INCORPORATING CULTURE OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES INTO ENGLISH EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN TAIWAN

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Abstract

Considering the general view that the world is becoming more like a global village, knowledge of related cultures is becoming valuable in the teaching of the English language. The purpose of this study was to investigate Taiwanese university English faculty’s perspectives on incorporating instructions of English-speaking countries’ culture into their teaching. A survey with a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was designed and utilized. Two statistical analysis methods including descriptive analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were carried out to examine faculty’s perspectives. Results of statistical analysis indicated that most university English faculty have a positive outlook on the incorporation of culture of English speaking countries into their teaching. This study presents recommendations made to university administrators, instructors, and researchers with the aim of achieving a more effective incorporation of culture into English teaching. The proactive incorporation of culture instruction into English teaching may be useful for institutions of higher education.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language, English instruction, English curriculum, cultural education, college instruction, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Approximately one quarter of the world’s population use English as a means of communication, and the number of non-native speakers is far more than that of native speakers of English (Crystal, 1997). Additionally, English has been identified as the first foreign language by several coun-
tries. This indicates that the importance of English learning is gradually emphasized and irrefutable. Mantle-Bromley (1992) pointed out that many language teachers only focus on linguistic terms in their language teaching. Recently, teachers are becoming increasingly more aware of sociocultural issues involved in foreign language teaching (Castro, Sercu, & Mendez Carcia, 2004).

Many scholars are aware that learning a language means learning the culture of the language as well. It has been stated that language learning should not be separated from culture (Atkinson, 1999; Brown, 1994). According to Kramsch (1993), cultural knowledge is essential for the development of communicative competence. The target culture knowledge will enable learners to use the target language more appropriately. Also, learning the target language culture will facilitate learners' target language proficiency. As a result, learners' language skills will be enhanced at the same time.

Language teachers were suggested not to limit the language teaching on linguistic items (Damen, 1987). Kramsch (1991) stated that language teachers should introduce learners the real life situations and cultural connotations of the foreign culture to help the learners know how to use the target language appropriately. Since language is for communication, speakers of the language have to know how to interact with people in the target language in real life. Successful communication will occur if we add culture into language instruction (Chuang, 2002).

Brown (1994) indicated that culture represents the integration of language and thought. Culture has a great influence on the language development and the way people use the language (Pesola, 1991). In other words, learning the target culture will bring a great impact for the learners. This positive impact may result in learners acquiring better skills of the language and knowing more about the target language culture. Liao (1996) indicated that sociolinguistic competence is crucial for effective cross-culture communication. With the understanding of the target language culture, it is easier for learners to know how to communicate with people in the target language. Consequently, learners will become better skilled at using the target language appropriately.

**CULTURE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Each language is closely related with its culture. Language teaching is also regarded as culture teaching. In the 1960s, the importance of culture instruction was firstly recognized and has been developed with different
focus on language teaching. It was found that the integration of culture and language teaching has been increased. It can also be said that culture is not only regarded as an element of language teaching, but also taken as integral knowledge of language skills and communicative competence.

Culture has been defined in different ways. Brook (1975) categorized culture in two parts: big "c" culture and small "c" culture (Battista, 1984; Flewelling, 1993). Big c culture represents all the best in people's life, whereas small c culture includes everything in people's life (Brooks, 1975). Papalia (1984) indicated that there are many concepts embedded in the culture, such as people's beliefs, customs, and lifestyles. Kramsch (1998) defined culture as the process of socialization and the influence of education. In addition, Tylor (1994) defined culture as a complex system that embraces knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and people's habits in a certain society.

Studies into culture instruction in foreign language teaching provided evidences that learners benefit a lot from the integration of culture and foreign language instruction (Daoud, 1998; Lin, 2004; Itakura, 2004). Facilitating learners' reading comprehension (Lin, 2004), assisting learners' communicative competence (Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002), raising students' learning motivation (Daoud, 1998), and enhancing learners' international understanding and dispels stereotypes and prejudice of the target culture (Itakura, 2004) were stated as the strengths of culture instruction.

