Maestría en
Docencia de
Idiomas

CULTURE AWARENESS: PROVIDING CONDITIONS TO REFLECT UPON THE EFL STUDENTS' OWN CULTURE

GLADYS SAAVEDRA SOSA - DANIEL ANTONIO ARIAS CASAS

glasa20@yahoo.es - dariascasas@gmail.com

Abstract

This article presents the results of a mini-scale research project related to the importance of the cultural awareness in the EFL students in order to provide conditions to allow students reflect upon their own culture. During the implementation of this project, it was evident that the students of a basic first level of English at the Language Institute at the UPTC seemed not to be aware of some important cultural aspects when learning a language because there is not enough exposure to reflection environments. This mini-scaleproject was framed under the action research approach following a cycle of diagnosis, planning, executing and evaluating (Baskerville in French, 2009). In order to collect data the following instruments were used: questionnaires, and video recordings. The

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de un proyecto de investigación a menor escala en la relación con la importancia de la conciencia cultural de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, con el objetivo de ofrecer las condiciones que les permita reflexionar acerca de su propia cultura durante el proceso de aprendizaje. Durante la implementación de este proyecto se evidenció que los estudiantes de nivel I de Inglés del Instituto de Idiomas de la UPTC parecían no ser conscientes de algunos aspectos culturales importantes en el aprendizaje de una lengua debido a que no tenían suficientes espacios de reflexión. Este proyecto se desarrolló bajo las características de un estudio de investigación acción en donde se diagnosticó un problema, se planeó una intervención, se ejecutó algunos talleres

findings revealed that cultural awareness is not only related to identity and communication but also to the dispositions that students deploy when learning a language in terms of valuing their own background, beliefs, and contexts among others.

Key words: Culture, awareness, reflection, culture awareness, L1 culture.

y finalmente se evaluó los resultados (Baskerville en French 2009). Para la recolección los siguientes instrumentos fueron empleados: cuestionarios y grabaciones en video. Los resultados mostraron que la conciencia de cultura no está solamente relacionada con identidad sino también con la disposición que los estudiantes muestran cuando aprenden una lengua en términos de valorar sus experiencias, creencias, y contextos entre otros.

Palabras clave: cultura, conciencia, reflexión, conciencia de cultura, cultura de la lengua materna.

Introduction

When learning a language, English students tend to put aside their own culture that is evident when they adopt some characteristics of the target language identically: ways of behavior, clothing, type of food, the music they listen to, etc. Irimia (2012) states that "culture involves a large variety of aspects, such as attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, perceptions, norms and values, social relationships, customs, celebrations, rituals among others". In here, it might be said that when a person is acquiring a new culture, he/she tends to face aspects inner to that culture. As a matter of fact, we teachers consider that "English as a foreign language is currently getting a higher status in comparison to our mother tongue, in this case Spanish, because we are being influenced by the mass media and globalization that somehow have exerted power, control and relevance to English as

the ideal language". However, it is not the role English is having in our society but the way learners approach this language without being aware of the richness and treasures inside their own culture and mother tongue. Similarly, being aware of one´s background might contribute to a more coherent and successful learning. The lack of connection between their own culture and the culture of the target language has been perceived due to some years of teaching at the language institute where the most used tool for teaching and learning is the textbook, and the classes are limited to the use of it. In this scenario, "the learners attempt to adopt the culture and the majority of aspects that the target language offers them without a real consciousness and usage of their immediate culture, the one that they are facing every day, their first language culture". This assertion becomes the prime aspect to contribute to the initial main concerns in this study.

Furthermore, at the language Institute, students have to take English as a requirement, for that reason they take his language as a subject without reflecting on what is behind learning any second language. One of the aspects that takes part in learning a language has to do with a balance that should exist between the culture of the target language with the one of their own. That is an aspect that Piatkowska (2011) claims when referring to "Intercultural communicative competence, the first requirement to develop such a competence transcends from the self-awareness, cultural sensitivity and understanding of their own and the target language culture in order to enhance cross-cultural communication".

This balance may facilitate a much more meaningful learning process:

> Language teaching with an intercultural dimension aims not only at helping learners to acquire the linguistic competence needed to communicate in speaking or writing, to formulate what they want to say/write in correct and appropriate ways. It also develops their intercultural competence i.e. their ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality (Irimia, 2012, p.326).

