

MERGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY ISSUES IN EFL CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at developing a parallel teaching program for EFL classes merging cultural diversity issues in teaching foreign language. Project Based Learning, Advance Organizer, and Debates are the strategies suggested with a list of topics related to the actual cultural groups in Jordan, as a model for multi-cultural society. This program is addressed to elementary, intermediate and high-intermediate levels, enabling the achievement of general and specific goals of TEFL' such as connecting classroom learning to real life situations, knowing and accepting the "other", and building communicative skills in English language.

Key words: Cultural diversity, Project Based Learning, Advance Organizer, Debate.

INTRODUCTION

Jordan is a multicultural society; about 5% - 7% of its population is from different cultural backgrounds. Two religions (Islam and Christian), around five non-Arab sub-cultural societies, and Arabs from different Arab World origins constitutes Jordanian population. It is quite important for these people to know each other and accept each other. The civil rights of all citizens are preserved by the constitution, and all Jordanians feel equal and respected within the Arab-Islamic cultural framework and the Jordanian National Identity.

It is important for all societies, specially the multi-cultural ones, to develop various activities and programs to shorten the distance between these cultures, which brings unity, loyalty and affiliation. Educational institutions are the most responsible party to carry out this national task. It could be reasonable to integrate cultural diversity issues into English Language teaching lessons for several reasons; first, teaching English is teaching another language that carries another culture, and learners are exposed to a foreign culture already, second, designing different activities and assignments for language teaching lessons is open and variant that can achieve several objective at the same time, and third, English language activities can give the learners the opportunity to work together inside and outside classroom.

English language is an obligatory subject taught in Jordan from grade one throughout to grade twelve. This study aims at proposing some techniques and activities to be administered in English classes, so as to enable students to know and interact with all the sub-cultures in the country, shortening the distance between them, at the time they practice all language skills in real life activities.

Problem and Question of the Study

Whereas education is one of the national systems responsible for societal issues, it has to take its share in maintaining balance among the youth. The contemporary unstable situation in the Arab World imposes its conditions in a limited time and shortage of resources, to be involved in raising awareness among youth and adults. Understanding and acceptance of each other among societal groups is an essential value that needs to activate. Cultural diversity hasn't been given sufficient focus in curricula in Jordan, and the time factor is not very helpful to develop suitable textbooks, therefore, this study suggests cultural diversity issues, with related wide range of subjects, to be introduced, studied and investigated in English as a Foreign Language classes. English language teaching aims at encouraging learners to communicate and interact in English through real life situations in authentic texts.

The study raises the following question:

-How can cultural diversity issues be integrated into English Teaching activities?

The researcher proposes advance organizer (AO), Project Based Learning (PBL), and Debate as suitable teaching/learning strategies to integrate cultural diversity issues in English Language Teaching (ELT) classes.

Significance of the Study

Cultural diversity is a crucial topic in the modern life, academic studies have been conducted in Jordan and elsewhere in this domain. But to the knowledge of the researcher, it hasn't been mentioned in school curriculum or

communicative activities designed by and for English teachers in Jordan to be implemented. Significance of this study lies in its attempt to engage English language learners in cultural diversity topics through the school activities. The researcher believes that this could be a suitable field for employing English in a way that enables achieving higher level goals of education. Learners would understand the cultural diversity in the Jordanian society by detecting the details of each culture by themselves, knowing the similarities and differences between these cultures and the mainstream culture; Arab-Islamic culture. Human nature tends to accept what is known and reject the unknown, this will create unity in the society and affiliation with the national identity. This educational goal goes in parallel with emphasis given to practicing English in real life situation with authentic texts and material

I. Advance Organizer (AO)

The definition of advance organizer refers to the information that is presented prior too learning and that can be used by the learner to organize and interpret new incoming information (Mayer, 2003). The purpose using AO according to Ausubel (1963) is to facilitate learning of written material by relating it to the existing hierarchical cognitive structure of the learner. It is an instructional strategy usually used to promote the learning of a new lesson and the retention of information as described by Ausubel (1963:81):

“These organizers are introduced in advance of learning itself, and are also presented at a higher level of abstraction, generality, and inclusiveness, integrating, and interrelating the material the precede.”

