



ENHANCING CULTURAL AWARENESS IN STUDENTS AT FIRST LEVEL AT THE UPTC IN SOGAMOSO

MAURICIO BARRERA CÁRDENAS
mauros4@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This project examines cultural awareness of 16 students of the basic English level at the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia Seccional- Sogamoso. This intervention was used in order to better approach the students and improve the class environment. A KWL chart was used as strategy to encourage the participants. In order to answer the procedure of the first part of the KWL chart, an intervention was used to clarify and motivate students to speak about their own cultural background. Findings suggest that culture could have an important place and its meaning attend a revision in the program at this institution. Also, the development of cultural awareness is visible in the EFL classroom. However this aspect must be discussed in order to incorporate it in the curriculum, the use of materials and methodology.

Resumen

Este proyecto analiza la concienciación cultural en 16 estudiantes de inglés básico en la Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia Seccional- Sogamoso. Esta intervención se hizo a fin de mejorar el ambiente en la clase. Un cuadro de KWL se utilizó como estrategia para motivar a los estudiantes ha hablar de su propia cultura. Los resultados sugieren que la cultura puede tener un lugar importante en esta institución. También, el desarrollo de la concienciación cultural en el salón de inglés como lengua extranjera es visible. Sin embargo, se debe promover la incorporación de aspectos culturales en los materiales y en la metodología de clase. . A fin de responder

Palabras clave: concienciación cultural, inglés como lengua extranjera, salón de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Keywords: cultural awareness, English/ foreign language. Learner, Sociocultural, EFL classroom

Introduction

The rapid growth of the English language has made different changes in all fields. Economy, communication and education have had a huge impact in terms of evolution due to the influence of this language. In this project, education has called the attention in order to study the effect of the English language as a foreign language and relation to cultural manifestation in that context. In the process of education, EFL teachers have been played an important part in revising and promoting new practices in the relations among culture, the teaching practice and the influence of EFL.

New studies that are the case of cultural studies engage as particular source in the English classroom. Al-Zubaidi (2010) Points that “cultural awareness, cultural standards and cultural competence are essential components of foreign language learning and teaching. Language and culture are intertwined, interconnected and inextricable”. Hovater (2007) argues that the knowledge of sociocultural characteristics can help to develop and improve better programs on ELT. Knowing that, it becomes clear to understand that culture has a special relationship with educational aspects. And in terms of EFL education, the promotion of new strategies can gain a good growth so students and teacher may improve their learning process. Then, the purpose of this project is to study

the manifestations of Cultural awareness in students of Basic English at the UPTC in Sogamoso, Where 16 students from different undergraduate programs such as Engineering, Accounting and Business Management take this subject as requirement in their programs. The intention of this project is to propose a new strategy in which students can increase awareness about the aspects of culture using the English as foreign language. Then, due to many students that arrive from different locations of Colombia to Sogamoso in order to study specialty professions such as Mining and Geologic Engineering, the differentiation and cultural profiles are very notable at this university. For that reason, many students do not know deep aspects about their cultures. Moreover, the students who arrive from locations other than Boyacá know few aspects about the context where they live and study. This description allowed the researcher to choose action research as the method to inquire about one strategy in order for the students to improve the interaction and approach themselves during the EFL class.

Justification

The English class in this foreign language context is most of the times focused on the acquisition of grammatical rules and training for a better pronunciation. Otherwise, this project examined the importance of the cultural role as a strategy where students

and teacher had the opportunity to share a pedagogical experience. For instance, about the students because they will notice that talking about cultures using the foreign language is a good way to improve their learning. Al-Zubaidi (2010) says that, Culture is the main input to foreign language learning. In that process, the researcher gave the importance of using a cultural approach to implement in the practice of teaching. Although, Cakir (2006) add that most of the time, a teacher can teach culture in implicit contents without giving the relevance of the cultural purpose. Moreover, this is an opportunity to analyze the interaction of sharing cultural differences among different backgrounds of the Colombian culture using culture and EFL.

Objective

The purpose of this project is to examine teaching cultural awareness in students of the first semester of Basic English at the UPTC in Sogamoso.

Research Question

The construction of the research question is the most important step of planning. And reviewing the literature in terms of action research, Ross (2008) conducted a study using a KWL chart. This intervention presents a practical approach using this model. This model is less formal than other types of research, but the advantage is that it focuses on a mutual topic. Then the research question is

How would the KWL chart enhance the cultural awareness in the students at the first level of the UPTC in Sogamoso?