Through the implementation of this mini scale project the researchers wanted to explore the impact of an intervention on students' awareness of their own culture through the process of learning English. To get to this aim, the researchers designed some workshops not only to guide the students to explore cultural awareness by means of different activities but also to generate critical points of view based on the cultures displayed on the English text book. The participants of this study were first level students in the Language Institute at the UPTC. "Learning involves acquiring competence through action and experience" (Mathew, 2012, p. 206). Thus, students cannot acquire any new knowledge if they do not get contact with the reality, if they do not manipulate that knowledge to make it more meaningful. For that reason the population in this study was chosen bearing in mind that students need to be exposed to reflexive environments since the beginning in order to strengthen their cultural awareness when learning a language and learn meaningfully through experience. To create a reflective environment "the teacher should be first a culture teacher, having the ability to experience and analyze both the home and target cultures" (Jiang, 2009, p.144). Teachers are also responsible of creating environments of exposure not only to the different cultures that deal with English as a second language but also their own.

Statement Of The Problem

The Language Institute offers different foreign languages as a mandatory requirement to get the professional degree at the UPTC. The methodology used in this program is framed under a communicative approach. Despite taking a foreign language is a compulsory course; the mission of the institute highlights the students´ needs and interests not only for the local population but also for the national and international ones.

Teachers in this program need to create opportunities to meaningfully engage learners in their language learning.

To establish that connection, it is absolutely necessary to create a balance between the contents of the textbook they have to follow, and the personal life experiences of each one of them when treating those contents. That is, to achieve the purpose as a student of the language institute based on the contents proposed on the textbook but through a dynamic and meaningful manner that considers in a certain way their own interests, and somehow, an ongoing awareness of the first language culture.

That kind of awareness may be appreciated through an understanding of the learning process which does not imply only the knowledge and use of the language properly but the relationships, interactions, differences, behaviors, identities, beliefs, and ways of living and thinking among the participants in an EFL classroom. "Foreign language learning is comprised of several components, including grammatical competence, communicative competence, language proficiency, as well as a change in attitudes towards one's own or another culture" (Kramsch cited in Jiang 2009, p.144). Hence, teaching a foreign language implies more than grammatical or communicative aspects; it deals with students' own culture as well as the target language.

Thus, this mini scale project sought for the idea of providing conditions to guide the students into an environment of reflection about culture awareness in their English learning process. Therefore, the following research question was stated:

WHAT ASPECTS OF CULTURE AND LANGUAGE ARE BROUGHT UP THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTERVENTION EXPLORING CULTURAL ASPECTS REFLECTED IN A TEXTBOOK IN A BASIC LEVEL COURSE?

Theoretical Framework

The main constructs of this research study are: Language and culture, culture awareness, and ELF learning and teaching. The aforementioned concepts were considered to illustrate the reader with the theory that best supports this study in which students are provided with opportunities to reflect and to reveal culture awareness through classroom practices.

Language And Culture

The concept of learning a language can be viewed as the important factor of understanding the language learning process asa way to express individual and social experiences among societies (Nieto, 2002). Similarly, Kumaravadivelu (2009) defines language as a fundamental part of learning and teaching dividing it into three concepts: language as a system, language as discourse and language as ideology. The first one entails the linguistic components working together as a whole system. The second one has to do with the spoken or written language that shares close relationships in form and meaning. And the third concept refers to a systemic combination of ideas that contains power and domination. From those perspectives, language is a broad concept that could not be defined as a single or fragmented aspect

of human beings. It contains richness and particularities of each community as part of a mixed society. Therefore, one could not deny that language is more than linguistic aspects and goes beyond the mere fact of speaking or writing to communicate, it is a whole mirror of the characteristics of a society and for that reason it is and has to do with culture as well.Kramsch (1999) states that: "Language can be viewed not only in terms of grammar and functions but also in terms of a cluster of various cultural aspects or cultural reality" (p.3). According to this assertion, language embodies a cluster of experiences, knowledge, attitudes and beliefs that affect the way in which someone communicates through a medium; the medium entails the way it is used by a person to transmit meaning: speaking, writing and reading. All those aspects refer to culture directly or indirectly; however, it is not always valued and tends to be isolated or put aside in teaching and learning. "The learning of a foreign or second language without culture is inaccurate and incomplete" (Genc&Bada in Cheng, 2013, p.80).

