TASKS FOR DEVELOPING CULTURAL AWARENESS IN L2 COMMUNITY

Madina Ibragimovna ISAMUKHAMEDOVA
Teacher
Tashkent State University of the Uzbek Language and Literature
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

ИККИНЧИ ТИЛНИ ЎРГАНИШ ЖАРАЁНИДА ТАЛАБАЛАРНИНГ МАДАНИЙ ОНГИНИ РИВОЖЛАНТИРИШГА ҚАРАТИЛГАН МАШҚЛАР

Мадина Ибрагимовна ИСАМУХАМЕДОВА
Ўқитувчи
Алишер Навоий номидаги Тошкент давлат ўзбек тили ва адабиёти университети,
Тошкент, Ўзбекистон

ЗАДАЧИ ДЛЯ РАЗВИТИЯ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ОСВЕДОМЛЕННОСТИ В СООБЩЕСТВЕ L2

Мадина Ибрагимовна ИСАМУХАМЕДОВА
Преподаватель
Ташкентский государственный университет узбекского языка и литературы имени Алишера Навои, Ташкент, Узбекистан madinaisa@navoiy-uni.uz

Abstract. The knowledge of English language has become an objective social need of nowadays, because for millions of people the English is a tool of their trade. Since English is the international means of exchange of information and experience, it is current need for businessmen, tradesmen, engineers, scientists and scholars all over the world.

It is widely recognised that any language conceals cultural heritage of the nation as a language is the only instrument that conveys traditions, customs, stories, written manuscripts that indeed make up cultural legacy and historical background of a nation.

In this article the researcher is going to analyze the importance of the term "cultural awareness" in EFL classrooms, as well as to work out, analyze and organize different tasks and activities which are directed to raise students' awareness of culture norms in target language community. This will help students not only in gaining intercultural communication skills, but their proficiency in comprehension, interpretation, translation and production of written and oral texts as well.

For the investigation the researcher selected thirty four students from two first year groups in the Tashkent State University of Uzbek language and literature.

Keywords: EFL — English as a foreign language; L2 — Second language; cultural awareness; communicative competence.

Аннотация. Ҳозирги кунда инглиз тилини мукаммал билиш ижтимоий эҳтиёжга айланди, чунки миллионлаб одамлар учун инглиз тили ўз ишининг ажралмас қисмидир. Инглиз

тили ахборот ва тажриба алмашиш учун халқаро восита бўлганлиги сабабли, уни билиш дунёдаги барча ишбилармонлар, савдогарлар, муҳандислар, олимлар учун зарурий эҳтиёждир. Ҳар қандай тил миллатнинг маданий меросини ўзида акс эттиради. Тил – бу анъана, урф-одатлар, воқеалар, миллатнинг маданий мероси ва тарихий асосини ташкил этувчи қўлёзмаларни етказадиган ягона восита эканлиги барчага маълум. Ушбу мақолада тадқиқотчи инглиз тилини ўрганишда "маданий хабардорлик" атамасининг аҳамиятини таҳлил қилиш билан бир қаторда, талабаларнинг маданий меъёрлар хақида хабардорлигини оширишга қаратилган турли хил вазифалар ва тадбирларни ишлаб чиқиш, таҳлил қилиш ва ташкил этишни режалаштирмоқда. Бу талабаларга нафақат маданиятлараро мулоқот кўникмаларини шакллантиришда, шунингдек, ёзма ва оғзаки матнларни тушуниш, изоҳлаш, таржима қилиш ва тузишда ҳам ёрдам беради.

Тадқиқот учун Тошкент давлат ўзбек тили ва адабиёти университетида таҳсил олаётган биринчи босқич талабаларининг икки гурухидан ўттиз тўрт нафар талаба танлаб олинди.

Калит сўзлар: EFL — инглиз тили чет тили сифатида; L2 — иккинчи тил; маданий онг; коммуникатив компетенция.

Аннотация. В настоящее время знание английского языка стало объективной социальной потребностью, потому что для миллионов людей английский является неотъемлемой частью их работы. Поскольку английский язык является международным средством обмена информацией и опытом, в настоящее время он необходим бизнесменам, работникам торговли, инженерам и ученым во всем мире.