Higher learning motivation leads to better learning outcome (Chung & Chow, 2004). In the context of foreign language learning, learners have higher learning motivation when they receive language instructions with socio-cultural aspects than linguistic aspects. According to Battista (1984), students enjoy the part of culture in the foreign language classes. Learners are more interested in learning the society and lifestyles in the target language country. Moreover, better understanding of the target language culture not only facilitates the learner's reading strategies in language learning (Wen, 1998), but also assists the learners' oral production and translation of the target language (Liao, 1996).

The development of internationalization brings a great impact on students' English education (Liao, 2004). It is crucial for students to equip with both the language skills and multicultural competence. Multicultural competence enables students to tell the cultural differences in multicultural settings (Gaston, 1984; Tiedt & Tiedt 1990). Ramler (1991) also supports the necessity for students to acquire a global perspective. Intercultural competence assists students to interpret the communication and different customs in different cultures (Liao, 1996).
Several researchers have stated the importance of intercultural competence. According to Sellami (2000), having intercultural competence entails having the knowledge and ability to enact appropriate behavioral skills. In addition, intercultural competence enables people to engage in effective communication (Liao, 1996). Moreover, learners can interpret gestures, codes, and other non-verbal signs of communication as well as conflict resolution skills (Jokikokko, 2005). As a result, in order to equip with intercultural competence, it is crucial and essential for learners to have intercultural knowledge.

Some studies were conducted to integrate culture and language learning as well as culture and teaching. These studies concluded that learners benefit greatly from cultural instruction, especially in the improvement of their reading and speaking abilities in the target language learning (Babcock, 1993; Wen, 1998). In addition, cultural awareness is also activated from the target culture instruction (Lin, 2002; Zoreda, 2002).

The contribution of integrating target culture and language into foreign language classroom was emphasized. However, difficulties of the incorporation of culture and target language were also discovered. Linguistic oriented curriculum, instructors' insufficient target cultural understanding, the lack of suitable textbook, and instructional time were pointed as instructors' obstacles of incorporating target culture and foreign language teaching (Castro, Sercu, & Mendez Garcia, 2004).

Studies into integrating culture and target language put more emphasis on how cultural information was implemented in foreign language classrooms. During the past years, several studies have looked into primary school English teachers' attitudes and practices (Chuang, 2002; Yang, 2004). Meanwhile, high school English teachers' conceptualization and instruction of culture was also conducted (Tsai, 2002). However, university faculty members' viewpoints were scarce. University faculty members' opinions will facilitate more effective English teaching at the university level. Therefore, this study was conducted with the purpose of investigating Taiwanese university faculty's perspectives on incorporating culture of English-speaking countries into their English teaching.

METHOD

The subjects of this study were all English faculty members from a selected university in Taiwan. A total of 35 faculty members participated in the survey. The subjects included 15 male (42.9%) and 20 female (57.1%) faculty members. All the participating faculty members have English teach-
ing experiences in universities.

With the aim of eliciting the views of the English faculty on cultural-related issues, a survey questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire utilizes a five-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Faculty members were asked to indicate their opinions on incorporation culture of English-speaking countries into English teaching by circling the number which represents their responses. A total of 74 items were developed and used in the survey. The questionnaire was divided into four major areas: (1) the understanding the cultures of English speaking countries, (2) subjects’ opinions toward incorporating instructions of English-speaking countries’ culture into English teaching, (3) current teaching situation in university, (4) the obstacles and suggestions of incorporation culture of English-speaking countries into English teaching.

To ensure the validity of the survey questionnaire developed, all items of the questionnaire were evaluated. Four experienced researchers in the area of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) evaluated the practicality of the questionnaire to investigate Taiwanese university English faculty’s opinions on incorporating instructions of English-speaking countries’ culture into their English teaching. Several minor revisions were made to the questionnaire based on the feedbacks provided. Expert validity of the questionnaire was acquired after the evaluation.