Cheng (2013) conducted a study in which culture and language are considered in the process of learning. The study was carried out with nine EFL students in Taiwan, in which the main objective was the analysis of the perceptions that students had about culture and how they affect the process of learning. The findings presented that the perceptions about culture vary in different ways and there was a predominant influence of American culture. This study demonstrated the necessity of considering teaching and learning about culture in EFL contexts. "The profound effect of cultural learning on language acquisition takes time to develop, and it requires learners' awareness to promote deeper understanding" (Cheng, 2013, p.79).

Another study carried out by Shemshadsara (2012) focused on the influences of cultural awareness in Language teaching and learning. The main observable aspect in this study centered on the importance of setting an intercultural stance in the learning of a language. As a result an intercultural stance in EFL fosters students' awareness bridging language and culture. In that same way, teachers can be benefitted because they develop another mentality reflected on their methodologies and practices.

Bearing in mind the intimate relationship between language and culture, and the present characteristics of each one of them altogether, when people learn and establish bridges of communication to contribute and make part of a society, it becomes even more important to observe some other aspects of language and culture when the intention is to communicate and cope with various worlds.

Some aspects ofcommunication are completely related to language. But we can divide those aspects through two kinds of perspectives. Firstly, when communication is seen as the language itself.Celce- Murcia in Barletta (2009) states that communication is related to the importance of taking advantage of the speech acts where the mastery of the grammar of a language is relevant as well as the language functions. Moreover, Barletta (2009) asserts that the communicative approach does not cover the sociocultural component entirely, the one that reflects the ability to use the language

appropriately in relation to the social and cultural particularities of the community immediately immersed. This assertion lets us to reflect upon the second and a more complete perspective in which the act of communication, language, functions, and culture join all in one.

Canale and Swain (in Kumaravadivelu, 2009) simplify the aforementioned components of communication when they refer to communicative competence. They frame four main components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. They tend to cover more cultural components instead of the mere linguistic aspects. The first one has to do with the language as a system where students master grammar. The second one is related to the use and understanding of language knowledge depending on real contexts. The third one refers to a cluster of series or utterances interconnected as a whole in an oral or written form.

Regarding the strategic competence, it refers to a set of verbal and non-verbal strategies a person uses when he or she experiences breakdowns when communicating. These strategies are used to compensate deficiencies in communication when there is deficient competence.

The previous competences are used to have a better understanding of language not only as a system but also as a concept that symbolizes cultural reality. Cultural reality deserves to be understood in order to better comprehend the concept of language, and this understanding is reflected on cultural awareness.

Culture Awareness

Nowadays, there is a new possibility to reflect upon the EFL settings in which teachers and learners are encountered with diverse cultures and so explore cultural awareness. The mix of cultures when learning a language provides a broader panorama: more meaningful knowledge experiences and more worlds to be discovered. Knutson (cited in Shemshadsara, 2012, p. 95) points out that "the development of students' cultural awareness starts by encouraging them to recognize their cultural identity in relation to other cultures". Likewise, Tomalin and Stempleski (cited in Shemshadsara, 2012), emphasize the importance of being aware of the own culture to understand other people. From that perspective, cultural awareness encompasses three qualities: (1) Awareness of one's own culturally induced behavior: (2), awareness of the culturally induced behavior of others, and (3), ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint.

These encounters of both the mother and the target language are more significant when the students are provided with emergent conditions to willingly reflect on the differences and similarities among their own realities when communicating.

These spaces help students discover what is behind learning a language. By contributing to these encounters Lee (2009) claims that:

> "Communication with people when learning and using the target language depends on: (1) the level of FL learners' understandingof intercultural dynamics

(that is, intercultural knowledge, behavior and attitude) of human interaction and communication; (2) their socio-cultural competency in respect of the target language. It is evident that FL instruction must provide students with opportunities for learning about these two factors to maximize learners' communicative competence" (p.76).

In here, the intercultural competence takes importance. Neuner in Barletta (2009) considers this concept as a reflective point of view of communicative competence where the functional aspect of the language as well as the personal and social contribute to the students' enrichment through the learning process. Barletta (2009) claims "the importance of promoting learners' acquisition of attitudes and skills required for interacting with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds." (p.144). It means that language and culture cannot be learnt nor even taught as isolated concepts.