Широко признано, что любой язык хранит в себе культурное наследие нации. Язык — единственный инструмент, который передает традиции, обычаи, историю, письменные рукописи, которые действительно составляют культурное наследие и исторический фон нации.

В этой статье была проанализирована важность термина «культурная осведомленность» в классах EFL, а также ставилась задача разработать, проанализировать и организовать различные задания, направленные на повышение осведомленности учащихся о культурных нормах сообщества целевого языка. Это поможет студентам не только приобрести навыки межкультурного общения, но и научиться понимать, интерпретировать, переводить и создавать письменные и устные тексты.

Для исследования было отобрано тридцать четыре студента из двух групп первого курса обучения в Ташкентском государственном университете узбекского языка и литературы.

Ключевые слова: EFL — английский как иностранный; L2 — второй язык; культурная осведомленность; коммуникативная компетентность.

Introduction. Nowadays, culture has taken an important place in foreign language teaching and learning and much has been written in this field in recent years. Among the outstanding scholars we can distinguish Byram (1997), Smith (1985), (Brown 1994), Kramsch (1993), Bygate (1987) and many others.

Indeed, cultural awareness gives people a variety of opportunities in communication, especially, widening their outlook and the most significant – to obtain the target language fully. It is much easier to possess any language by learning the culture of native speakers at the same time as the language and culture are interrelated and inseparable from each other.

It is widely believed that knowing a language demands not only grammar, lexis and phonology, but certain features and characteristics of the culture as well; which probably leads us to some cultural differences. These kinds of dissimilarities exist in every language and are expressed through the voice tone, an appropriate topic for conversation, place of silence, expressions, gestures and etc. In addition, Smith (3, 2) adds that the presentation of an argument in a way that sounds fluent and elegant in one culture may be regarded as clumsy and circular by members of another culture.

Coming out from the ideas above, it can be claimed that language is a part of culture and culture is a part of language. The two are complexly interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture (1, 165).

Every culture has its own standards for conversation and these standards are different from one culture to another; furthermore, some of the norms can be completely different and conflict with other cultures' norms. Thus, communicational misunderstandings may ascend among speakers who do not know or share the principles of other culture. To solve such problems in the target language in the EFL classrooms the learners need to learn the target culture within the syllabus.

Main part. While increasing cultural awareness in the EFL classroom it should be kept in mind that understanding a foreign culture should help students of another language to use words and expressions more skillfully and accurately; to understand levels of language; to act naturally with representatives of other culture, while recognizing and accepting their different reactions, and to help speakers of other tongues feel as if at home in the students' own culture.

According to Widdowson (4, 87), learners cannot be prepared in patterns of
cultural behavior because these are too unpredictable and cannot be imitated in the classroom. Nevertheless, he also suggests that the classroom context is a community with its own cultural reality, and that this offers a unique environment in which language and culture are not just learned but learned from. Tasks which are more demonstrative of the real world can then be included into the classroom as a methodology that will provide for communicative competence.

As Widdowson states, these tasks should then be systematically linked to the things learners need to do in the real world, incorporate what is known about the nature of successful communication, and embody what is known about second language acquisition.

On the other hand, Byram (2, 271) proposes that "learners need to see their role not as imitators of native speakers but as social actors engaging with other social actors in a particular kind of communication and interaction which is different from that between native speakers". Byram's model proposes that the ultimate goal of

language teaching should not be to become a native speaker but an intercultural speaker. In addressing the requirements for an intercultural speaker, Byram establishes a comprehensive model of intercultural communicative competence geared toward developing culture-specific as well as general knowledge and skills for learning about, becoming involved in, and successfully negotiating intercultural communicative interactions.

The reviewed literature related to teaching culture in EFL classrooms indicates that even though the important role of culture is widely recognized by majority scholars in teaching languages, in reality there are few materials and worked out tasks for raising learners' cultural awareness. In the context of our university, raising students' cultural awareness has a double purpose on the one hand, they are as non-native speakers of English should be culturally aware as part of their communicative competence. On the other hand, in a long run they are as future teachers of English should be capable of developing their learners' cultural competence. In the current curriculum cultural component is integrated into several courses such as Integrated Skills, Intercultural competence as well as Country study.

