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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: A STUDY OF NEED IN A HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT OF PAKISTAN

Abstract

The study aims to investigate the need of Intercultural Communication (ICC) with reference to the English language classroom in Pakistani universities. The paper is conceptual – argument(s) are developed based on the literature and researchers' personal experiences and views. The rapid changes such as globalisation, technological advancements and increasing trend to travel/immigration of people to different countries for business, jobs, study and better living are making the world smaller and creating the need for ICC. English has a prominent place in Pakistan and it enjoys the privilege of a second language. Now there is a need to shift from English as a second Language (ESL) to EFL, where ICC should be given a proper place. As there is a special requirement of culture in language teaching (Kramsch, 2001), hence, there is a need to evaluate cultural existence in the course material of English used at university level and to modify the course outline to include ICC. Finally, it is suggested that in order to develop the Pakistani English language learners' capacity with the reference to ICC, it is inevitable to consider the international cultures along with the local cultures in the English language curriculum.

Key Words: *Intercultural Communication (ICC), English Language, University Context*

Introduction

This paper aims to investigate the need of Intercultural Communication (ICC) in Pakistani universities. The economic, political and cultural interests of people from all over the world create a need for ICC. The whole world has now become a global village (Barnett and Lee, 2003). The impact attached to the word 'globalisation' is positive. It suggests values such as, one world, becoming closer, acquaintance and sharing (Hamelink, 1990).

According to Crystal (2003), English has acquired the status of a global language. Similarly, Firth (1996) considers that the single foreign language preferred for global communication is English. House (1999) and Seidlhofer (2001) label the English language as a lingua franca when it is used as a tool for exchanging ideas between speakers of different languages and cultures. The English language is widely used by non-native speakers and only 1 out of 4 speakers of the English language is a native speaker (Crystal, 2003). McKay (2002) considers the English language as an international language, because it has been used on a global level for the purpose of communication across the world, but at the same time, it is also being used as a means of interaction in societies where people have different cultures and speak different first languages.

Further, English is the official language of international organisations such as the United Nations Organisation (UNO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Most of the countries in the world are using English language in one way or another. Barnett and Lee (2003) maintain that, with the invention of technologies like optical fibres, satellites and especially the internet, the world has changed into a single domicile. Furthermore, the World Wide Web plays a significant role in the form of successful channels to increase togetherness amongst people of different origins (Barnett, Chon and Rosen, 2000). These technologies, especially the internet, have increased the use of the English language across the world and

helped it to gain the status of an international language. The all above arguments create the need of ICC.

The official language of Pakistan is English and it is regarded as a second language in this country (Akram and Mahmood, 2007). English is being used as a language of business and academic communities in Pakistan and further, it not only meets the aim of advancement of the country, but it also helps to achieve the political and societal concerns (Mansoor, 1993). English is being taught as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 to graduation in Pakistan. The universities in Pakistan completely employ English language as their medium of instruction (Ministry of Education, 2009).

In conclusion, a Pakistani student, as a citizen of the global world, needs the tool of ICC to be successful in this world. The course material which is used for teaching the English is mostly not updated or what is called not fulfilling the current needs of the students according to the changing world scenario. The ICC is not included as a subject in the English language course. So, because of this whole scene when Pakistani students need to communicate with the people from different cultures or even when they need to use materials from world leading periodicals and books, they remain unsuccessful.
These all arguments demand the inclusion of ICC as a subject in the course of English language at the Pakistani university level – which this paper aims to explore. In the next section, a review of the related literature is presented followed by implications.

Review of Related Literature

The Concept of Intercultural Communication

The concept of ICC started to gain more attention in 1980 (Kramsch, 2001). The generalised concept of ICC revolves around the exchange of successful information related to culture amongst two or more

groups of individuals who are representatives of different social identities (Barnett and Lee, 2003).