ELF Learning And Teaching

Foreign language learning is comprised of several components, including grammatical competence, communicative competence, language proficiency, as well as a change in attitudes towards one's own or another culture (Kramsch in Jiang, 2009). The previous aspects include an emergent component that determines the importance of culture in an EFL environment. The procedures carried out in the classroom must guide and look for common academic, personal and professional achievements in the teaching-learning process. Jiang (2009) mentions "the close relationship between the

knowledge that someone acquires about the target language and the culture learnt from the same language" (p.146).

Aiming at clarifying these concepts the English teacher may be the one who opens the possibility to include the cultural particularities of each student to enrich and empower the learning processes and even more, to develop culture awareness to understand the social differences and give the value to the own culture and others in the real life. "Becoming more reflective about their own culture and the others is a guarantee of a better understanding of the current personal viewpoints and the role that someone can have in a society" (Agudelo, 200, p.187).

In regards to the importance of cultural awareness on the part of the students and teachers, the use of varied material becomes another crucial factor to set a more reflective position in EFL settings. No course book or set of materials is likely to be perfect (Rajabi&Ketabi, 2012, p. 710).

The most used material in EFL environment is the textbook, this material has become in some cases the one that leads the classrooms' goals and the teacher is an obedient user. Rajabi&Ketabi (2012) conducted a descriptive study about the cultural emergent elements in four English language textbooks. As a result, in terms of the analysis of the textbooks, the authors affirm that the contents of the textbooks are mostly related to the cultural contexts of English-speaking countries. However, the current position of English around the world suggests that: "English needs not always be linked to the culture of those who speak it

as a first language. Indeed the purpose of an international language is to describe one's own culture and concerns to others" (McKay in Rajabi&Ketabi, 2004).

Nowadays, teachers need to reflect upon their main role in the classroom and retake the control. Galloway and García in Barletta (2009) support this idea when highlighting the fact that the textbook takes value depending on the usage and creativity of the teacher when using it. The success in the textbook usage is correlated to what the teacher can do with it.

It is worth noting that the value of the cultural treatment that a teacher exerts in the classroom may open the possibility to move from a simple knowledge to a more conscious and challenging position in the EFL learning process. As a way of concluding, language can be defined as a means of communication. It offers a wide range of possibilities: to get to know new people, to increase our background, to explore, and understand behaviors, ways of thinking, values, differences in cultures to have a closer relationship with others being part of a community. Thus, when we comprehend these differences, the end of EFL learning process is broadened going beyond the mere fact of communication but it enlarges a new variation of interactions through the intercultural competence, competence that has emerged depending on the individual characteristics of EFL learners, in such a way, that EFL classrooms become an environment more integrated with the outside social reality where the participants generate meaning, take risks, and are able to contribute with the new trends of the world.

Research Methodology

The type of Research

This study was framed under the Action Research Approach taking into account the cycle of Baskerville and Wood-Happer (in French, 2009). This cycle follows five steps of an Action Research Approach: Diagnosis, plan, implementation, evaluation, and reflection. In the first stage, it was a diagnosis made from the researchers' wonderings throughout some years of teaching practice in which the initial concerns were identified; in the second stage, a set of workshops were designed to provide opportunities to reflect on their understanding of cultural aspects reflected in their textbooks. When we refer to Action Research approach in this study, we attempted to create opportunities for students to explore their understanding of culture in relation to language learning experience.

Data Collection Procedures

The following instruments were used to gather information: questionnaires, and video recordings. Both of them were used to identify common patterns in relation to cultural awareness. The workshops were based on some activities focused on leading students to state a reflective position on how many cultures are actually displayed in the textbook for example the American, Colombian, British or any other.

Instructional design

In order to illustrate the reader with the implementation used there were some

workshops designed to guide the students to explore cultural awareness from getting to activate their schemata to get to know a reflective position on the topic already mentioned. The activities allowed the students to state a position, and be able to discuss on cultural awareness taking into account their English textbook.