Two first year groups from The Tashkent State University of Uzbek language and literature were chosen for the experiment accomplishment. The experimental group (107a) group consists of 17 students in total and there 17 students in control group (108a). The learners' age does not considerably vary from each other as they all are between 19 and 23. In addition, majority of the representatives of these groups are female students. The level of the students does not differ so much as almost all of them are expected to possess B2 level. The groups are multinational: Tadjik, Uygur and Uzbeks.

To develop tasks for students the researcher made use of various sources such as internet, course books, films etc. The variety of activities were selected and organized in terms of diagrams, charts, film watching, group discussion, pre and post questionnaires for the experiment participants.

Initially, the researcher conducted needs analysis in order to find out students' present needs in terms of what they know about US and UK culture. The initial needs analysis questionnaire was used as a research tool on this stage. The form consists of six questions which are directed to find out students mail needs and their present knowledge of American and UK culture. The survey would be highly productive for further preparation of tasks for students.

Then, the learners were given pre-test form consisting of twenty-two questions. Through this pre-test the researcher was able to assess experiment participants' background knowledge, and to compare the results at the end of the experiment.

As a second step, tasks for revealing students' stereotypes on American and British men and women and their relationship were worked out and tried out. These tasks included brainstorming on this issue and filling the table on students' vision. Identifying students' stereotypes is needed to determine how well they know about the culture of these two countries and how genuine is this knowledge.

After that, an independent study tasks were given to learners for further exploring the stereotypes among other respondents. The tasks are applied to experimental group (107a) only. Students were to conduct several interviews among men and women in order to identify

others' opinion on this subject. The main reason for giving this task is to make students compare their beliefs about Americans and Brits with the other people's opinion.

The forth step included tasks for debriefing learners' stereotypes based on historical American film "Gone with the wind". Having watched the film, students determined for themselves which of their beliefs about Americans confirmed and which contradicted. Students were also involved in such tasks as brainstorming, group discussion and filling in the table. Moreover, to let students compare and contrast how American culture changed over time the learners were also given the tasks for combating their preconceptions based on a modern American film "Raising Helen".

On the final step at the purpose of fixing the gained knowledge and checking the initial result with the last, the post-questionnaire was conducted by the researcher.

Throughout the stages tasks for comparing and contrasting the target culture with the own culture were also employed. This would lead the student to better understanding of the topic.

The results of the experiment. As it was mentioned above, the current needs of the students in terms of cultural learning were identified with the help of Needs analysis questionnaire. The following table describes the results of Needs analysis questionnaire which was prepared for the experimental group.

Result Distribution on Needs Analysis Survey

Question	Most popular answer	Number of subject or ticks (out of 35)
1. Have you ever travelled to any English speaking country?	No	29
	Yes	1
2. Where do you find information about English speaking countries?	TV	21
	Internet	28
	Films	19
	Course books	13
3. What type of information do you usually search or are interested in about English speaking countries?	Culture, moral values, lifestyle, educational system	23
	History, Cuisine, habits, traditions, history	12
4. Do you think there are differences between the cultures of the US and the UK?	Differences in culture, people's character, appearance, traditions, eating habits, greeting, superstitions, language differences.	27
5. What films and/or fiction books do you think depict US and UK culture?	"Never back down", "Titanic", "Sherlock Holmes", "Gone with the wind"	20
6. Do you think the cultures of the US and UK have changed over time?	I have no idea about this	28

The table shows that all students except one have not experienced the real life in UK or US. Moreover, they mostly take the information about these two cultures from the internet which is not believed as a reliable source. The responds that students gave were too general; they were expected to answer in details or at least to provide some

examples. Besides, majority of the learners knew nothing about changes in the culture of UK and US over time. According to the research participants responds to the third question, they were mostly interested in customs and traditions, lifestyle, habits, hobbies and etc. This information was effectively used while preparing the materials for the further research process.

Then, the researcher was to identify what is culture and cultural awareness in students' understanding. While answering the question "What is culture?" and "What is cultural awareness?" the learners mostly respond in the same way. Here are some examples of their opinion on this issue:

"Culture is history, traditions, customs, national clothes, food, language of one country"

"Cultural awareness – to be aware of another nations' culture and to have some information, knowledge and ideas about that country in order to avoid misunderstandings."