For the purpose of this study the operational definition of AO is the different cultural groups that constitute the Jordanian society, namely, the mainstream culture is Arab-Islamic, the sub-cultures are Chechens, Circasians, Armenians, Kurds, Assyrians, AL-Dorooz and Turks. The researcher suggests that the AO be used in the elementary level classes of EFL.

AO is a teaching/learning strategy that aims to provide the necessary scaffolding for students to learn new and unfamiliar material, and to integrate new ideas into relatively familiar ideas (a comparative organizer which compares and contrasts old and new ideas). It is an instructional tool used in teaching to help the learner recall and transfer prior knowledge to the new information (Joyce, 2000). The process begins with presenting information before instruction as a way to provoke previously existing schema, or get the learners restructure what they already know into a new schema as was first introduced by David Ausubel in order to facilitate learning through focus of mental learning. According to Joyce et al (2000), AO model has three phases of activities:

Phase I: Presentation of AO in three steps:

- clarify the aims of the lesson
- present AO
- prompt awareness of relevant knowledge

Phase II: Making links to/from AO in three steps:

- present the learning task or learning material
- make organization and logical order of learning material explicit

Phase III: Strengthening of the cognitive organization

Gagne’s theory of “Condition of Learning” will be followed in its nine steps to implement AO. Cory (1996) explained how this theory breaks the conditions of learning into external and internal; the previously learned capabilities of the learner are the internal conditions, while the stimuli or the instructions provided to the learner are the external conditions. The essential components of teaching for Gagne are presenting the knowledge or demonstrating the skill, providing practice with feedback, and providing learner guidance. Gagne’s nine general steps of instructions for learning are: (Gagne, 1985)

- 1- Gaining attention of the learners
- 2- Informing learners of the objectives
- 3- Stimulating recall of prior learning
- 4- Presenting the stimulus
- 5- Providing learning guidance
- 6- Eliciting performance
- 7- Providing feedback
- 8- Assessing performance
- 9- Enhancing retention and transfer

Review of Related Studies (AO)

Empirical research conducted on AO used in different teaching situations and disciplines reflect the beneficial outcomes in achieving the set objectives. Using the meta-analysis technique, Stone (1983) analyzed 135 studies that include reading introductory passages as advance organizer to enable students to organize, learn, and retain the read material concluded that AO facilitates both learning and retention. Herron's (1994) results of his study supported the use of advance organizer in both first and second language classes prior to listening to texts, reading, and introducing key vocabulary, in addition to cultural background issues. Chung and Huang (1998) pointed out that the focus should be on new words in preparing advance organizers for EFL students, it should also be concise and short for the longer warm-up period might decrease the attention of less motivated students. Herron et al (1999) investigated whether students learn culture embedded in a video-based second language program, and the results of the study supported using video in teaching culture in second language classes. And, Lin and Chen (2007) aimed to compare the effects of different types of computer-generated visuals and advance organizers in enhancing comprehension and retention of a content-based lesson for learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The results showed that the animation group outperformed the static visual group while the animation embedded with a question advance organizer had a marginal effect in facilitating the acquisition of L2 reading comprehension.

It is obvious that AO is a flexible strategy to be used in different levels and subjects, in addition to being attractive and interesting to students and teachers. It allows communication and brain storming among learners within a healthy and friendly environment.

