

CULTURAL AWARENESS THROUGH TASK BASED LEARNING USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

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Abstract

The document examines the literature review found in the research project “cultural awareness through task-based learning using authentic materials” conducted by Luis Martinez and Sally Pedraza as an investigation thesis for the master program in bilingual education and applied linguistics at Fundación Universitaria Juan N. Corpas in Bogota Colombia. This review shows the relation among the studies, as well as the relevant findings, possible gaps, and conclusions of each study. The research project already mentioned, is an analysis of how future English teachers can benefit of the inclusion of culture while they are in formation. In order to support the objective of the project, several studies were examined in different levels. Therefore, the following pages show the different studies in a local, national, and an international level. On the other hand, the main objective of the present review is to show and examine the studies that build up the state of the art section of the project mentioned earlier. Additionally, the findings of this analysis, show that as a matter of fact, there have been several studies connected to the use of authentic materials within the English teaching field, as well as studies questioning the role of cultural awareness along the process of learning and teaching English as a second language. The most relevant discovery is that this the research project “cultural awareness through task based learning using authentic materials” is feasible and would provide an interesting approach on the teaching ESL role.

Keywords: cultural awareness, task-based learning, language instruction, English as a second language (ESL), authentic materials.

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CONCIENCIA CULTURAL A TRAVÉS DEL APRENDIZAJE BASADO EN TAREAS UTILIZANDO MATERIALES AUTÉNTICOS

Resumen

Este documento examina la revisión literaria que se encuentra en el proyecto de investigación que lleva por nombre “Cultural awareness through task-based learning using authentic materials”, realizado por Luis Martínez y Sally Pedraza como tesis de investigación para la maestría en educación bilingüe y lingüística aplicada de la Fundación Universitaria Juan N. Corpas en Bogotá Colombia. El documento muestra la relación entre los diferentes estudios, además de los resultados más relevantes, posibles vacíos y conclusiones de cada estudio. El proyecto de investigación anteriormente mencionado es un análisis de como los futuros profesores de inglés pueden beneficiarse de la inclusión de la cultura mientras aún se encuentran en formación. De manera que, en las siguientes paginas se presentan los estudios en un nivel local, nacional, e internacional. Por su parte, el objetivo principal de la presente revisión es mostrar y examinar los estudios que conforman el apartado de estado del arte del proyecto mencionado anteriormente. Además, los hallazgos de este análisis muestran que, de hecho, ha habido varios estudios relacionados con el uso de materiales auténticos dentro del campo de la enseñanza del inglés, así como estudios que cuestionan el papel de la conciencia cultural a lo largo del proceso de aprendizaje y enseñanza del inglés como segunda lengua. El descubrimiento más relevante es que este proyecto de investigación “Conciencia cultural a través del aprendizaje basado en tareas utilizando materiales auténticos” es factible y proporcionaría un enfoque interesante sobre el papel de la enseñanza de ESL.

Palabras clave: conciencia cultural, aprendizaje basado en tareas, enseñanza de inglés, inglés como segundo idioma (ESL), material auténtico.

Introduction

The research project aims to strengthen English learning process through the use of authentic materials with English teachers in training. It was conducted using Task- Based-Learning (TBL) approach in order to provide them with different cultural input through the development of tasks. According to Wahyu (2019) TBL “can help students place themselves in situations such as in the real world” (p. 21), that means that through the implementation of this approach, students will have the possibility to express themselves in the target language experienced real-life situations. Also, Nunan (2004) said while students are being exposed TBL approach, “their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning” (p. 2), in that way they are more engaged in what they want to say than in the use of grammar itself.

On the other hand, culture and the way people use to interchange their ideas through communication, it is a relevant aspect to be considered along the development of the project. It is a fact that every individual makes part of a specific place in the world and every place whether called country, city, or region has its own characteristics and they are related to cultural aspects which are proper from this place. Therefore, according to Bryam, M (as cited in Cardenas, 2018) this is called intercultural competence and it is an ability that helps individuals understand their own and others’ beliefs, conceptions and behaviors, in order to live in harmony, but also to challenge and change themselves; making of it a possibility to learn from and improve the social conditions they live in to create an impact on society. Hence, intercultural competence builds up the ability of individuals to learn and interact with their reality. On the other hand, Wang (2018) states that “It’s of great significance to enhance students’ cultural awareness so as to cultiva-

te and improve their linguistic competence”, in this way as they become more conscious about the cultural diversity that surrounds them, they will be more willing to interpret certain cultural meanings from each region they are exposed in class.

Finally, it is important to mention the relevance that authentic materials have in this project, since they will be the main resources to use through the development of the different activities designed to carry out the class. Thus, Nunan (1989) defined authentic materials as “the materials which have been produced for purposes other than to teach language” (p. 23). That means that as other kinds of resources aimed to teach English, these ones do not have that purpose; they are not design with pedagogical purposes and also for certain kind of audience in their target language and based on daily life.