"Culture is the face of one nation, its traditional food, clothes, habits. It is the way of behaving, acting, speaking, living which comes from the history to the present."

"Cultural awareness is to know about one's culture and other cultures in order to avoid cultural shock."

"Culture is traditional habits that were inherited by ancestors to their generation."

"Cultural awareness – to have enough knowledge about one culture"

"Culture is country's face, its history, present or future. Culture is everything: what they eat, what they wear and how they live."

"Culture is an appearance of a nation."

"Cultural awareness – to be aware of other nations' lifestyle"

"Cultural awareness – knowing the cultures of every country of the world"

It is clearly seen from the responses that the students have their own exact opinion on what culture and cultural awareness is.

According to the next step, while identifying students' stereotypes on American and British culture, the meaning of the word "stereotype" was defined first among the learners.

Here are some of their answers:

"Stereotype – imagination about one country's nation or about people"

"Stereotype is a false or true opinion about one culture, nation or a group of people"

"Stereotype – an oversimplified idea about group of people"

"Stereotype is the first idea which comes to one's mind about something. It may be true or not, believable or not."

Almost the whole class presented the proper definition for the word "stereotype". They also claimed that stereotypes cannot be always true. The researcher used this very fact to impact some of the learners' false beliefs on American and British culture.

The results of ethnographic research – interview held by the research participants (Group 107a)

Questions	The Most popular answers
How do you imagine British men are like?	Punctual, responsible, gentle, intelligent, handsome, pale skinned, blue-eyed, well-built, smart, family-oriented, polite, tolerant, modest.
How do you imagine American men are like?	Outgoing, dark-skinned, rude, aggressive, active, overweight, self-confident, independent, handsome, quick-tempered, critical.
How do you imagine British women are like?	Caring, romantic, kind, punctual, blond, slim, intelligent, tall, pretty, hospitable, good cookers.
How do you imagine American women are like?	Rude, passionate, gossipers, self-confident, workaholic, selfish, outgoing, easy-going, beautiful, irresponsible, big-eyed, dark-haired, modern.
How do you think relationships between British men and women are like?	Loyal, respect each other, open-minded, helping hand, family-oriented, jealous to each other, equal rights in family, prefer to have less children, trust each other, similar hobbies in family, solve problems together.
How do you think relationships between American men and women are like?	Cannot come to any decision together, open, passionate, they have equal rights, self-esteem, selfish, too close to each other, the divorce rate is high, no children, and unstable relationship, changeable, go to compromises.

The form indicates that the interviewees have more critical comments about American people and a couple of negative beliefs about Brits. It can be explained by the lack of information about these two cultures or the existence of some wrong stereotypes. During the research the students were given a chance to compare their and their respondents' beliefs on these two nations and mark how they confirmed or contradicted.

In order to check the current knowledge on American and British culture, the pre-test was applied to the experimental (107a) and the control (108a) groups.

There were no significant discrepancy between the marks of experimental (group A) and control group (group B) with regard to pre-test results. It means that both groups were almost at the same the cultural knowledge on the target cultures.

The table below indicates the result of both groups on the pre-test:

The comparison of pre-test results in Groups A and B
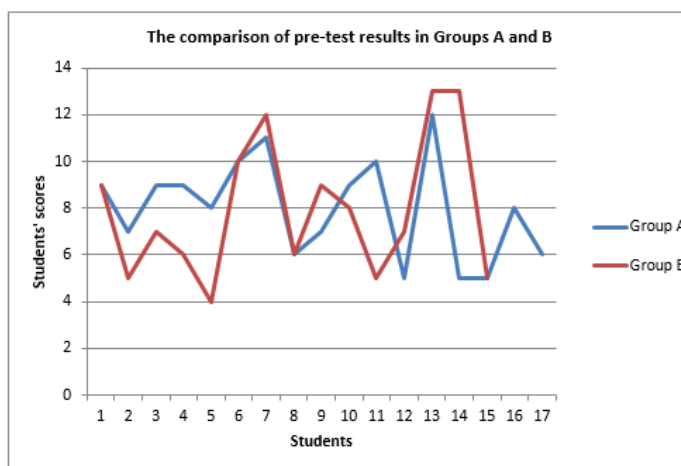
However, the post-test result shows that the experimental group to which the tasks for raising cultural awareness were applied, performed better than the control group which was taught in traditional way:

