Investigating Instructors' and Students' Attitudes towards the Effectiveness of Having Target Cultural Knowledge on Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Having positive attitudes towards the target culture can affect the teaching/learning process. Considering the importance of having the target cultural knowledge on learning English, the current study inspected the Peruvian instructors' and students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of having target cultural knowledge on English language learning. To achieve this end, 90 Peruvian teachers and 90 learners were chosen, and then they were given two researcher-made questionnaires to check their attitudes towards having target cultural knowledge. The researchers administered two questionnaires to measure the attitudes of the Peruvian teachers and students towards the effects of having the target cultural knowledge on learning English. The results of one- sample t-test indicated that both Peruvian teachers and students held favorable attitudes towards having target cultural knowledge for learning English language. The findings of the research can persuade teachers to use culturally-based materials in their teaching process.

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1. Introduction

Language and culture are interconnected; in fact, culture and language learning/teaching are not segregated. Therefore, while teaching, a target language culture must be instructed. Learning a language is not only learning all skills (e.g., speaking, writing, reading, and listening) and sub-skills (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc.), but also is learning the cultural issues of that language. As Hesar and Zarfsaz (2012) state, the complete understanding of a language needs the understanding of both language issues and cultural issues. Therefore, it is very important for English learners to improve their English cultural awareness to get fluent English learners.

Brooks (1975) mentions that culture is the central part of a society since it links individuals through identity and forms the way they live, treat, speak, and interact. Language cannot be segregated from the culture of the people who utilize it since through culture we can figure out why some people speak and interact in a specific way, and under particular circumstances which would not mean the same for other people or would signify nothing at all. Equally, the language applied by a community is by far the best language to describe the culture of this community. The close correlation between culture and language is summarized by Brown (2007), who states that language and culture are complementary of each other; the two mentioned concepts are so closely related that we cannot separate them from each other. Language and culture have a communicative role since both carry meanings. On the one hand, language transfers syntax, semantics, and pragmatics for communicators and speakers (Brooks, 1997). Culture, on the other hand, is the bearer of cultural meanings that are manifested by behavioral models. For successful communication between languages and cultures, one ought to figure out the cultural differences and humans' ethics and ideas (Bagherzadeh & Tajeddin, 2021; Saville-Troike, 2003).

Byram and Flemming (1988) argue that language and culture are dependent on each other. So, if one will acquire a language, s/he needs to acquire the culture of that language to communicate and understand the common experiences, social treatments, emotions, customs, and religious issues of the speakers of that language.

Familiarity with the target culture can help EFL/ESL learners to develop their English learning since "culture is the core of language" (Dabou, Hammoudi, & Chibani, 2021, p. 253). Genc and Bada (2005) assert that integrating training culture into language teaching bears a significant and provoking impact on language learners and language instruction. Similarly, Chastain (1988) holds that culture instruction bears a crucial part in language learning in EFL contexts. It is obvious that culture and language teaching are inseparable, and learners need social and cultural awareness during international communications.

Regarding the interconnection between culture and language instruction, this research intended to scrutinize the attitudes of both Peruvian instructors and students towards the effectiveness of having target cultural knowledge on English language learning. Dornyei (2005) says that attitude constitutes a vital agent of a language learning society. Based on Brown (2007), EFL learners can present both favorable and unfavorable attitudes towards the target culture and language. Negative attitudes can reduce motivation; on the other hand, positive attitudes can increase the motivation of EFL learners, and this can develop language learning. Therefore, it is needed to inspect the opinions of Peruvian instructors and students about the impacts of the target cultural knowledge on learning the English language.

2. Theoretical Framework

Culture is the core of the language, and it correlates with attitude. In this respect, Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby (2003) defined culture in terms of negative or positive attitudes. In other words, culture can be defined as the way people respond, whether positively or natively, to the values and behaviors of a community. Cultures of all societies are different from each other. Communities in diverse places of the globe possess diverse cultural customs, beliefs, and emotions and utilize various dialects and languages. Although culture and language appear different, they have a strong link and influence each other reciprocally. Gleason (1961) stated that the development of a language regularly

influences cultural familiarity, and cultural familiarity aids us in learning a language.

Language is a part of the culture and formed by culture; it is also the carrier of culture and reflects cultural issues of a society in which the language is used. Culture and language are strongly pertinent to each other. Instructing another language is instructing another culture; acquiring another language is also acquiring another culture (Yang, 2014). Teaching a language is beyond enhancing learners' linguistic skills and subskills; in addition, it includes conveying cultural knowledge about the community where the language is used.