However, the use of authentic materials can represent a little disadvantage if they are not used in a proper way; Richards (2006) stated that “authentic materials often contain difficult language, unneeded vocabulary items, and complex language structures, which can often create problems” (p. 20). In this way it is crucial to be aware about the kind of authentic material to be used in class. It also needs to be selected taking into account some aspects such as, students’ interest and English level, among others.

Methodology

The information to be examined, will be gathered taking as a based the collection of studies that were used to support the research project previously mentioned. Each study was analyzed in a deep way. The relevant aspects appreciated in every study are the cultural content, and the use of authentic materials. Those

aspects are relevant since the research project upon this document is built on has as main pillars those two factors.

Moreover, the studies to be examined are research projects also conducted by professors and scholars that have been working on teaching development, therefore, the studies are found within the educational field.

The purpose of the deep analysis is to identify the most relevant findings, as well as possible gaps, and conclusions of each study. Nonetheless, it is of pivotal importance to mention the relation each study has with the research project “cultural awareness through task based learning using authentic materials”. Every single work provided essential information for its proper support and development.

Among the local studies there were found two researches; the first one is called Materials to Develop Intercultural Communicative Competence in an EFL Context, written by Cárdenas (2018) and the second is Improving Reading Comprehension in ninth graders through pre, while and post reading strategies using authentic materials published on Facebook by Becerra & Rodríguez (2016).

The first research project referred to the materials to develop intercultural communicative competence in an EFL context. This study aimed to promote the intercultural communicative competence through the implementation and adaptation of materials for cultural awareness with eleventh graders at a public school. The research method used was action research and the instruments were worksheets with cultural content: a survey, artifacts, and teacher’s journal. Within the conclusions, they found that the inclusion of cultural topics with a variety of activities made students feel comfortable with the use of those materials causing an innovation inside the classroom.

Along the analysis of the second study, it is found that the main objective was to improve reading comprehension of ninth graders, using technology, authentic materials, and the social network Facebook, the name of the study is “Reading Comprehension in ninth graders through reading strategies using authentic material on Facebook”. Researchers used action research to develop the project. After implementing their strategies that consisted on posting English teaching content on the Facebook profile of the students, and analyze the result through evaluation. It was found that authentic materials published on the social network Facebook, were useful to raise students’ interest upon reading. Moreover, since learners were exposed to a greater amount of foreign language, they were able to use their phones to support their comprehension process. That is to say that inclusion of the technology in the study was a useful technique.

Taking into account what was previously mentioned, it is possible to evidence the relation of these two studies with the main research project. Both studies work with materials to teach. Moreover, the second study provides a general glance on how to work with authentic materials. The first study provides information on the intercultural competence among the students. However, it is important to mention that some gaps were evidenced in the studies. Neither of the studies showed the curriculum proposed by the teacher. In the second study, the authors decided to work with a social network such as Facebook, and this according to current school policies this is not appropriate. Moreover, when working with technology, it might be wrong to assume that all the learners have the possibility to access technology.

On the other hand, there were collected some national studies; the first one is called Board-games to foster Colombian cultural awareness inside the EFL classroom, written by Martínez

Méndez and Gamboa (2017). The other one is the Impact of Authentic Material and Tasks on Students' communicative competence at a Colombian Language School by Castillo and Osorio (2016).

The first research project analyses the inclusion of Colombian Culture inside the EFL classroom. The researcher states that the material used to learn English by the participants of the project is based on culture of foreign countries. One relevant aspect of the study along its development is the didactic way used to implement the Colombian culture. Taking into account the best way for students to learn, it was decided to adapt a series of board games so that students could play and at the same time learn English having as context their own culture. The study was conducted under action research with students of eight grade at Pio XII high school in Guatavita, Colombia. This study provided an insight on how to use authentic materials to teach English, and it also showed that when students are aware of their own culture, the learning process become meaningful and knowledge is easier to be acquired.

The objective of the second study was to analyze the impact of the use of authentic materials and tasks on the students' communicative competence in an A2 level English course in a Colombian public university. The research method used was a mixed study composed of a quasi-experimental research design and descriptive- qualitative through pre and post-test, observations, semi-structured interviews, surveys and diaries. It was found that the implementation of authentic materials and authentic tasks, in the context of a pedagogical project, influenced the improvement of the communicative competence of students and the pedagogical practice of the teacher in charge of the experimental group.