The workshops aimed at activating firstly the students´ prior knowledge about some cultures in order to contrast with other cultures around the world. Secondly, it was pursued to identify the cultures displayed on their English textbook to establish a connection, and reflect upon the extent of their own culture inclusion; thirdly it was intended to activate students´ awareness by incorporating new knowledge about cultural aspects such as verbal and nonverbal communication, and misunderstandings, and finally the cultural awareness was the result of the students´ reflective processes. These reflective processes are evidenced as *follows:*

Example 1
Teacher 1: ¿QuiéntieneCanadá?
Student 1: Nosotros
Teacher 1: ¿Qué encontramos acerca de food?
Student 2: seafood
Teacher 1: that is?
Student 3: comida (pause)
Teacher 1: aja comida de mar
Student 3:… todo lo que tiene que ver comida de mar
Teacher 1: es un país que está cerca… tiene sus mares
Student 4: tienecomoislas

Example 2 (video beam projection)

Teacher 2: What about images, content in relation to cultures?
Teacher 2: do you see the images like some Japanese people?
Student 2: yes
Teacher 2: but there is another image down there. What is it?
Student 3: Paris
Teacher 2: Well another reflected culture
Teacher 2: It is a super famous icon
Teacher 2: … and this image?
Students 4: Piscilago
Students and teacher: Jajaja
Student 5: United States
Teacher 2: American people
Teacher 2: there are not Colombian people there
Student 6: no… there aren´t

Example 3
Teacher 1: ok we saw that in the textbook we have little about our culture
Student 1: yes
Teacher 1: We are going to watch some short videos and you will tell me about them ok?
Student 2: ok
Videos projection
Teacher 1: ok. What did you understand?
Student 3: … we have to be very careful when while being in another country because we can misunderstand things or the people there can also misunderstand us.
Teacher 1: right. Can we only communicate orally?
Student 4: no. our body also communicates. And our culture is reflected there. We can be rude.

Example 4
Discussion
Teacher 1: … you can also change the

concept of teaching English…
Student 1: yes
Teacher 1: because it depends on many thing, the material we use, our own concept because many times we teachers are not open to change, we need a critical opinion like teacher why don´t we
Student 2: for example I always have seen that when we go to another country United States we are forced to speak in English but i fan American comes to our country we get him/he a translator…

In the aforementioned examples, it is evidenced that students were using their schemata based on a topic related to different cultures around the world, then we find the different cultures students can recognize in their textbook asserting lack of Colombian culture throughout it. Also, we find that students become aware of what communication implies by watching videos of verbal and nonverbal communication. Finally, students state a critical position on what learning and teaching a language involves.

Research Setting And Participants

The Context

This mini scale project took place at the UPTC in Tunja. It is public university hosting around thirty thousand students from different parts of the country. It is well known and recognized due to its academic quality and excellent professionals. Students have to take four levels of a foreign language in order to graduate. The Language Institute belongs to the university, and it is the one that offers not only the languages to all the undergraduate students but also to people outside the university.

The Participants

The participants of this mini scale project were around 25 students enrolledin English level I. They were fifteen men and ten women. Their ages rank between 17 and 30 years old. Most of them come from the department of Boyacá, and some others from cities around it. The majority of students displayed very little cultural awareness when learning the language. It is evident in these extracts taken from the video recordings; they were translated into English because the original transcripts were in Spanish and English.

Example 5
Teacher 1: ¿What do we know before doing the reading?
Student 7: nothing
Teacher 1: ok, the first questions is
Teacher 1: how much do I know about these countries?
Teacher 1: so it is only to ask what I know in relation to Canada and its culture.
Teacher 1: ok
Teacher 1: what do we know about it?
Student 8: (heads' movement) NOTHING

In this example it is evident that some students knew nothing about Canada and cultural aspects related to it.

Data analysis and findings

The data analysis procedure was carried out by finding the common patterns in the answers provided by the students in the questionnaires, and the observation. The questionnaires were related to the relationship among the cultural aspects presented in the language learning process,

and the students' positions on the understanding of that process. Students' answers reflected a lack of awareness of the role of cultural issues presented when learning a language. This analysis showed four main categories that provide an answer to the research question: WHAT ASPECTS OF CULTURE AND LANGUAGE ARE BROUGHT UP THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTERVENTION EXPLORING CULTURAL ASPECTS REFLECTED IN A TEXTBOOK IN A BASIC LEVEL COURSE?

The categories are explained as follows:

Category 1:*Mirror*

This category evidenced that cultural awareness is related to *identity*. Students expressed that most of the time, they tend to lose their identity when they are learning a language because their own culture is underestimated and barely seen or explored in their classes. This is evident through the answers provided by the students in the questionnaires: the original version is in Spanish.

