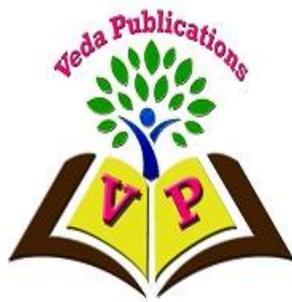


## THE IMPORTANCE OF EMBODYING CULTURE INTO EFL SYLLABUS WITH REFERENCE TO ENGLISH IN SAUDI ARABIA

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate areas of language-culture interdependence. It aims at the importance and necessity of embodying the foreign culture in the syllabus of English language learning, and to what extent this will help learners to acquire and use the foreign language perfectly by means of contrastive analysis of cultural items of both languages. The study consists of five chapters including the introductory one which illustrates the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, the questions put under investigations and the methodology of the study. The second chapter reviews the related literature about language and culture and its incorporation into foreign language learning syllabus. The third chapter shows the methodology of the study. Chapter four is confined to the analysis & discussions of the study tool, (the interview) besides the findings. The last chapter presents the recommendations and suggestions drawn in the light of the pervious findings.

**Keywords:** *Culture, Curriculum, Syllabus, Home Culture, Justification, Attainability.*

## INTRODUCTION

As a main domain in the issues of the Ninth Educational Conference in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), the status of English language syllabus had taken a large area of discussion. It is clearly seen that great efforts had been exerted by compilers to come out with a convenient syllabus of English for both intermediate and secondary level, therefore English language changes according to the modern movement of technology. The last two decades of the twentieth century had witnessed so many changes as result of the modern technology. Accordingly, the government had adopted many modern strategies towards teaching English in the different levels. The impose of the new trends represents the need which had gradually affected the field of education in general and the syllabus of English language in both target languages in particular. The conference declared that English language should be considered as one of the universal languages through which people can communicate with other communities. This forced the researcher to investigate the effect of culture on learning a foreign language. Concisely, this research has been conducted to see how far students can master English language if we consider some of the effects of 'home culture' on learning a foreign language.

## THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In this research, the researcher attempts to investigate the impact of culture on learning a foreign language in terms of why culture should be taught and considered as an integral part of the English syllabus. Concisely, the study analyzes the effects of culture on learning English with reference to English for Saudi Arabia for both levels: intermediate and secondary. Here the researcher will take into account the contribution of many teachers, scholars, researchers and compilers who have seen it as their goal to discuss the influence of "home culture" and "target culture" in learning foreign language. More specifically the main premise of the paper will be given to how far it is possible to learn English within the norms and values of home culture.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study tries to investigate the process of selection in syllabus of teaching local culture in Saudi Arabia as a whole in terms of syllabus design through

English language curriculum. The researcher attempts to show how we reflect home culture internationally, if we make use of English language as the first language in the world. Consequently, its benefit will go first to the new generations as well as to the whole people in the world to know more about Saudi culture. Moreover, the researcher also hopes to shed light on the process of selection of some cultural elements which are intertwined with English language, this means that to teach one's own culture, students need a second cultural environment of people with different cultures or views and different languages to be compared it to one's "home culture". In summary one can say that the syllabuses of teaching "home culture" that is incorporated into English syllabus today could only reflect a bit of the local culture of the people in the country.

## HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH

- The impact of culture on learning foreign language is very great.
- It may not be possible to separate the foreign language (English) from its cultural values and contexts of origins.
- It is essential to investigate on how far it is possible to learn English within the norms and values of home culture.
- It may be essential for us to have knowledge of English language by means of culture.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study, the researcher will try to shed light on the effect of culture in learning English language, frequently the following questions should be taken into account:

### Main Questions

1. What is the effect of culture on learning a language?
2. What is the aim behind imposing foreign culture into English syllabus?

### Sub-questions

1. Why do compilers incorporate some cultural items into English syllabus to be taught?
2. Is it possible to learn English language within the norms and values of home culture?

## OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

This stage of globalization has witnessed the need for many universal languages; especially English has been counted today as a universal language of

science and communication. Information in different aspects of knowledge is available in English language. As a result, the researcher hopes that people everywhere should make the best use of this language to satisfy their needs and to achieve the following:

- To accentuate that culture is necessary for determining the language.
- To focus on the necessity of recognizing that ELL must be our message to the learners with culture as a medium.
- To illustrate that language is an outcome of culture.
- To help learners to comprehend English and compare and contrast between the two cultures.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is evidently noticed that the effect of culture on learning a language has been the concern of many teachers and scholars. Lessard Clouston notes that in the past people learned a foreign language to study its literature and this was the main medium of understanding the culture" (Lessard Clouston: 1997). Brooks emphasized the importance of culture not for the study of literature but for language learning (Brooks: 1968). Similarly scholars as Hall: 1959, Nostrand: 1974 and Seelye 1989 made an endeavor to base foreign language learning on a universal ground of emotional and physical needs so that the foreign culture would appear less threatening and more accessible to the language. Another important point that needs to be dealt with is the fact that language does not exist apart from culture that is from norms or beliefs that determines the ways of people's life (Sapir, 197 :207). This is the same sense as in Good Enough's well known definition: "A society's culture consist of whatever one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for anyone of themselves. Culture, therefore, is the recognition of how a person must possess to get through the task of daily living, only for a few it does require a knowledge of some or much music, literature and arts (Enough, 1957:167). In this sense one should say language is an integral part of the social system and culture environment in which one grow up. This means that we constantly

create our traditions and values, and pass them onto others through the process of communication. Otherwise one can say, language is the social institution in the sense that people who speak it belong to a race of a particular community and this had led to the view that both language and culture are intimately bound together because both shaping and shaped by the society. To summarize one has to stress that language is an outcome of the culture as whole and also a vehicle by which the aspects of culture are shaped and communicated.

## CULTURE AND SYLLABUS

Decisions about the curriculum are a decision about values .This indicates that curriculum is a form of social and political action. This is true too if we see the purpose of comprehensive education as the initiation of pupils into the broad sweep of home culture rather than their differentiation to peruse different curricula based on their presumed abilities and interest. To summarize one had to say that in this study the researcher defined the term 'culture' to refer to all customs, traditions, values, beliefs and language of group of people, the term curriculum might refer to knowledge, skills, information, abilities and activities which are included in the teaching of any syllabus.

## THE SCOPE OF CURRICULUM

A key problem, as the working paper recognize is that the term curriculum is not simply a matter of creating a new content to be taught to children, that is to say curriculum of a school in its narrow sense might refer to the whole set of experience by its pupils are educated. In this sense the main premise of the paper will concentrate mainly in syllabus design, taking into account all the techniques, methods, approaches, and theories in syllabus design.

Curriculum of a school, more specifically secondary schools in Saudi Arabia, is no longer confined to project developers and theorists. Public concern about the shape and the purpose of the curriculum has broadened the base of curriculum studies. Accordingly this has led to increasing the demand of the material writers to evaluate all the new as well as the old curricula projects in general to shed light on curriculum issues of any programs part of their professional role. Furthermore, one of the

issues in this paper is to discuss the English syllabus through *English for Saudi Arabia* regarding home culture as part of it to be taught to students.

To make the government and syllabus designers to be aware of the importance of home culture in the syllabus, one has to draw their attention to the absence of Saudi culture from the syllabus in both levels. If these aspects were included they will help to make learners aware of their home culture, for instant religious beliefs are more essential for all students, then it is taught to be grasped broadly and firmly. This means that the achievement of Islamic culture in related subject like history and English will show us that role-play work in drama and English presents for the reflection of the religious culture.

### THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In this research the focus will be given to the syllabus of English where teaching of home culture is incorporated into English language. More specially, the researcher will take this issue precisely taking into account the book *English for Saudi Arabia*. The population of the study will include some of teachers of English Girls schools-in Alkharj, inspector from the College of Education –Alkharj and teachers of English in some private schools Air Base schools in Riyadh.

### III. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The major tool in this study is an interview. This indicates that the data collecting tool 'Interview' here will be a critical survey of the syllabus design, thus the research will analyze the data of this paper taking into account the subjects, the instruments and the procedures. Finally, besides the interview, the researcher also will take into account the most essential techniques, methods, approaches and theories in syllabus design. The population of the study mainly consists of six teachers of English, besides four English language inspectors who were responsible of Alkharj area, which consists of many secondary schools. Those interviews included items which have covered the main questions concerning the research problems. Also the researcher had designed extra items to collect data from the subjects of the study. The subjects are required to give full answers for all the items in written form as well as oral discussion because some oral items has been added to make the interview more effective

,successful and reliable.

### PROCEDURES

In order to verify objectivity and validity of the interview, the researcher initially piloted some of its written forms among some of the intended subjects. Then they are corrected and redistributed to be answered by supervisors, teachers and learners. The objective behind learners' interviews is to investigate on the level of understanding the syllabus items that contain foreign culture. Also the tools were checked and evaluated by ELT expert for assessing its reliability.

### DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSIONS

#### ANALYSIS OF LEARNERS' INTERVIEW

All the learners shared the idea that they easily understand and deal with the lessons that include multi-cultural items. And they said that the comparison between the two items helps them to a great extend in guessing the meaning and practicing the new language items(for example lesson 5 unit 3Appendix 2 page27).