Procedures for Implementing (AO)

Implementation of the Advance Organizer can take the following sequenced steps in EFL class teaching speaking. In order to integrate cultural diversity, the suggested title of the lesson is: Cultural Diversity in Jordan. The teacher (T) prepares the slides (to be explained during the lesson procedures) in advance, brings some flowers with him to the classroom, and pictures of butterflies and birds, and pictures that represent culture groups in Jordan in their costumes with some information about their origin, language, food, and related information. Procedures of the lesson will follow the steps presented by Gagne' as shown in the lesson plan in table (1) below.

Table (1)
AO Lesson Plan

No.	Procedure	Teacher	Pupils
1	Gaining attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - writes the title of the lesson on the board. - gives the flowers, pictures of butterflies and birds to the pupils, one item for each according to their choice. - Asks P to give meaningful sentences about the flowers and pictures. - Writes the answers on the board. - Asks some questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you have a garden at home? -Are there any flowers in the garden? -What are the colors of the flowers? -What else do you see in the garden? - Writes answers on the board and corrects mistakes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a- say a meaningful sentence using the item he has, like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -I have a red flower, it's a rose. -I have a butterfly. -My bird is singing. b-answer the questions.
2	Describing the goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -write the goal of the lesson on the board: At the end of this lesson pupils should be able to speak about the cultural diversity in Jordan using the new words: culture, cultural diversity, Chechens, Circassians, Armenians, Kurds, Assyrians, AL-Dorooz and Turks in meaningful sentences. - asks the pupils if they know anyone of the mentioned groups. -What do you know about your friend Taymoor? Ellene? - What language does he/she speak? -Do they have different kinds of food? -Does his/her look different from others? 	Answer the questions, give information, ask questions.
3	Stimulating recall of prior knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show the slides and ask questions a-The first slide shows a green field of grass without any trees or flowers. Q-What do you see here? 	Answer questions, take notes, ask questions. Talk about the change after the third slide, brain storm

		<p>b-The second slide shows one flower basin of one color. Q-What do you see here? Q-Are there any trees? birds, butterflies? Q- How does the picture look? Q-What shall we do?</p> <p>c-The third slide shows a colorful garden full of flowers from different types and some trees with birds, butterflies and bees. Q-What do you see now?</p>	<p>about the benefits we gain out of this change in terms of beauty, environment, etc.</p>
4	Presenting the material to be learned	<p>a-Hangs a map of Jordan. b-Gives an introduction about Jordanian society and its population in general, mainly the mainstream culture and National Identity. c-Distributes culture related pictures. d-Asks if they know anyone of the mentioned culture groups. -What do you know about your friend Taymoor? Ellene? - What language does he/she speak? -Do they have different kinds of food? -Does his/her look different from others?</p>	<p>a- take notes b- answer questions c-make sentences d-discuss, compare, connect information</p>
5	Providing guidance for learning	<p>a-asks pupils to hang the pictures of culture groups on the empty map of Jordan. b- makes the connection between the flower garden and Jordanian society. c-explains cultural diversity – -Cultural diversity means that the society is like the garden, and the cultures make the diversity in their colors and types. -The more these colors are in harmony with each other, the better they look. -The good relations and acceptance between the cultures in the society will affect the whole society's safety and good life, same as the butterflies and birds coming to the garden.</p>	<p>a- hang the pictures on the map. b- describe each cultural groups, features, costumes, food, traditions, etc.</p>
6	6-Eliciting performance	<p>a-gives needed vocabulary for discussion like: bonds, democracy, belonging to the homeland. b- holds discussion and brainstorming through questioning and encouraging.</p>	<p>a-compare between the garden and Jordan. b-brain-storm about the benefits of cultural diversity c-discuss how to strengthen bonds between cultural groups d-enhance the belonging to Jordan e-Democracy</p>
7	Providing informative feedback	<p>a-what are the lessons learned from this experience? b- how can we develop this knowledge into actions?</p>	<p>a- summarize the results of the discussion. b-present recommendations.</p>
8	Assessing performance	<p>It is up to the teacher to test his students in a short quiz, or ask them to prepare short dialogues to check their performance.</p>	<p>-do the quiz or prepare a dialogue.</p>
9	Enhancing retention and transfer	<p>An assignment could be given to the learners for the next class, to prepare some information about other cultures in the world, or carry out a debate of the similarities and differences between these sub-cultures, or with the mainstream culture.</p>	<p>Prepare an assignment about any other culture.</p>