Student 1: "In my language, in my way of speaking, but above all the way I like to listen to music because music in English is my favorite".
Student 2: "Our culture is not mentioned at all".
Student 3: "Honestly, the book has a lot of different cultures, but our culture is not there. There is not anything about it".
Student 5: "In the English textbook the Colombian culture is not evident by itself. There are other outstanding aspects of more known cultures".

Student 6: Language is part of our own culture and that is why it is difficult to be far away from learning it due to language as well as culture are part of our identity".
Student 7: "The relationship that I find is that the language, English in this case is influencing our culture uprooting it, and forgetting it sooner or later".

Category 2: *Heritage*

Cultural awareness is revealed through the culture background existing in each student if this awareness is awakened and explored in depth. Thus, teachers should know who their students are, where they come from so as to support their students learning as well as it becomes more meaningful and fruitful.
This is evident through the answers provided by the students in the questionnaires:
Student 1: "THE LANGUAGE THAT IS BEING LEARNED HAS TO HAVE NATIVE THINGS BECUASE IF WE GO TO OTHER COUNTRIES WE WILL BE REPRESENTING THEM"
Student 2: "It does not matter the language that we are learning because our culture is somehow reflected on it".
This is also evident through the answers provided by the students in the video recordings:
Teacher 1: ... "through the listening excercises".
Teacher 1: "... to state a position and say what kind of English they are using..."
Teacher 1: then, we can state a position from my point of view or from my own culture, what Gladys was saying, I am able to design a strategy to learn English..."
Teacher 1: .." making a parenthesis, English is nowadays a universal language, it is the

language in which you have access to research, but if we refer to a person who lives in Leticia"… (Pause)
Teacher 1: Well English is nothing for them. He or she is going to need Portuguese because he is close to Brazil, yes".
Student 1: yes
Teacher 1: a person who is interested in only working in his country, a person who lives in a rural area well English is not one of his interests".
Teacher 1: and it is ok
Student 2: yap
Student 3: we create that culture like if they were the most important".
Student 4: for example when a gringo comes to Colombia we try to speak English".
Student 5: but if we go to the United States, they do not switch the language into Spanish at all".
Teacher 1: "And that is identity and it is cultural too".

Category 3: *Knowledge*

Language knowledge facilitates a better understanding of cultures. This knowledge empowers the concept students have about language and the relationship that emerges from the combination of these two concepts. Lack of knowledge is one of the main obstacles students have to interact. This lack of knowledge can be divided into linguistic knowledge and culture knowledge.Besides, sometimes this lack of knowledge is related to a misconnection of teachers' views when teaching a language.

This is evident through the answers provided by the students in the video recordings:

Student 1: "a lot of times if we do not know

grammar we cannot express what we feel".
Student 2: for example I have not seen English two years ago".
Student 3: "Me too, and it is an obstacle and it does have to do if I like it or not".
Student 4: "lack of pronunciation".
Student 5: if we do not know how to express ourselves what we really want to mean in front of a person from a different culture".
Student 6: I think you teachers are guilty because …"
Teacher 1: ups
Student 2: yes… because they give you a book and you work with it even if you do not like it yes?
Teacher 2: yes
Student 7: "and how about vocabulary or tell us that if we go to another place this is what you are going to need, you should talk among teachers of English to start teaching culture in the schools.

Category 4: **Communication**

In this category, the students think that language is mainly learned to generate communication among people no matter where they come from, whereas they are many cultures and customs to get to know. The target language is an aspect that facilitates an effective communication. The students also pointed out that the use of verbal (vocalization) and non-verbal communication (gestures) work as an aid to have a better understanding of other cultures. Consequently, communication is an implicit factor that affects directly in culture awareness. They also agreed with the idea that customs may interfere in the communication, and the acquisition of new knowledge of other languages, bearing in mind that each country has its own values,

roots, beliefs, traditions, and concepts etc., that is why any culture cannot be understood properly if there is no knowledge and awareness of what it is behind it.

This is evident through the answers provided by the students in the questionnaires:

Student 1: "a good communication-interpretation-knowledge of other cultures facilitates communication".

Student 2: " In the language and the good use of communication. To understand and comprehend what it is transmitting for an effective communication".