#### ANALYSIS OF TEACHER'S INTERVIEW

Initially all the English teachers argued that culture is the total life way of people, therefore students may need the basic features of the" home culture" to be added in the English curriculum to achieve the following:

- To help students to know that social variable in terms of age, sex, social class and place of residence can influence the ways in which people communicate.
- Enabling the students to promote an understand that acquiring a large part of the words concerned with value judgment, good, bad, right, wrong ,acceptable and unacceptable in the culture in which the individual has grown up could accepted understanding by most members of the social group and also promote all the skills required in the language.
- Moreover all the teachers agreed that unless we incorporate some of home customs, beliefs, and values into English curriculum, it might seem as if culture cannot play an integral part of the English curriculum to enable the students to learn the language smoothly. In this way it becomes easier for the

students to learn the language if they introduced to some key words such as marriage, death, housing, clothing, and food. However some teachers argued that to learn a foreign language students should be provided by isolated items about cultural information in both target culture as well as "home culture" while designing an English curriculum.

- Similarly all the teachers agreed that material writers must be aware that the essential part of a language is the effects of its culture reflect upon the customs, traditional values, expectations, ceremonies, festivals, funerals, physical features, games and stories. This will help learners to guess the meaning & usage of the new items by comparing them to ones from their home culture. For example lesson 2 unit 14 from the book (Say it in English- Appendix -1 page 26). Concisely incorporating all these aspects of culture into English curriculum provides the students by some guidelines to learn English language while exposing them to cultural diversity between L 1 & L2.
- Consequently the majority of the teachers agreed that language exists as linguistics' habits as asset of practices, that imply not only a practical system of words and grammatical rules but also lexical and grammatical categories of language have been assumed to determine how its speakers conceptualize the world around them.

#### IV. ANALYSIS OF INSPECTOR'S INTERVIEWS

The inspectors of English had been argued that culture should be regarded as an integral part of the English curriculum because, even though it is inherent in what we teach, however learning a language is also learning the cultural knowledge and skills required to be a competent L2/FL speakers. The second reason for the necessity of embodying culture into English syllabus is to enable students to take control of their own learning as well as to achieve autonomy by evaluating and questioning the wider context within which the learning of the target language is embedded. Accordingly the aim of incorporating culture into English syllabus is to increase students' awareness and to develop their

mental images towards the target language, its culture and their own "home culture", helping them to make comparison among cultures. These comparisons of course are not meant to underestimate target cultures, but to enrich students experience and to sensate them to cultural diversity. Moreover, effects of culture on learning a foreign language enable the students to master some skills in the language if they developed an understanding of L1&L2 cultures. In this respect English syllabus must provide learners with isolated items about the target culture as well as "home culture" while designing an English syllabus to be taught. According to all inspectors, it is important for the material writers to incorporate some activities into English syllabus to invite learners to practice role-play emotions, they must write a list of several words indicating emotions, happiness, fear, anger, joy, pain, guilt, and sadness, to reflect different ways in which people from different cultures express emotions as well as interpret gestures, and facial expressions. Consequently such various forms of non-verbal communication increase students' awareness of understanding how culture, sub-culture or co-culture uses these signs to communicate.

Finally the inspectors of English maintain that the English syllabus should include other activities through which certain pictures showing gestures invites the students to discuss and answer some questions. Which gestures are different from those in the "home culture"? which of the gestures used in different situations or even avoided in the "home culture"? For instant in England it is a common behavior for the English men to teach "homosexuality" at their schools, but it is unfamiliar to incorporate it in the English syllabus, so compilers have to avoid such problematic areas. Also they argued that learning can best find its expressions and functions through the aspects of culture in the sense that literature is a viable component of second language programs at the appropriate level and one of its major functions is to serve as a medium to transmit the culture of the people who speaks the target language in which it is written. As a result exposure to "literary works" can help the students to expand their language awareness and develop their language competence. Of course literature can help

the students to learn English if it account for the values, believes and customs in the "home culture "as well as the "target culture" to extend students awareness of both languages.

#### V. SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS &

#### CONCLUSION

#### SUMMARY

To summarize one can say all the English teachers and supervisors agreed that students really need some cultural elements to be added in the English syllabus to facilitate learning the foreign language smoothly. Moreover all the teachers and the supervisors agreed that unless material writers take into account necessity of embodying students' "home culture" such as customs, beliefs, and values into English syllabus, it might seem as if most of the cultural elements of home culture may inhabit communication. The majority of them agreed that learning a second or a foreign language can not only based on the effect of its culture, but also may depend on the effect of different cultures on the target language. Accordingly all the English teachers staff and the supervisors stated that the positive effect of culture on learning a language not only account for the language skills acquired, but also help the learners develop an understanding of both L1 and L2 or FL cultures. Finally all the English teachers, staff and the English supervisors agreed that even aspects of culture in the form of "literary works" also can help the students to learn English language faithfully.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends the following idea to be studied by another researcher to adapt the idea to our holy Islamic culture and society. In case of Saudi Arabia as an ideal Islamic country, which types of language items should be excluded from the syllabus, and which ones should be included for catering idealism and appropriateness need further in-depth studies.