Theoretical framework

In order to deeply explore the meaning of culture and cultural awareness and the relationship with the EFL education, there are different sources of literature to review. For example: AL- Mekhlafi (2007) states, That “The modification of educational policies required at exploration of cultural strategies due to EFL prospective teachers need to be prepared in multiple areas, Namely language skills, language and linguistics, culture and literature, pedagogical psychology and hands on teaching experience”. Culture has different interpretations from different points of view. For instance from a scientific point of view, culture is a primitive concept which emerges from a transitional state and gives to the human beings a social and historical interpretation (Yakovleva, 2009). From a social point of view, culture is an individual or collectivistic behavior represented in different contexts (Heydebrand, 1994). From an educational view, Mike (2007) says that culture is a set of facts, practices to develop pedagogical elements to get success in any society. Also, Hieber (1976) adds from an anthropological point of view that “culture is an integrated system of learned patterns of behavior, ideas, and products characteristic of a society”.

According to Kramersch (1993) Culture is mere information conveyed by the language. Because when a person wears, thinks, expresses and/or behaves, he or she can reveal a social norm of interaction with the help of the language. Culture reveals a community and inside the community there are different social structures. On the other hand, culture can involve different

appreciations for different people (Cakir, 2006). The universal principle of culture is linked with education in the measure that culture is transmitted through linguistic systems. Then the function of language consists of transmitting culture in particular social situations. Moran (2001) says that the perspectives in culture are underlined when the members of a community connect practices to share communicative purposes. This connotation explains that increasing cultural awareness can be as other possible skill not only to use in an academic scene.

In order to develop an understanding of what makes cultural awareness in the EFL practice, this is a resource designed to help a personal competence for teachers and students. Then the identification of this concept would allow teachers to take into consideration of development of cultural competency. Moreover, cultural awareness is a key aspect supported by sensitivity to different behaviors in social situations (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1994).

Brown (2004) argues that the nature of context is linked with idiosyncratic information. In this sense, the relationship between English language and the concept of culture remarks a logical deduction of a global language and its role in a Spanish context. This influence demands serious interpretations about how a foreign language can be implemented as a source of interactive communication in the classrooms.

In order to accomplish the last topic, it is necessary to assume that the English language is totally immersed in a different culture where this language is originally

spoken. Notice that the use of this foreign language involves immediately a combination between a specific linguistic learning and the interaction with the actual media and academic sources of information.

While the importance of the culture concept is recognizable, there will be reasons to consider about the relationship between English as foreign language and culture. For that reason, the definition of culture for English foreign language teachers is indispensable not only as a general meaning, but also as an instructional component in order to insert the cultural components with the practice of teaching.

Culture can be defined as the essence or mirror of a town. It recognizes beliefs and customs. Diaz & Weed (2000) explain, that the influence of culture in interaction and communication indicates perspectives by which teachers and learners can implement in the process of language learning. It also makes a sense of the world.

In order to determine cultural awareness as an approach, it is important to understand what the role of our own culture is. In that way, the effect of adapting culture with a foreign language could be as a process in which teachers transmit to the students in different situations. This process is linked examining the background, values, attitudes and educational practices (Stanley & Padilla, 1986).

Burke (2001), points about cultural competence relating to a teacher's ability and responding to differences positively and interact effectively with students from a variety of backgrounds. This is often

elaborated as the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and skills to interact with and support the development of students from all backgrounds. For this study, the cultural competence is considered as an important factor to empower inside the classroom.

This competence is achieved when teachers and students share the purpose about English language that must be addressed in an educative context. It is a practice conducted through a process of socializing with the norms and beliefs of another culture. It should be adapted to integrate modes of thinking and implement in a pedagogical environment (Barletta, 2008).

There are different points of view to adapt about cultural awareness in the classroom. Cakir (2006) considers that “Teacher’s task is to make students aware of cultural differences, not pass value judgments on these differences. Students learning a foreign language have to assimilate many new categorizations and codifications if they are to understand and speak the language as its native speakers do”. In this sense, English as a foreign language can be used to express ideas and distinctions to satisfy pedagogical proposes. In other words, EFL should be used to express not only international cultures or stereotypes. Moreover, it should describe the local culture and be aware that a student can understand a reality. With this conceptualization, the cultural competence could be achieved and the target language used as an option to satisfy a communicative purpose or need.