Student 3: "being not aware of other's traditions, their ways of communicating interfere in communication as well".

Pedagogical Implications

Developing cultural awareness into EFL classrooms will benefit the students´ learning process in terms of opening the possibilities of broadening a reflective point of view upon the understanding of the society in their immediate reality. Additionally, this process of understanding may contribute to empowering the interactions among participants of the teaching – learning process. Students take into consideration their cultural particularities in a conscious way aiming at introducing the outside world into the classroom, and those features are going to be reflected on their own identity.

Cultural awareness in relation to the personal enrichment becomes a relevant factor in which students' background; prior experiences and language knowledge might facilitate the learning of a foreign language successfully. Through this enrichment, the students are more reflective and can establish a strong position depending on their needs, interests, desires, experiences and expectations. However, students' lack of cultural awareness is not only responsibility of them but also teachers who can be more aware of addressing students' learning process towards a more open world of possibilities, instead of following a textbook and so limiting students' language knowledge.

Conclusions

There are many students who have reflective points of view in terms of their learning process and like to be more exposed to new trends and changes. Those students are not always sharing or accepting the ways some teachers of languages teach English because some of them are used to narrow possibilities of broadening learners' horizons.

Some teachers are sometimes more focused on teaching the language rather than finding new ways to engage students in a meaningful learning process that embraces students´ opinions, thoughts, needs, and background. Some of the advantages of providing a learning space characterized by the combination of the students' own culture with the understanding of the target language may contribute to thestudents' reflective process during the whole process of learning a second language and growing as human beings.

References

Agudelo, J. J. (2007). An Intercultural Approach for Language Teaching: DevelopingCritical Cultural Awareness. *Íkala, revista de lenguaje y cultura,* 12(18) 185-217. Recovered from http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=255020488008

Barletta, N. (2009). Intercultural Competence: Another Challenge. *PROFILE Issues In Teachers' Professional Development, 11*(1), 143-158. Retrieved from http://www.revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/10552

Cheng, C. (2013). Reflections of college English majors' cultural perceptions on learning English in Taiwan. *English Language Teaching, 6*(1), 79-91. Retrieved fromhttp://search.proquest.com/docview/1288356307?accountid=43790

French, S. (2009). Action research for practicing managers. *The Journal of Management Development, 28*(3), 187-204. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02621710910939596

Irimia, M. L. (2012). Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching.

International Journal of Communication Research, 2(4), 325-331. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1274744560?accountid=43790

Jiang, Y. (2009). On the integration of culture into EFL teaching. *Asian Culture and History, 1*(2), 144-147. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/839754275?accountid=43790

Lee, K. (2009). Treating culture: What 11 high school EFL conversation textbooks inSouth Korea do.*English Teaching, 8*(1), 76. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/926191644?accountid=43790

Kramsch, C. (1999).*Language and culture.*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2009). *Understanding language teaching.* New Jersey: Routledge.

Mathew, N. G. (2012). Reflective classroom practice for effective classroom instruction. *International Education Studies, 5*(3), 205-211. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1019433687?accountid=43790

Nieto, S. (2002).*Language, culture, and teaching: Critical perspectives for a new century.* New Jersey:Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Piatkowska, K. (2011). Foreign language learners' awareness of 'invisible' culture and their reading comprehension skills in light of intercultural communicative competence. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences, 4*(10), 131-143. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/906338595?accountid=43790

Rajabi, S., &Ketabi, S. (2012). Aspects of cultural elements in prominent Englishtextbooks for EFL setting. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2*(4), 705-712. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1328998357?accountid=43790

Shemshadsara, Z. G. (2012). Developing cultural awareness in foreign language teaching. *English Language Teaching, 5*(3), 95-99. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1009162042?accountid=43790

THE AUTHORS

GLADYS SAAVEDRA SOSA holds a bachelor degree in Modern Languages at UPTC. She is currently an M.A Candidate. She is an English full time teacher at the International Language Institute at UPTC. Her main interests are in technology in EFL classrooms, reflective teaching, and the role of materials in teaching and learning processes.

DANIEL ANTONIO ARIAS CASAS holds a bachelor degree in Foreign Languages at UPTC. He is currently an M.A Candidate and a full time English teacher at the International Language Institute at UPTC. He is keen on aspects related to critical thinking and the use of didactic materials in EFL contexts.