Data collection was carried out for a period of one week from September 20th to 26th, 2006. The questionnaires were sent to each faculty member’s office. A total of 27 (77.1%) questionnaires were mailed back after one week. From the questionnaires returned, 24 (68.6%) valid questionnaires were used for data analysis. The study used descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation, etc.) to obtain demographic information from the questionnaire. Additionally, this study utilized the analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure to examine the significant differences in different factors.

RESULTS

The study is based on a survey taken by 24 faculty members of an English department at a selected university in Taiwan. The subjects whose returned questionnaires were used for analysis included eight male (33.3%) and 16 female (66.7%) faculty members. The data analysis also revealed that four (16.7%) of them were doctorate holders and 20 (83.3%) of them master holders. There were four (16.7%) assistant professors and 20 (83.3%) lecturers. In addition, seven (29.2%) of them had less than one year teach-
ing experience at the university level, 13 (54.1%) of them had taught more than one year but less than five years, and four (16.7%) had five to 10 years of teaching experiences. The data also indicated that nine (37.5%) of the subjects had living experience in an English speaking country, compared to 15 (62.5%) of them who had no such experience.

There were four (16.7%) subjects only used English in class, 10 (41.7%) of them used English primarily and some Chinese to assist their instruction, five (20.8%) of them used both English and Chinese equally in their instruction, and the five (20.8%) used Chinese as the primary language and was used English to assist their teaching. Among them, 11 (45.8%) were less than 30 years old, 12 (50%) were between 31 and 40 and one (4.2%) was between the age of 41 and 50. Table 1 illustrates the background information of the subjects.

The result showed that 21 (87.5%) of the faculty members indicated that they incorporated culture of English-speaking countries into their English instruction. There were 22 (91.7%) of the faculty members agreed with the importance of incorporating culture of English-speaking countries into English teaching at the university level. The result indicated that 22 (91.7%) of the faculty members indicated that English-speaking countries culture instruction indeed activated students’ English learning motivation. The result of the questionnaire showed that 21 (87.5%) of the faculty members agreed that English-speaking countries culture instruction help students develop their English communicative competence. Moreover, it was shown that 23 (95.8%) faculty members agreed that English-speaking countries culture instruction help students build a worldview. However, 16 (66.7%) of the faculty members revealed they had an inadequate understanding of culture of English speaking countries.

This study explored Taiwanese university English faculty’ viewpoints on incorporating culture of English-speaking countries into English teaching. Several factors were found affecting faculty members’ culture instruction of English-speaking countries. Female faculty members who participated in the study expressed higher confidence in their understanding of culture of English speaking countries. In addition, female faculty members taught more cultural related issues in their English teaching. Thus, female faculty members are more likely to incorporate culture of English-speaking countries into English teaching.

Table 2 illustrates the significant differences between demographic characteristics and the principle factors under investigation. A significant difference was found between different languages used in class and faculty’s opinions on the incorporation of English speaking countries’ culture. It
implied that it is more direct and efficient for faculty members to use English as a primary language in class to introduce cultural related issues of English speaking countries to students. When cultural aspects are considered in English teaching, it is potentially more beneficial to use English as the primary language of instruction.

Most faculty members of this study agreed with the importance of incorporating culture of English-speaking countries into English teaching
at the university level. Faculty members expressed that culture of English speaking countries issues enhance students' learning motivation. This result supports the statement by Battista (1984) that cultural instruction stimulates students' interest in foreign language learning. Another finding of the study revealed that the faculty members agreed that English speaking countries culture instruction help students develop their English communicative competence. This finding confirms the statement by Seelye (1984) that foreign cultures exposure helps students to communicate more accurately. The concept asserted by Jokikokko (2005) that learners can interpret gestures, codes, other non-verbal signs of communication, and conflict resolution skills was also supported. Moreover, faculty members agreed that English speaking countries culture instruction help students build a worldview. This notion is in accordance with Ramler's (1991) statement that it is essential for students to acquire a global perspective. Lastly, it was revealed that faculty members' inadequate understanding of culture of English speaking countries hinder the incorporation of culture of English-speaking countries into English instruction.