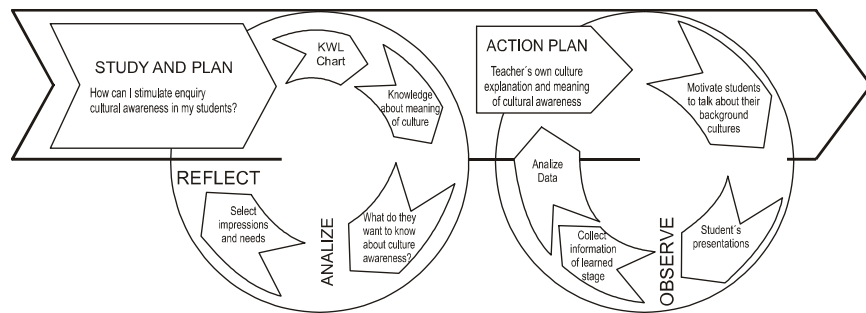
Taking in consideration the critical applied linguistics, English language is a process of evolution. And teachers must consider the

critical approach like a static approach. Pennycook (2003) suggests that critical applied linguistics is a mix of different areas. For the purpose of this project the principles of action research were based on Ferrance (2000) suggesting that, this is an individual teacher research, because it focuses on a single classroom, collaborative support, and data organization.

Methodology

As the main concern was identified, to develop this project, there were the next stages. The literature review was the first step to increase the research aim. It conducted to define what specific method would be required to answer the research question. Defining the plan of the research, a consent form was distributed to the participants. Moreover, Ross (2008) explains that in a qualitative research involves sources of data such as teacher observation, examination of student work samples and performance.

The instrument used to collect data was a KWL chart applied by the teacher in two sessions, a presentation by the teacher - students and observations. The first session was to explore what the students knew about culture and cultural awareness. A KWL chart was distributed for that purpose. The origin of this method is discussed by Schultz (2010) This strategy examines the competency in science social studies. (see: appendix. A). For this purpose students can control this procedure individually. Moreover, it was used as diagnostic in order to active the prior knowledge of the students about culture and cultural awareness.

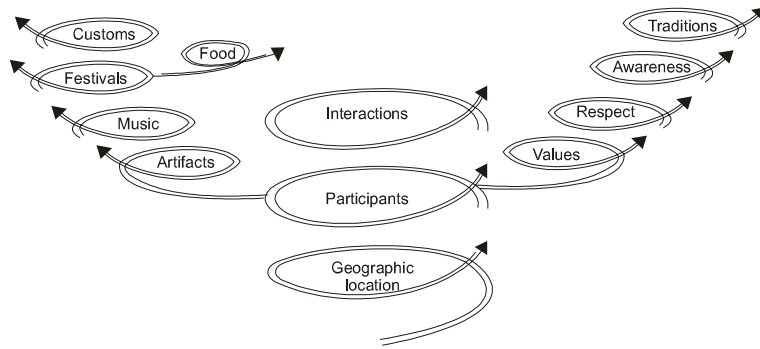


Students had to fill the two columns of **what they knew** and **what would they want to know** about the meaning of culture and cultural awareness. From these perceptions and doubts the teacher prepared a speech in order to supply these doubts and clarify the last concepts. Moreover, the teacher gave a little presentation about the location of Boyacá-Colombia using English foreign language in order to motivate the students to produce a presentation. Based on the teacher's presentation and instruction students had to prepare a presentation and talk about their own cultures or a cultural topic. During the presentations the teacher was writing field notes. After all the presentations the teacher gave again the same KWL chart. In that way, they finished filling the third column: what had they learned about the experience. After the teacher listed categories according to the data collected from this chart. Also, observations without participation, for that case, Vargas (1984) argues, "Here it is necessary to follow and write relevant

aspects to study". In that case the researcher is taking the contact with the students but avoiding the participation or giving comments only taking notes for the purpose of this study. Then the researcher was focused on the performance of the student, the manifestations, explanations about the meaning of culture and cultural awareness.