The analysis done to the previous studies, provide information on how to work with culture within an educational environment. Furthermore, one of the studies also provides an overview on how to include authentic materials to work on the communicative competence of the learners. Nonetheless, it is relevant to mention the possible gaps that were found in the studies. For instance, when working with the communicative competence of the students, it is important to take into account the level of proficiency of the language. That is to say, that according to the finding, A2 level is not enough to make students reach the expected performance. On the other hand, when working with culture, it is not advisable to isolate the culture of the target language. Kramsch (1993) emphasizes the significance of culture in language teaching and argues that language and culture are inseparable. She advocates for integrating culture to enhance language learning.

Finally, there were found some international studies; The Loss and Return of Chinese Culture in English Teaching: Teaching Design of Chinese Tea Culture in English Class Based on the model of Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE) by Yang and Congzhou (2019). And The Use of Authentic Materials in Teaching English: Indonesia Teachers' Perspective in EFL Classes (Huda, 2017).

The first study was carried out by Yang and Congzhou in 2019 in China, its main objective was to spread the Chinese culture, focusing on the tea culture, the authors used the ADDIE model to meet the objective and relate the fostering of the culture into English teaching. The method used was quantitative and the instruments used for collecting data were a pre-teaching questionnaire applied to students before and a questionnaire applied to them after the implementation finished. As a conclusion they affirmed that the design of Chinese tea culture

based on the ADDIE model is “feasible, logical and complete” (Yang & Congzhou, 2019, p. 193) in terms of intercultural education from theory to practical teaching.

The previous study provides a valuable view on how to include the culture within the teaching process, the methodology used to achieve this goal was ADDIE model. Therefore, it is possible to say that the use of an innovative approach to reach the expected results. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that the main research project intends to have future teachers benefit from the inclusion of cultural aspects using the task-based approach. Therefore, the development of the projects is similar since both implement cultural content through a specific approach, being ADDIE model and task-based learning.

On the other hand, the second study was carried out by Miftahul Huda in 2017. The main purpose of this investigation was to inspect Indonesian EFL teachers’ beliefs regarding the use of authentic materials at State Islamic Junior High School level in South Tangerang. This was a qualitative study which intended to provide a deep-interpretation towards the use of authentic materials along the English teaching program at State Islamic Junior High School level in South Tangerang. The instruments for collecting the data were two questionnaires and an interview. Within the results, they found that teachers have positive attitudes toward the use of authentic materials in EFL classes. Also, they consider through the use of them, students can be exposed to an important input for motivating and exposing them to real language.

The above research is a great support about why it is considered authentic materials as a useful tool to introduce cultural aspects in an EFL class, due to the fact that AM (authentic materials). are not created with pedagogical

purposes and it includes real information about common situations in a determined region. In such manner, it will be easier to get closer to the main objective of this project that is focused on the exposure of cultural aspects and real English language input to students, through the development of several tasks inside the classroom.

Conclusions

In order to conclude, it is possible to say that in all the three levels examined, a great amount of research has been made working with aspects such as cultural awareness and authentic materials in ESL teaching. However, very little research has to do with future English teachers, and it is at this point where our research project gains paramount relevance. All the studies were examined in a deep way, and one common finding is that all of them were developed with English learners at school in different levels or grades (ninth graders, elementary students and more).

Taking into consideration that Colombia which is the country where the research is being held does not have a superior level in regards to English proficiency, it is important to find the cause of that phenomenon, according the article published by Semana (2020) “Colombia y su preocupante nivel de inglés” (p. 1), “one of the causes is the low level of education of English teachers” (translation made by the authors). In such manner, as teachers are the only English language input students receive, teachers’ low level could help delay students’ learning processes. Hence, the use of authentic materials, and cultural awareness targets this issue by widen the exposure to English students get, and limiting the amount of mistakes committed along the process of teaching.

Nevertheless, Rodríguez (2022) in article posted by Portafolio called “Colombia sigue sin aprobar el nivel de inglés” established that “Colombia sigue manteniéndose en un “nivel bajo”, pero con 12 puntos adicionales frente al resultado presentado en el 2021” (p. 1). This indicates that although Colombia has improved a little its results the past year, it is still facing a big problem related to the English level, which is lower regarding to some neighboring countries, as mention before, the use of authentic materials targets this phenomenon and aims to improve the quality of English teaching.

Therefore, the project aims to foster English learning of this teachers to be by including culture within the learning environment. Nonetheless, one of the findings previously men-

tioned in one of the studies, is that is culture of the target language cannot be isolated, since that might lead to translation and might hinder the accurate performance of the students Kramersch (1993).

That is why in the actual research project cultural aspects of English-speaking countries is being worked with. Moreover, another finding was that the curriculum proposed by the teacher was not taken into consideration when implemented the project. For this reason, the development of the project was carried out along with the intervention and corrections of the head teachers, so that both the curriculum and the implementation could work smoothly, and always in benefit of the future teachers.

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