With the goal of helping students use English correctly and appropriately, faculty members should incorporate culture of English-speaking countries into their instruction. Furthermore, it would be more helpful if culture of English-speaking countries were purposefully taught instead of briefly introduced as a small part of the instruction. However, faculty members' inadequate knowledge of culture of English-speaking countries was discovered as a major obstacle that needs to be overcome. In order to offer more effective instruction to students, foreign language instructors should not only be fluent in the target language but also proficient in the target culture.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Results derived from the survey led to the conclusion that culture of English speaking countries instruction is generally considered essential in English teaching. Meanwhile, most of the faculty provide cultural knowledge and information in their English instruction. Faculty members indicated that culture of English-speaking countries is incorporated into their English instruction and most of them hold positive attitudes toward incorporating culture of English-speaking countries into English teaching. In addition, faculty members possess more understanding of small "c" culture of English-speaking countries as categorized by Brook (1975).

Faculty members expect students to learn not only how to use En-
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glish correctly but also appropriately. However, an adequate understanding of English-speaking countries’ culture is pointed out as the main difficulty of incorporating culture of English-speaking countries into English teaching. Based on the findings, we conclude that culture instruction of English-speaking countries build students’ learning motivation, communicative competence, and worldview.

Since culture is always changing and research on cultural instruction is continuously updated, it is important for instructors to gain a deeper in-

Table 2. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for principal factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Understanding of culture of English speaking countries</th>
<th>Opinions on the incorporation of English speaking countries' culture</th>
<th>Current English teaching situation at the university level</th>
<th>Difficulties of English speaking countries culture instruction</th>
<th>Suggestions for the incorporation of English speaking countries' culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>5.009**</td>
<td>1.030</td>
<td>4.005*</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.676</td>
<td>0.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.676</td>
<td>0.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of teaching in universities</td>
<td>0.628</td>
<td>0.687</td>
<td>2.709*</td>
<td>0.359</td>
<td>2.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of living in English speaking countries</td>
<td>0.609</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>0.952</td>
<td>2.783*</td>
<td>1.179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.356</td>
<td>2.142</td>
<td>3.088*</td>
<td>0.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language use</td>
<td>2.668*</td>
<td>2.986*</td>
<td>0.373</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0.746</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: p-value<0.05; **: p-value<0.01

sight into culture of English speaking countries. Instructors should continue to obtain updated information and knowledge of culture of English speaking countries via a variety of difference sources. Academic institutions are suggested to offer more cultural related activities to enhance instructors and students’ understanding of English speaking countries. Authorities can subsidize instructors to go to English speaking countries for an immersed cultural experience. Such a valuable experience can provide them with the desired opportunity to make up for the inadequacy in their understanding of the target culture. Faculty exchange with universities in English speaking countries is another viable means for mutual benefits. Not only will faculty members gain more intercultural knowledge and different teaching experiences, students will benefit greatly from their interaction with visiting faculty.
Certain limitations of this study need to be addressed. The data of the study was collected from faculty of only one selected university in Taiwan. The results would be more representative if data from more subjects can be collected from different universities. In future studies, interviewing or classroom observation can be combined with the questionnaire to achieve a more thorough understanding of how culture of English speaking countries is taught. It is hopeful that more attention can be drawn to the promotion of incorporating culture of English speaking countries to facilitate both faculty members' English teaching and students' learning.

REFERENCES


Incorporating Culture of English-Speaking Countries (Dylan Sung and Pei-Wen Chen)