Culture must be integrated basically and fundamentally as a key element in learning and teaching a language. When cultural affairs get involved in language teaching, pupils can achieve success in their language learning (AbdAlgane Mohammed, 2020). Therefore, EFL/ESL teachers must care about the diversities of cultures, recognize important cultural materials when they make a language syllabus, and use suitable instructional techniques to aid pupils to grasp the cultural differences (AbdAlgane Mohammed, 2020).

Cultural issues encompass the customs, behaviors, and manners of individuals who live in a specific community where the language is used (Aldawood & Almeshari, 2019; R'boul, 2021). Culture plays a crucial role in the language and the way it is utilized by its users. So, it is very vital for pupils to comprehend the target culture so as to understand the foreign language (Zhan, 2016). It has been discovered that instructors ought to motivate their pupils to connect their language with the authentic contexts in order to apply the target language sufficiently. Target cultural knowledge can aid EFL students to learn that foreign language more easily. Cortazzi and Jin recommended (1999) a classification of culture sources. The first is source culture, which is the culture of the learners themselves. Based on this source, EFL students can broadly comprehend their own culture (identities, values, etc.), and communicate with all humans around the globe on vocabulary-dependent topics. The second is the target culture which its integration provides EFL learners with the possibility to booster their motivation towards the target language. Alptekin (2002) stated that because it is hard for native English-speaking EFL textbooks authors

to gain information from another culture than their own, then they need to depend on the target culture. The third kind is international target culture which is integrated into EFL materials to supply a chance for non-native English speakers to select the cultural standards and practices they want to show, other than the inner circle Englishes or to skip at least the American and British variants (Liu & Laohawiriyanon, 2013). Nevertheless, as Andarab (2012) asserted, it must be made perfectly clear that the current issue is not whether to include culture in the English teaching or not, but particularly which culture should be paid attention to and how to perform it.

Thu (2010) emphasized that the question of whether culture should be instructed is ineffective. Andarab (2012) is highly critical of the way the target culture is incorporated into the textbooks. She believed that considering the inseparability of the English language and its culture, three hypotheses are assumed: First, native speakers represent not only English but also the owners of English. Second, in places where English is the mother tongue, English is the cultural center, and mostly where the dominant culture is English, it does not necessarily mean that these cultures are not different. Third, the fear that some students may get victims of alienation if they do not want to be culturally assimilated is a point in case. Jabeen and Shah (2011) supported the idea of eliminating the target culture teaching in EFL environments when analyzing Pakistani students' attitudes towards the target culture and discovered that most of their responses were negative.

The theory behind cultural awareness is the cultural schema which is recommended as an appropriate concept for connecting culture to cognitive concepts (DiMaggio 1997), and it is increasingly used in the experimental investigations stressing cultural-cognitive interactions (Baumann & de Laat, 2012; Baumann & Ho, 2014; Cerulo & Ruane, 2014; Vaisey, 2009). This concept is intrinsically strong because it is semantically and structurally similar to cognitive schemas, which are fundamental concepts in cognitive science. This similarity deepens our understanding of real-world cultures, allowing immediate access to insights to increase our comprehension of culture in action.

Regarding the attitudes of teachers and students towards the effects of the target cultural knowledge on learning English, some empirical studies were carried out. For example, Aydemir and Mede (2014), Belli (2018), Dabou et al. (2021), Gorjian and Aghvami (2017), Oanh and Minh (2018), Rafieyan, Eng, and Mohamed (2013), Yang and Chen (2016), and Yılmaz and Ozkan (2016) revealed that the participants in their studies presented positive attitudes towards the effects of the target cultural knowledge on learning English. As for one, Gorjian and Aghvami (2017) inspected the teachers' and learners' attitudes toward the importance of the English culture in reading comprehension classes. Therefore, this investigation intended to compare the teachers' and learners' perceptions about the significance of teaching culture and their outlooks on reading materials. The findings indicated that there was not a significant difference in the teachers' and the learners' perception of the use of culture and English native materials in the classroom. The findings also showed that the learners in the reading class in which the English native textbook was used outflanked the class with the non-native reading textbook.