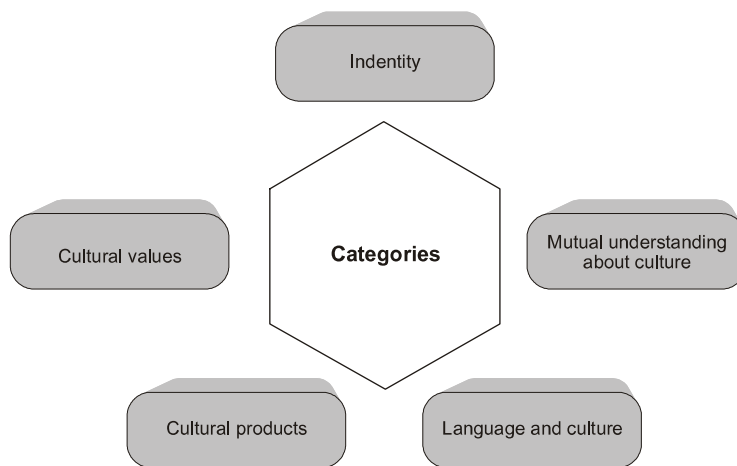
Analysis of the data

It was important to analyze 16 KWL charts in regards to the variety of concepts the participants manifested. Then, the information collected about this project was classified by categories representing the most important aspects from the observations, and field notes. According to Huberman & Miles (1994) in the process of observations in qualitative evidence, the researcher must access to collect data associating charts, matrices or networks. The main aspects from the observations were contrasted and displayed from the observations and patterns are:



Finally joining the three instrument's observations, KWL chart and field notes. These three perspectives increased furnishing the evidence with the concern of the research. Huberman & Miles (1994)

explains that this process is a set of analysis to appreciate the most representative understandings for a problematic. Each position converged until constitute the next categories:



Mutual understanding about culture: Valencia (2006) says that geographical features and natural sources are attractive facts in which students can prepare interesting activities. The intention of sharing different cultures was accomplished. Particularly, this experience was accompanied by stages supported by cultural knowing of each participant. In addition, the diversity of cultures empowered the setting and everybody was very interesting with the differences."The cultural

experience, therefore, consists of the cultural content, the outcome, the activities in which students can engage this content, the outcomes that are intended or achieved, the learning of the context, and the nature of the relationship the teacher develops with the students" (Moran,2006).

It is difficult to explain the list of all the topics that participant explained during this activity. The challenge was to infer one connection between different points of view such as food,

popular traditions and geographic locations. Adding, the reflection was in the way the participants organized the information to share in the class. On the other hand, the engagement they had with the activity. Furthermore, cultural information about products explains that this is a learning process. At the same time participants explain in foreign language things such as clothing, music, personal experiences they entered in a cultural dimension about participants' own culture. Reflecting on that point, Mendez & Piñeros (2004) argue "it is needless to say how necessary it is to provide spaces, in which students can reflect, discuss and express their beliefs about life itself".

Language and culture: According to Cakir (2006) culture and language are inseparable. In the process of this project, the participants deal with both together. Therefore, Language is a window to explain culture and there must be a point of distinction to express the culture. Taking as reference the observations, participants explained their cultural information in foreign language for the first time. Some of them feel comfortable and others feel shy. Gebhard (1994) explains that the value of observing the use of any language is to discover the peripheral role among context, the activity and the participants. The interaction from the participants was dominated in all the activity rather than the dominance of the teacher. Diaz & Nevin (2003) explains that when the voices of students emerge in the classroom "The students perceive their own cultural and linguistic reality within the classroom".

In this category, the cultural awareness is perceived when the participants' turns to

explain about the prestige of their own cultures rather than the focus of the use of foreign language. This consideration is explained by Kramsch (1993) adding that the effect of the used of the English language to explain a context is a tool represented as a medium of communication. In that case, even the participants had problems with pronunciation or code-switching the focus of this study was to enhance the cultural awareness. While the participants were presenting their cultural discourses the correction of mistakes was avoided due to the fact that participants needed special confidence to express their realities, opinions and feelings.

There is another point to reflect that is the case of the relationship between culture perspectives and language. Moran (2006) considers, that each culture can possess their own terminology. Then the construction of knowledge can benefit the interaction and the oral production of any speaker. Then, the efficiency of this activity was good in order that the participants acquired new forms of expression or terminology for instance cultural patterns.

Cultural products: In this finding there was a strong variety of products. Moran (2006) clarifies that "a cultural product can be considered for example artifacts, tools, social institutions and other constructions, like art, literature, architecture and music". The different products from the different cultures and the recognition of these differences have a positive effect due to products that participants explained given the reference what they were talking. Diaz & Weed (2000) explains that, a cultural system is not only represented by behaviors.

