that communicative competence is needed to be cultivated in ELT as a new notion since English is recognized as a world language and it encompasses both local and international contexts as settings of language use.

It has been observed that, in Pakistan English as L2 is taught in a large classroom and students attempt to memorize sentence structures, vocabulary items, phrases, grammar rules for passing a language test but when it comes to communication, the learners would hardly be able to communicate competently. This highlights the grave issue of enabling learners to achieve ICC competence. It shouldn't be considered a practical approach towards L2 teaching in multilingual large class. Communicative terms, phrases, cultural items, sentence patterns, common sayings, idioms could be taught through cultural knowledge to effectively communicate second language. The cultural deviations and patterns should be taught to enhance communicative competence. The meanings and perceptions of native speakers, how they observe and see the world, and how they make use of language to reflect their thoughts and behaviours should be known to L2 teachers and learner.

There is a need to include the communicative skills along with the basic knowledge of language skills. In SLA class, the learner's focus is rather more on memorizing the vocabulary lists, the structure and form is more highlighted than communicative teaching in multilingual large class. Besides, ICC has been relatively given little emphasis in syllabi. Since every cultural identity has its own language with its distinctive features, therefore, in SLA class, the cultural aspects of the target language must be taught and made available to the students. In SLA class, normally the phrases and idioms of English language are not easily understood by the learners, since idioms and phrases are particular sayings of any culture, therefore, a problem arises in understanding as well as using them in communication. This creates problems in language teaching in multilingual large class for the students with different cultural backgrounds and cultural identities; therefore, they make deviations and errors while using second language. Hence, cultural contents and cultural and language learning tasks should be selected to scaffold the ICC learning process.

3.2 Principal Steps to Achieve ICC Competence

The purpose of language is communication, therefore, language should be taught to develop communicative competence through teaching. Language teaching needs to impart language competence embedded with cultural identity of students' native language. There should be proper cultivation of competence, so that the knowledge of language should enhance the cultural knowledge too. In order to

ensure that language teaching is grounded in cultural knowledge and identity of learners is respected, following key steps need to be followed:

Firstly, to promote cultural identity and unity in previous literature, it has been noted that language and cultural identities are inseparable and unified (Little, 2020; Poyas & Elkad-Lehman, 2020). As a result, in L2 teaching in a multilingual large class students and teachers maintain unity. Secondly, maintaining cultural difference is an essential element in L2 learning. There is a basic difference between cultural identities which needs to be maintained by both the teacher and the taught. For example, in our cultural context, the plain refusal is acceptable, with the use of terms of negation i.e. *naheen, na*, (meaning 'NO'), however, in English culture, plain refusal is taken as a rude gesture, therefore, their gestures and phrases are like, *I am afraid not, no but..., sorry I cannot accept it...etc.* For a second language learner, it is imperative to know the terms as well as their cultural background, in order to achieve ICC competence. Thirdly, principle of objectivity is yet another major feature for achieving competence. This signifies that cultural differences are present in language content. But it can never be assumed that one culture is superior to the other. Therefore, the principle of objectivity is to be maintained in language teaching and be carefully used in a multilingual large class. The language teacher and learner should objectively discuss the cultural aspects of the second language and avoid subjectivity. The merits of any one cultural identity and its influence on other cultural identities should not be discussed in a language class. Last but not the least, L2 teachers need to maintain certain social and cultural pragmatic principles in a multilingual large class. For example, in English language, there are certain phrases, expression, words, gestures and items of language used in a way that pragmatically communicate the other meaning, peculiar and particular to their cultural identities.

3.3 Role of Language teachers in a Multilingual Class

Teacher plays a major role in the process of L2 teaching in a multilingual large class. Teaching is a complex and difficult job to impart the linguistic knowledge and cultural awareness to the learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, teachers are responsible for enhancing the language skills of the learners through applying certain teaching strategies. Teacher can motivate and cultivate students' interest in L2 multilingual large class. In order to stimulate the interest of students, the teacher should encourage communication and erase the hesitation and difficulties which the learners face. Learners shall get both language and cultural knowledge which ultimately communicative competence. Reasonable guidance and input given to the learners by teachers is another main aspect of successful language teaching in multilingual large class. According to (Krashen, 1985), learners achieve language teaching in multilingual large class gradually by receiving "comprehensible Input". Another main aspect in second language teaching is teachers' evaluation process of learner's performance. The learners' evaluation and feedback by teacher can notably affect learners' interest in teaching in multilingual large class. Teacher can encourage the learners for not making mistakes or correct their errors by encouraging them to avoid mistakes.

4. Conclusion

Second language teaching in a multilingual large class is an ever-growing area of interest in SLA field. Language, as a medium of communication is the carrier of cultural identities and is hardly separable from it. Languages are learnt to participate in the global world. English, a language of international communication is taught and acquired in different countries. There are cultural factors which language teachers and learners need to be aware of. Teachers inculcate linguistic knowledge embedded with cultural identities as well. Cultural communication exchanges are common practices in the globalized world today. Thus, language learners have to master the language knowledge and cultural awareness in order to achieve competence. There is a role of both the language teacher and learner to achieve the desired competence of second language by maintaining the cultural identity as well as cultural differences. Various major aspects and factors have been discussed above for achieving competence. Language teachers while teaching English as second language cultivate learners' cultural competence. This will surely make L2 teaching in a multilingual large class and competence achievable and successful.

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