In another research, Belli (2018) explored the attitudes of Turkish university students at the English Language Teaching (ELT) Department towards culture and its incorporation into language teaching and their cultural awareness and to reveal if birthplace, gender, experience abroad, and high school graduation had any effect on their attitudes. The findings yielded positive attitudes of significant numbers of ELT students towards culture and its integration in language teaching regardless of their birthplace, the type of high school, and the experience abroad. As for gender, female learners held more positive attitudes towards culture than males. Additionally, respondents were found to learn culture mainly to enhance their cultural awareness and maintain better communication with people from various cultures. In the light of results, necessary implications were provided for teachers and teacher educators regarding raising cultural awareness of students and developing positive attitudes towards the integration of target culture into language instruction. Recently, Oanh and Minh (2018) examined students' attitudes towards the incorporation of teaching cross-cultural issues and teaching the listening skill. The results indicated that students found the cross-cultural issues beneficial in aiding them to comprehend the lessons better and form healthy cross-cultural awareness. They also enjoyed learning the cultural differences to improve their cross-cultural knowledge and got the helpful experience to widen their world.

Quite recently, Dabou et al. (2021) investigated the teachers' and students' attitudes towards the incorporation of the English culture in the EFL curriculum at the University of Sétif 2. The analysis of the data indicated that all the teachers were for the integration of the target culture in the EFL classes. The research also demonstrated that students who had positive attitudes towards the target culture represented only 28% of the sample. Therefore, the researchers offered that the concept of target culture be properly defined within the EFL class and appropriately approached to sustain interest. In addition, teachers were encouraged to incorporate particular aspects of the target culture, such as language, norms, and values, to avoid misunderstanding and respect each other's cultural rights.

After reviewing the literature, the researchers could not find any investigation pertaining to the attitudes of Peruvian teachers and students towards the effects of English cultural knowledge on English learning improvement; therefore, this study posed the following question to cover this gap:

RQ. What are the Peruvian teachers' and students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of having the target cultural background on English learning improvement?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

For doing the current study, 180 participants were selected; 90 teachers and 90 students. They were selected from the academic department of education, National University of San Marcos. The researchers selected intermediate students according to the results of the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). The age range of the students and the teachers was between 17 and 25 and 34 and 49 years old, respectively. Both genders were included in this study.

3.2. Instruments

The OQPT was applied in the current study to help the researchers select the same level of participants. Based on the findings of the OQPT, the pupils whose scores were between one standard deviation (SD) above and below the mean were selected as intermediate and were considered as the respondents of this investigation.

The other means for gathering the needed data was a questionnaire containing a variety of statements to assess teachers' attitudes towards the influences of the target cultural knowledge on their students' English improvement. The questionnaire was made by the researchers of the current study and included 15 Likert-type items. The Likert scale was applied in the mentioned tool to reveal the degree of disagreement and agreement from 1-5, which were: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The reliability of this questionnaire was computed by using Cronbach's alpha ($r = .80$).

The last tool applied in the present investigation was a questionnaire that was given to 90 students to investigate their attitudes towards the impacts of having English cultural knowledge on their English improvement. The same as the previous questionnaire, this questionnaire was designed by the researchers themselves and had 15 Likert-type items. The

Likert scale was applied in the mentioned instrument to show the degree of disagreement and agreement from 1 to 5. The reliability of this questionnaire was measured by using Cronbach's alpha ($r = .82$). The validity of both questionnaires was verified by several English instructors.

3.3. Procedures

To do this research, first, the researchers gave the OQPT so as to determine the subjects' homogeneity in terms of English language proficiency. Ninety intermediate students and 90 English teachers were selected for the final subjects of the current research. Then, the subjects were given the mentioned questionnaires to determine the effectiveness of having the target cultural knowledge on the students' English achievement. Finally, the data were analyzed using SPSS software. After completing the process of data collection, the data received an exact analysis through applying SPSS software. Finally, one-sample t-tests were applied to analyze the data collected by administering the mentioned questionnaires.

4. Results

After gathering the data through the mentioned attitude questionnaires, the researchers analyzed them to get the final results. The details of the results are depicted in the following tables:

Table 1
One-Sample Test of the Students' Questionnaire

		Test Value = 0			
T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
56.05	14	.00	4.23	4.07	4.39

Based on Table 1, the amount of statistic t-value is 56.05, *df* = 14, and the significance level is 0.00, which is less than 0.05. This means that the Peruvian learners had favorable opinions about the effectiveness of having the target cultural knowledge on their English improvement.

Table 2
One-Sample Test of the Teachers' Questionnaire

		Test Value = 0			
T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
58.58	14	.00	4.29	4.13	4.45

As seen in Table 2, the amount of statistic t-value is 58.58, *df* = 14, and the significance level is 0.00. Therefore, we can say that the Peruvian teachers held positive attitudes towards the effectiveness of the target cultural knowledge on their students' English achievement.