II. Project Based Learning (PBL)

Project based learning is an instructional learner-centered strategy of teaching and learning. Instead of using a rigid lesson plan that directs a learner down a specific path of learning objectives, PBL allows in-depth investigation of a topic. (Harris & Katz, 2001). This method of teaching enables learners to have more autonomy over what they learn maintaining interest and motivating them at the same time to take more responsibility for their learning (Tassinari, 1996; Wolk, 1994; Worthy, 2000). With more autonomy, learners “shape their projects to fit their own interests and abilities” (Moursund, 1998, p.4).

The theoretical foundation of PBL goes back to the 1900s, and John Dewey afterwards supported “learning by doing”. This idea is also reflected in constructivism and constructionism. Constructivism explains how the individual constructs knowledge through interaction with the environment in a different way than others (Perkins, 1992; Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978). It is through conducting investigation, conversations and activities, an individual learns by constructing new knowledge and building on the current knowledge.

Constructionism takes the notion of construction knowledge one step further. It posits that individuals learn best when they construct a personally- meaningful artifact that can be shared with and reflected upon others, (Harel & Papert, 1991; Kafai & Resnick, 1996). By focusing on the individual learner, PBL strives for “considerable individualization of curriculum, instruction and assessment, in other words, the project is learner-centered” (Moursund, 1998, p4).

The seven essentials for PBL (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010) were chosen for the purpose of this study.
Driving question or challenge

- 1- Need to know
- 2- Inquiry and innovation
- 3- 21st Century skills
- 4- Student voice and choice
- 5- Feedback and revision
- 6- Publicly presented product

Review of Related Studies (PBL)

The reviewed studies emphasized the accuracy of PBL and its effect on the learners. Gallagher & Stepien (1996) found that secondary students who studied using PBL in American Studies showed deeper understanding of the content than those who received a traditional model of instruction. Ertmer & Simons (2005) described ways to overcome and simplify PBL problems in identifying the driving questions, structuring students’ research efforts, motivating students, creating collaborative classroom atmosphere, and assessing their learning with rubrics and classroom reflections. Barron & Darling-Hammond (2008) reviewed studies on inquiry based learning outcomes and the best practices in applying project based learning, problem based learning, and design based instruction, suggesting evidence based approaches to support inquiry based teaching in the classroom, that will help students evaluate their own against standards. Hung (2008) introduced in his study the nine-step problem design process to help participants to detect whether the PBL problems could affect students acquire of sufficient content knowledge, activate appropriate knowledge, and properly direct their own learning in using PBL. Hernandez-Ramos & De La Paz (2009) results showed significant gains in content knowledge and historical-thinking skills for students engaged in PBL curriculum compared to students who received traditional instruction among university students from Santa Clara University and the University of Maryland. Finkelstein, Hanson, Huang, Hirschman, & Hang (2010) studied the effect of PBL economics curriculum on student learning and problem solving, indicating that both students and teachers benefited from PBL curriculum.

Procedures and steps for Implementation of PBL

Implementing PBL in EFL classes integrating cultural diversity issues in teaching English for the intermediate and higher intermediate level can take the following steps and procedures:

1- Driving Question or Challenge

After the discussion about inharmonious cultures within one society that lead to clashes and un-stability, the teacher brainstorming with students suggests possible solutions, such as enacting laws, understanding each other, and raising public awareness about the cultural groups in the society. Students create a driving question to focus their efforts, focusing on a specific local area: How can we reduce the tension within the society? What do we know about each other?

2- A Need to Know

The teacher introduces the project by telling students that they will be learning more about cultural diversity in Jordan, referring to the problems faced by other countries in the region because of lack of understanding and accepting each other.