#### CONCLUSION

To conclude we can say the main premise of the present paper illustrates that evaluation of the effect of culture on learning English is a necessary component of English syllabus. This paper has contrived to clarify most of the issues it sets out to investigate, and has helped to promote a better understanding of culture and its importance in

learning English language.

#### COMPARTMENTALIZE SUBJECT WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE SYLLABUS:

- ✚ Material writer must also take into account that an essential part of the English instruction is the students' culture.
- ✚ On a particular note, the positive effects of culture on learning English should allow learners to master English language appropriately.
- ✚ Most importantly, the effect of culture to learn English should enable the learners to experience and analyze both the home culture and the target culture. In this respect, knowing of both cultures will open the windows among learners to study L1, and L2 perfectly.
- ✚ English syllabus should specify a common ground through which students can conceptualize or understand English and their won language by means of comparison.
- ✚ At any rate, aspects of culture should aim to foster empathy with the cultural norms of the target language community to increase students' knowledge to learn English.
- ✚ English syllabus should give the learners an opportunity to enjoy certain activities like a games, sports and festivities which reflect cultural diversity between L 1 &L2. A large part of the words concerned value judgments must be added in the English syllabus.
- ✚ English syllabus need an enlargement of the cultural item associated with language item to allow the learners to use the language fluently.
- ✚ Language items in the English syllabus should be a companied by presenting cultural class posters, pictures and maps to facilitate learning and promote a mental image of the learners' use of English.
- ✚ Material writers should take into account when designing an English syllabus to draw up a list of the characteristics and traits that supposedly distinguish the home culture from the target culture.

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Appendixes

Appendix-1

1.

Unit 14

Lesson 2

**WRITING**

**A. Look at the pictures and fill in the table with the names of the places that match the adjectives.**



300m 1889  
Eiffle Tower  
Paris /  
France



300m.  
2002  
Mamlaka Tower Riyadh  
/ Saudi Arabia



230m  
2700B.C.  
The Pyramids  
Cairo / Egypt



452 m  
1996  
Petronas Tower  
KualaLumpur /  
Mala

oldest	
most famous	
newest	
highest/ tallest	
largest / biggest	

**B. Which place would you like to visit? Why?**

**Listening**

**A. What is the correct answer? Can you guess?**

2. How old is the oldest man on earth?
 

a. 100 years.	b. 120 years.	c. 140 years.
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2. Where is the highest fountain in the world?
 

a. Jeddah.	b. Cairo.	c. Geneva .
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- 3; Which is the biggest city in the world?
 

a.Tokyo.	b. Calcutta.	c. New York.
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4. Which is the longest river in the world?
 

a. The Amazon.	b. The Mississippi.	c. The Nile.
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5. ' Which is the largest continent in the world?
 

a. Africa.	b. Asia.	c. America.
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**B. Listen to the teacher testing her students. Tick the correct answers.**

### APPENDIX -2

1. Look at these steps from a Saudi cookbook. They describe how to make Arabic coffee:

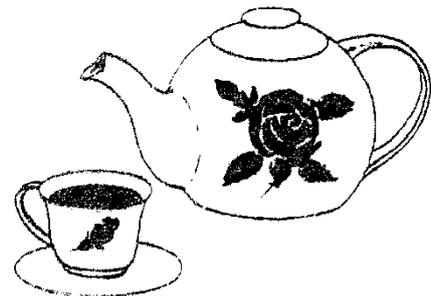
1. Put green coffee beans into a roasting pan.
2. Roast the beans until they become light brown.
3. Grind the beans.
4. Boil some water.
5. Add the coffee and allow the mixture to boil again.
6. Add cardamom for taste.
7. Remove from the heat and strain.
8. Transfer to a brass or silver coffee pot for serving.



2. With your teacher, write a paragraph with the title How to Make Coffee the Saudi Way. Use words like first .. , then . " Next; , After that . " Finally ... Try to join two or three steps together.

3. Now look at these notes by an English housewife about how to make tea:

1. Boil water.
2. Pour boiling water into tea pot to heat it.
3. Empty pot.
4. One spoonful tea for each person and one extra spoonful "for the pot".
5. Pour boiling water over tea.
6. Allow to stand five minutes.
7. Pour into cups.
8. Milk and sugar to taste.



4. Finally, open your books. Write a paragraph with the title How to Make Tea the English Way.

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