5. Discussion

After analyzing the data, the outcomes showed that both groups (the teachers and the students) held positive attitudes towards the positive impacts of having English cultural knowledge on English achievement. Based on the students' attitudes, familiarity with English culture can help them improve their English learning.

Learning similarities exist between the two languages (Peruvian and English) may be one reason why Peruvian students presented positive attitudes towards learning English culture. Therefore, students should be motivated to learn the similarities between their culture and the target culture to gain a common comprehension. The other reason that makes the students show a tendency towards learning the target culture may be the cultural challenges that they face while learning English. Through examining and solving the challenges, students can be involved more in the English language and culture; consequently, this involvement results in better learning. The other justification for presenting favorable attitudes towards learning English culture can be referred to its attraction; learning a new culture is absolutely interesting and attractive for the students. So, language and culture should be taught simultaneously as Namaziandost et al. (2020) held that culture and language must be learned together to attain accurate linguistic understanding.

Similar to the students, Peruvian teachers embraced the idea of having English cultural knowledge. The reason for the positive attitudes of the teachers may stem from the fact that they know language and culture are inseparable, and teaching language without integrating culture cannot be accurate and complete. The outcomes of this research agree with those of Wang (2014), who indicated that university teachers and students in Australia had positive attitudes toward teaching target culture. Besides, this research is advocated by Oanh and Minh (2018) who checked the students' attitudes towards the

incorporations of teaching cross-cultural topics and teaching the listening skill. The outcomes displayed that the students found the cross-cultural issues effective in helping them understand the lessons better and form healthy cross-cultural awareness.

The findings of this study are supported by Saricoban and Caliskan (2011), who discovered that the participants of their study had positive attitudes towards learning the cultural elements of the target language society. In addition, this study is compatible with Rafieyan et al. (2013), who inspected the attitude of Iranian language learners towards the integrations of cultural issues of the target language community into their classroom instruction. The outcomes showed that the participants had favorable ideas about learning the target language culture.

On the other hand, the findings of this investigation are opposite with Jabeen and Shah (2011), who analyzed the attitude of Pakistani learners towards target culture teaching and indicated that the respondents had high negative attitudes towards incorporating cultural materials into language teaching. On the other hand, the results of this research do not agree with the findings of Dabou et al. (2021),s who discovered that only 28% of the students in their research had positive attitudes towards teaching the target culture.

Having cultural knowledge is a must for the students, as Hayati (2009) stated that cultural knowledge of students is the basis for learning a language. He kept on that a language is only professionally learned when students obtain enough cultural knowledge of the target language. Supporters of the background knowledge believe that activating background knowledge and linking new information to the old information can lead to enhanced comprehension. If students do not have relevant knowledge about different topics in their mind, they will not comprehend the novel passages well (Bilokcuoglu, 2014).

The results of this study have educational implications for teachers, learners, and material designers. Based on this research, it can be offered that teachers activate students' cultural schemata before writing, reading, listening, and speaking activities. If a subject has cultural differences, teachers need to provide basic cultural knowledge to students. Having basic

knowledge is fundamental to successful speaking and writing. Thus, language learners can improve their speaking and writing skills by increasing exposure to target cultural materials. By getting more exposure to specific culturally oriented materials, language learners can enhance their English learning.

The findings of this study may encourage teachers to put cultural warm-up tasks that are pertinent to passages and also make the passages familiar and easy before teaching them. It is imperative that while giving the cultural background knowledge, instructors must learn adequate before instructing, and they ought to know politics, economics, history, art, religion, literature, and other aspects of social life (Aldawood & Almeshari, 2019). The results of this study can also make the Ministry of Education recognize the significance of cultural materials. The findings of this research can encourage material designers to incorporate more English culturally-based materials into the Peruvian syllabus.

Even though we did our best to carry out this research perfectly, drawbacks or limitations are investable in all studies. One drawback of this research refers to the small population of this research which included only 180 Peruvian learners and teachers; therefore, we should take care in generalizing the results to other populations in other contexts. Thus, next studies are offered to include more participants to boost their results' generalizability. Only quantitative data were collected to answer the research question; hence, next studies are suggested to utilize both qualitative and quantitative data to increase the validity of the findings. The participants of this research were from the EFL context; future studies are suggested to do such research in ESL contexts.

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