3- Inquiry and Innovation

More detailed questions will be generated by students. Teacher guides them to add to this list as many as they discover new insights. As the students find answers, they raise and investigate new questions. Students synthesize the information they gather and use it both to inform their individually written papers on the driving question, and to help create their team's product related to that question.

4- 21st Century Skills

Students form teams of three or four and plan what tasks they will do and how they will work together. As they work, each team regularly pauses to review how well they are collaborating and communicating, using rubrics they had developed with the teacher's guidance. Teacher guides students on how to use time and task organizers. They practice oral presentation skills, and in writing journals, students reflect on their thinking and problem-solving processes.

A project should give students opportunities to build such 21st century skills as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and the use of technology, which will serve them well in the workplace and life.

5- Student Voice and Choice

On the limited-choice end of the scale, students can select what topic to study within a general driving question such as cultural aspects of each culture group, the languages, the features and characteristics, etc. The teacher might provide a limited menu of options. On the "the more, the better" end of the scale, students can decide what products they will create, what resources they will use, and how they will structure their time. Students could even choose a project's topic and driving question.

6- Feedback and Revision

As they develop their ideas and products, student teams critique one another's work, referring to rubrics and exemplars. Teacher checks research notes, reviews rough drafts and plans, and meets with teams to monitor their progress.

7- A Publicly Presented Product

Teams present their projects in cultural diversity issues and proposals for addressing the problem in a celebration inside or outside the school. The invited audience may include parents, peers, and representatives of community, business, and government organizations. Students answer questions and reflect on how they completed the project. They should come up with recommendations on how to preserve the Safety and unity of the society by understanding and accepting all the cultural groups in the society. They should present their own work talking about what they gained in terms of knowledge and skills—and pride.

III. Debate

Debate is a structured discussion that tends toward dualism; there are usually two teams of at least two people each; one team, the affirmative, supports the resolution; and the second team, the negative, opposes it. It can be an effective teaching/learning strategy for higher education level, enabling students to take an active part in their own learning. Gibbs (1992:10) identifies four key elements essential for deeper learning: motivation, learner activity, interaction with others, and a strong knowledge base. Debate as a teaching/learning method creates a pedagogical environment for cooperative learning through interaction that develops critical thinking skills.

According to Nunan, (1981) language learning happens more successfully when it occurs in a meaningful, authentic and supportive context. Using classroom debate offers opportunities to negotiate meanings, and allows students to have more access to employ linguistic knowledge to promote effective language learning. Jacobs & Farrell (2003) refer to debate in language learning offers an active learning environment through authentic interaction as a learner-centered approach.

Teachers usually feel that debate is a complicated type of interaction in which high level of discourse skills need to be applied. The Teacher's Guide to Introducing Debate in the Classroom presents steps and procedures for teacher to manage different types and levels of classroom debates. For University students it is recommended that the

type entitled “The great debate” is chosen to discuss the matter of cultural diversity. This style of debate gives the students an opportunity to prepare and debate in a formal style. It takes 2-4 classes to do the research.

Review of Related Studies (Debate)

Park, Kier, & Jugdev (2011) contributed to the field of research on debate as an instructional technique, the findings showed that the use of debates in text-based courses at the online undergraduate and graduate levels can contribute to improved learning outcomes and student satisfaction. Rai (2011) examined the benefits of using in-class debates as an instructional strategy. These benefits include mastery of the content and the development of critical thinking skills, empathy, and oral communications skills. Fournier-Sylvester (2013) discussed teacher’s viewpoints about avoiding using debates in classrooms for the unpredictability of students’ reaction, accusation of trying to include political agenda, and the insufficient knowledge or skills to employ debates. The study illustrated the positive impact of debate on students’ critical thinking skills and democratic commitments, advising teachers that with some preparation and facilitation techniques their concerns will be open to use the strategy in current events and social issues. And, Alén, Domínguez, & De Carlos (2014) reported that academic debate presents students with an interesting opportunity to develop diverse and relevant learning and critical thinking abilities through active learning.