The ICC is directly related to the culture. The concept of culture is perceived in a different way by different scholars and researchers. A number of researchers certainly consider that culture consists of distinctive conventional and cultural features, for example, race, nationality, ethnic group, and a country's geographical boundaries (Bradford, Kane, and Meyers, 1999), whereas others consider culture as an acquired set of common views regarding beliefs values and norms that directly or indirectly affect the attitudes and behaviours of a specific major group of individuals (Lustig and Koester, 1999).

ICC must emphasise the sharing of information between two or more than two units of culture that are rooted in a shared setting which helps in minimising the ambiguity regarding the other systems' expected behaviour by raising the understanding of other societal units (Gudykunst, Yang and Nishida,1985).

Kim (1989) explained how the phenomenon of 'acculturation' takes place in the perspective of ICC. Kim defined it as a process of the learning of a new culture by an adult individual who has grown-up in a different culture, when he/she becomes a member of another cultural system. Milton (1998) explained the concept of adopting the new culture by using two different terms to differentiate the level of adopting the new culture which is usually misunderstood. Milton used the terms adaptation and assimilation for this purpose. For Milton, 'assimilation' is a process in which an individual completely replaces his/her old worldview with the new culture, whereas in the adaptation, an individual adds some new behaviour in his/her existing worldview, from the host culture. Assimilation helps an individual to become a completely new one, in other words, it is substitutive. On the other hand, adaptation helps a person to become

a bicultural and multicultural individual, in other words, it is additive (Milton, 1998).

In the context of ICC, stereotypes are considered an important element for cultural generalisation (Milton, 1998). Milton believes that stereotypes represent the common feature of a group, and that it is a theoretical idea attached to different fragments of society such as race, faith, customs, era, or gender. According to Milton (1998), stereotypes can be positive or negative, but both types create problems in ICC because of many reasons. These reasons might include that, both kinds of stereotypes are not completely correct and they become the reason for misunderstanding the other partners while communicating. Further, because of these stereotypes, we do not observe the others objectively, but we view them in a particular way which is the proof of our prejudice (Milton, 1998).

Milton (1998) maintains that the generalisation of culture is possible through ignoring stereotypes, by means of establishing the view of belief prevalence. Milton further argues that, almost all sorts of beliefs always exist in all kinds of cultures; however, different cultures favour some specific beliefs. This preference of beliefs is called cultural generalisations. Although the mainstream of a society share the same set of beliefs, the outlook of some individuals in society maybe closer to people of other cultures. However this does not represent the whole society, because such individuals are not in the majority (Milton, 1998). Milton (1998) maintains that the ICC process is a complex phenomenon and it covers the following components: language and relativity of experience, perceptual relativity, nonverbal behaviour, communication style, and values and assumptions.

Cultural Awareness in Intercultural Communication

For effective ICC, Littlewood (2001) gives special importance to the function of cultural awareness and presents four different levels of cultural awareness.

- The first level is a broad understanding of common ground that different cultures have by means of shared information and the identification of this difference from other cultures.
- The second level is a comprehensive understanding of the common ground which covers traditions and cultural representations of specific social groups.
- The penultimate level relates to the awareness of the elements responsible for divergence and failure in communication amongst specific cultures.
- The final level is meta-awareness, where the individual has an understanding about the constraints of the first three stages of cultural awareness, is ready to settle communicative meaning and to produce innovative impacts in particular situations.

All the stages of cultural awareness are interconnected and interdependent and each of these stages support each other, and information/understanding at one level, nourishes the information/understanding at the next phase; however, the author of these levels understands that the most crucial stage is the last one, because of the deficiencies of the previous phases and the involvement of the agreement upon meanings. Through the four phases of cultural awareness, Littlewood emphasises the significance of the settlement of cultural distinctiveness for the point of reference to understand the individuals' intent. In order to become a proficient intercultural communicator, one must understand the culture in general and have a particular understanding of the conversational group in innovative manners according to the given conversational circumstances (Baker, 2009).