It must be consisted in how people wear differing from age, gender and social class. The different artifacts student brought to this presentation represented a point of pride without witness. On the contrary the designs such as posters, brochures clothing, and historical people encouraged the participants to use and spontaneous discourse.

Cultural values: This project not only created a learning environment. In addition the learning opportunity was increased through the manifestation of cultural values. A-L Zubaidi (2010) confirms that the acquisition of cultural values is represented through the practice of developing the sensitivity to culture, improve the capacity to understand, relate and interact with diverse people. In that way the result of each explanation of each culture, the cultural background and the respect for other cultural manifestations are clear examples of the demonstration of cultural values. The cultural values can maximize the discourse, the interpretations about the world. Those values are manifested during the presentations. Also at the end of the KWL chart, students could mention about cultural perceptions.

For instance, one participant said that “culture is a way to communicate in the world”. Moran (2006) says that a perception can control the destiny and the environment. If the participants have this kind of perceptions it becomes a cultural perspective by which the symbol of communication and the value of culture are strongly linked.

Identity: Alvarez & Bonilla (2009) say that

trying to articulate culture in the EFL classroom is a good way in which teachers establish a good contact with the students. On the other hand, students can encounter new perspectives, collaborative and dialogic experience. In this project, the participants had the opportunity to appreciate and portray different views about culture. This integration of culture allowed them to examine their own cultural patterns. Diaz & Weed (1995) add that students must feel comfortable when they talk about their own culture.

Because at this stage, the repertoire is motivated by the foundation that participants bring from their own cultures. This cultural background allowed them to speak about themselves. Social competence is visible because they could express about cultural knowledge, history, circumstances and social organizations (Stanley & Padilla, 1986) despite, the differences among the participants in terms of accent and customs. There was a complete point of balance when participants described in their own words their origin and the identification classifying themselves as members of a particular group.

Discussion

The exploration of this project described that approaching cultural awareness is a good pedagogical tool. This is because the relationship between culture and learning style is a strength point. In addition, Burke (2001) assumes that when a teacher activates the cultural background in his/her students the limit of opportunities to produce utterances is huge. Moreover, if a teacher accepts there are cultural differences in the

classroom; also that students learn in different ways. The application of cultural awareness is a practical approach since the students can reflect about their origins or cultural views. Student role was manifested through Collaborative learning. Stanley & Padilla (1986) argue that this kind of learning is based on individual achievements associated with group rewards. In this project, participants were involved and according to the analysis they made progress toward the goal of explaining about their cultures. Participants mastered a very good presentation and reflected on the KWL chart. Through these reflections, participants explained the reality about cultural diversity in the classroom and the meaning of culture and cultural awareness.

The teacher role was to activate the cultural background through a linguistic input. Diaz & Weed (1995) say that a teacher needs to give details of the world so that students perceive and engage learning experience. At the moment of the activity Participants showed a cultural understanding and expressed multiple perspectives, due to the fact that they were exposed through a comprehensible input (Kramersch, 1993).

The context offered a good environment for the activity. However, the experience rises to work on the revision of the program especially for teachers. In fact, teachers must distinguish the importance of cultural awareness on the impact to improve understanding of cultural difference. In the EFL teaching, the effect can facilitate and complement understanding of different customs and traditions furthermore a better understanding of the world.

Conclusion

Teaching cultural awareness needs to be revealed through a communicative process. In addition, there is not much difference between language and culture. But when English as a foreign language penetrates in a culture; a cultural orientation and explaining about the role of this language is necessary. For that reason the way to increase cultural awareness needs a cultural control, beyond a linguistic control. In fact, before the exposition of EFL learning practice teachers and students must consider the importance of their own culture.

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This paper is dedicated to my wife, children and all the students of English as a foreign language in Colombia.

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THE AUTHOR

MAURICIO BARRERA CÁRDENAS is a MA Language Teaching Candidate. Currently, he has been teaching English as a foreign language at the Uptc and Colegio Nuestra Señora del Rosario in Sogamoso. He belongs to the Horizons Educative program, working as director. He is dealing the project *didactic life* an important factory to design and distribute materials for languages teaching.

APPENDIX A

What do I know about culture?	What do I want to know about cultural awareness?	What did I learn?