Procedures and steps for implementing Debate

Before going through the steps of carrying out a debate in the classroom, following is a quick look at the role of both the teacher and the student.

The teacher’s role:

- Providing the topic
- Facilitating brainstorming sessions and building skills activities.
- Helping students organize information by note-taking, preparing worksheets, reviewing and giving directions)
- Providing practice time prior to the debates
- Invite audience – parents, administrators or other honored guests to judge.

The student’s role:

- Receive topic, begin research, interview experts
- Look up resources
- Review materials and mark it; affirmative or negative
- On the worksheet, establish needs for change and develop a defensible plan
- Review the affirmative case from the negative point of view, and, on the worksheet, prepare negative responses and evidence, at the same time test the affirmative case
- Plan questions and practice presentation arguments

The procedures of implementation, takes the following steps:

1- Choosing topics

Students are given the opportunity to be involved in the choice of debate topics. Teacher creates a variety of cultural diversity related topics, then allows the class to vote for the ones they are the most interested in.

Examples of some topics:

- a. Cultural diversity affects positively/negatively social unity.
- b. Cultural diversity in Jordan threatens social harmony.
- c. Cultural diversity affects the national culture.
- d. Jordanians accept cultural groups with all their differences.

2- Choosing groups and assigning related topic for each group

- Groups can be allocated randomly, or students choose their own groups, or the teacher assigns the groups
- A groups organizer is allocated, and that person set times and dates for meetings.
- Members of the group will be given their topics, and told which side of the argument they will be supporting (negative or positive)

3- Preparing the students

- Debate format

Standard debate structure includes:

- An opening statement
- Rebuttal question
- Allotted time
- Closing statement

Each member of the team should be responsible for one aspect, and all members should speak.

- Preparatory tutorials/lectures and debate documentation

It is suggested that preparatory lectures be at least 2 hours per week. The first hour is devoted to a lecture on relevant issues of cultural diversity in Jordan. The second hour is tutorial in which the debate takes place. Feedback from students at the end of the sessions will help them establish research papers.

- Group monitoring

The group organizers should arrange meetings and ensuring that preparatory work is being done and all group members are involved. Any problems encountered need to be discussed with the teacher in time to remedy before the actual debate is due.

4- Assessing the debate

A marking rubric is to be prepared to assess the whole work which includes the following:

1. Presentation structure

Timing

Logical flow

2. Content

Depth and understanding of topic

Relevance of arguments

Originality of content

Coverage of key arguments

Evidence of external referencing/referral to Laws and case study examples

Use of examples and quotations

3. Delivery

Self- presentation

Voice projection and expression

Eye contact/body language

Handling of questions

4. Supporting Materials, transparencies, handouts

5. Substantial shift in end vote

On the assigned date of the activity to take place, students will be ready to deliver their information in the style of debate in front of audience (if possible). The teacher will facilitate and observe the activity without interference or comments unless the case developed negatively. Audience will be given time to ask questions to the students. The final stage of the debate will conclude with recommendations and suggestions such as:

- 1- The best way to preserve and maintain social.
- 2- More research to be conducted.

CONCLUSION

Three instructional strategies were introduced by the study to promote English language skills among three levels of learners; elementary stage, intermediate, and university students. The topic chosen for these three strategies was Cultural Diversity in Jordan. It is expected that using these strategies will enable students from understanding contemporary cultural situation in the country that affects the well-being of the society. At the same time they will be directed towards understanding the others, creating the traditions of democracy and tolerance, and appreciating the unity of stability of the society. Practicing English in real life situation through discussion and research will be more

beneficial than traditional instructions. Moreover, they will develop critical thinking skills and team work experiences that will help them in their future lives.

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