There is a need for more skills than mere cultural awareness to become a successful intercultural communicator. This argument is supported by Milton's (1998) view that, even by obtaining a great deal of knowledge from an individual about the history of another culture, it might not help him/her to become a successful communicator with a person of that specific culture. He further points out that understanding an objective culture might work as an addition to the individual's knowledge, but it might not be a source to his/her increase in competence.

The Relationship of Language and Culture

Culture and language are indivisible. According to Agar (1994:28), 'culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture'. The basic purpose of ICC teaching with regards to English Language Teaching (ELT) is to facilitate the students of language to enhance a broader scene of both the societies and cultures where the language learnt by them is being used (Laopongharn and Sercombe, 2009). Kramsch (1998) claimed that there is an unbreakable bond between the culture and language and it looks very difficult to teach a language without teaching the culture of that language. In fact, an individual assimilates a culture when he/she lives in that society, and this absorbed culture transforms when that individual interacts with other cultures or by his/her inner desire to adopt other cultures (Mansoor, 1993).

Teaching of English in Pakistan

ELT has always been a complex and much debated topic in the Pakistani education system. In the diverse Pakistani linguistic fabric, English has been significant, principal and influential, more than any other language since Pakistan came into being (Shamim, 2008).

According to Mansoor (1993), Pakistani students learn the English language because of a number of reasons. These reasons are basically related with their advancement and being successful as a student and as a professional person. The factors due to which Pakistani students consider learning English as a necessary subject, may include travelling overseas, reading and comprehending advanced literature based on technology, to pace with university education which is in English, to obtain access to international publications, including books and journals, and obtaining high profile jobs, across the world (Mansoor, 1993).

The Pakistani students also need English language for the purpose of social interactions. Based on the above need to learn English, Mansoor therefore emphasises that, in order to enable the students to use English in the local context, English language teaching should focus on these areas: academic use, interactive use, and communication use in employment, to teach English as a second language. On the other hand, as the students need to learn English to travel, study and work abroad, English language teaching should therefore focus as an international language for the purpose of ICC (Mansoor, 1993).

The Status of English in Pakistan

As mentioned earlier, English is enjoying the status of an official language in Pakistan (Akram and Mahmood, 2007). The official figure of the speakers of English language in Pakistan is not available; different researchers have different approximations about it. Rahman (2007) establishes that around 3.5% of the people of Pakistan have the ability to speak English fluently, whereas Crystal (1997) maintains that about 11% of the Pakistani people are speakers of the English language. Rahman's estimate also includes those people who consider English as their first language. Rahman contradicts Crystal's figure and considers it unreliable. Based on my

personal experience as a student and then as a Lecturer in a public Pakistani university, I will give more importance to Rahman's (2007) estimation. The English language is primarily used by certain groups in Pakistani society, including higher officials of military, higher Government officials, certain groups of media, higher education academics and elite class people (Shamim, 2008).

Multilingualism in Pakistan

Being a land of ancient civilisation, Pakistan is a multicultural and multilingual society (Shamim, 2008 and Tariq, 2003). Pakistan has four main geographic units (provinces) - Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhaw (Previously called NWFP), and Balochistan, where about 72 languages are being spoken by the people (Asher, 2008). Out of these 72, six main regional languages are being used, mostly by nearly 96% of the population of Pakistan (Rahman, 2007).

These include Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Saraiki, Balochi and Urdu (Rahman, 2007). Two of these regional languages, Punjabi and Saraiki, are supposed to be mutually intelligible and used in different areas of the Punjab province, which is the biggest province in terms of population – comprising of 56% of the whole population of Pakistan (CENSUS, 2001). Similarly, Pashtu, Sindhi and Balochi are the main languages used by the people of the other three provinces in Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhaw, Sindh, and Balochistan respectively. Urdu has the status of the national language of Pakistan and has enjoyed this status since 1947 (Mansoor, 2004). However, a limited number of Pakistani people can use Urdu. The six main regional languages of Pakistan are presented below, along with their percentage of speakers.