The Difference between the results of post-test in Groups A and B
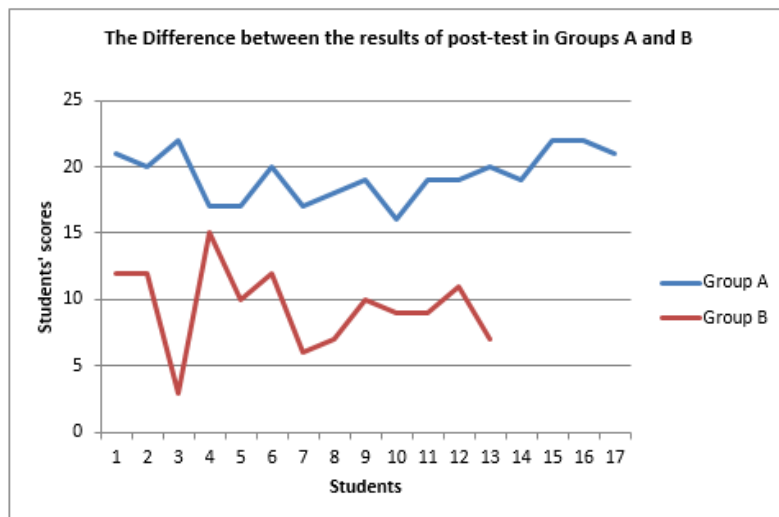
Conclusion. It was revealed by the researcher that the students are aware of the importance of knowing and understanding other cultures for effective communication. Students state that they get information on British and American cultures through internet, TV, course books and films, however very few mentioned which films depict American and/or UK culture and none have named any relevant fiction books, which probably shows that students are not able to retrieve cultural information from seen films and read fiction. Learners define culture mostly as a sum of traditions, history, customs, clothes, cuisine, etc. not going deeper, i.e. values, attitudes, beliefs. However, students stated that they have no idea of whether the cultures of the US and UK have changed over time.

Thus students need to be trained to learn and reflect on the seen films and/or fiction to raise their cultural awareness, including by comparing and contrasting films depicting different historical period of time.

Furthermore, it was revealed through the experiment that most students idealise British men (punctual, responsible, well-built, polite) and romantise British women (romantic, caring, slim, pretty etc.). In comparison, majority of learners seem to have prevailingly negative stereotypes about American men (aggressive, overweight, rude) and women (rude, selfish, irresponsible etc.).

Thus, interestingly most students have idealistic preconceived views on British men and women, while stating mostly negative gendered stereotypes that of the American.

In the process of these experiment, we have developed and applied various tasks for developing learners' cultural awareness which are: questionnaires and quizzes, table completions, Venn diagrammes, ethnographic research tasks, pre- (brainstorming, oral discussion), while (taking notes, comparing with the previous assumptions) and post tasks (oral discussions, written reflective essays) based on films.

The applied tasks helped to improve the students' cultural awareness as they have developed better understanding of the American culture in the past and present and could relate them to their own culture. The quantitative comparison of the results show that the students in the experimental group have outperformed the students in the control group to about 50%, which proves the effectiveness of the applied methodology.

The first and the important verdict of the researcher was that in these research theories of many scholars on the effect of cultural awareness on language learning and teaching process have found their approval in certain content. As the research result shows, the students' intercultural knowledge has risen.

Still, there are some changes that took place in the investigation. Initially, the tasks were directed to develop the learners' awareness about two cultures: American and English; however, due to time constraints and the fact that the American men and women seemed to arouse learners' negative attitudes we decided to focus on the American culture during the research.

Furthermore, this experiment has completely changed the researchers' point of view in teaching process. Now, she strongly agrees with all those statements of a scholar who have claimed that even being partly informed about the culture of target language raises the learners' better understanding of that language, develops their communicative skills, widens their outlook and has so many advantages except those that has been mentioned earlier.

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