Languages	Percentage of speakers
Punjabi	44.15
Pashto	15.42

Sindhi	14.10
Saraiki	10.53
Urdu	7.57
Balochi	3.57
Others	4.66

Source: Census 2001:107 cited by Akram and Mahmood (2007) p: 2

This variety of languages and cultures within the Pakistan also create the demand of ICC to be taught at the university level through using the mean of English; because, although, Urdu is the national language of Pakistan, but only 7.57 % of the whole population of Pakistan can speak Urdu (CENSUS, 2001).

Implications

Some of the implications are based on author's personal experience as a student and a lecturer of a Pakistani university. The rapid changes such as globalisation, technological advancements and increasing trend to travel/immigration of people to different countries for business, jobs, study and better living are making the world smaller and creating the need for ICC. It is not possible for a country to progress without economic, political and cultural relations with other countries in the world. This all applies, of course, to Pakistan as well.

As mentioned previously, English has a prominent place in Pakistan and it enjoys the privilege of a second language (Akram and Mahmood, 2007). At present, its demand and importance in Pakistan has increased to meet the challenges of the global world of the 21st Century. Therefore, new vistas in English language teaching and learning have arisen for Pakistani learners and now there is a need to shift from English as a second Language (ESL) to EFL (Rahman, 2003), where ICC should be given a proper place. As already explained, there is a special requirement of culture in language teaching (Kramsch, 2001), hence, there is a need to evaluate cultural

existence in the course material of English used at university level and to modify the course outline to include ICC.

According to Mansoor (2007), as there is less local English material taught in Pakistan, it made English language teaching and learning less purposeful, because the material taught to teach English language is outdated. It is suggested that English language material should include three types of cultural awareness: the local culture, other Pakistani cultures, and the cultures of other countries (Mansoor, 2007). Incarnation of all these cultures in syllabuses may be helpful for students to obtain awareness about different cultures which is the purpose of ICC. This argument is supported by a number of researchers such as Li (1998) and Dogancay-Aktuna (2005). These researchers maintain that, if the material used to teach English as a language is not considering ICC, it discourages the students and they do not remain successful in the learning of the English language. Proper consideration should also be given to the social background of students in both the selection of and teaching English language materials.

Hall (1957) highlights the importance of ICC by arguing that culture and communication are unavoidable for each other. Therefore, there is a need to equip Pakistani students with a wide range of national and international cultural awareness. However, the truth is that students may face great difficulty when they have to relate the foreign contexts to their local cultures. The reason behind this point is that students are not exposed to international cultures (Mansoor, 2007).

In order to meet the above suggestions, there is a need to develop such a body which is responsible for the development of a curriculum that should help to meet the needs of learning English as a second and foreign language where ICC must be considered (Mansoor, 2007). Furthermore, this body should monitor and update

the English language syllabus with the change in international trends related to the teaching of English as a language. Finally, Mansoor (2007) suggests that, to make the English language teaching successful from the context of ICC, the curriculum for English language should include material from different countries and cultures such as the United Kingdom, United States of America, South Asia, Africa, Middle East, Europe and Russia.

Conclusion

The present paper aims to discuss and highlight the importance of ICC with reference to the English language classroom in the context of Pakistani universities. Further, it specifically emphasises the need to teach English language with a prominent place for ICC. The reason behind this investigation is the rapid economic, social, political changes and technological advancements in the world, which are making it as a global village. In order to cope and remain successful, it is necessary to interact with people of other cultures and languages efficiently. In this whole scenario, no other language is comparable with the crucial position of English. In the literature review concept of ICC, the relationship of language, communication and culture are discussed, along with providing the status of English and local languages of Pakistan. In the field of implication, it is suggested that, in order to develop the Pakistani English language learners' capacity with the reference of ICC, it is inevitable to consider the international cultures along with the local cultures in the English language curriculum. It will encourage Pakistani English language students to retain their motivation in learning English. Moreover, the need for ICC should be taken seriously by English language teachers as well. There is a need to prepare English learners to look beyond English merely as a language and to focus on how it is used in a border cultural framework, which is basically ICC.

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