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The Role of Target Culture in English Language Education: EFL Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

This research inquired into the ways in which EFL teachers think of the role of target culture in English language education. Of special interest in this research was the issue of whether teaching the target culture is seen as important when it comes to English language learning and teaching in EFL contexts or not. Equally important was the question of whose target culture is taught. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with ten EFL teachers at different language institutes: five were from Khartoum, Sudan and five from Tehran, Iran. The interview questions, which were formulated after extensive reading of germane literature, explored themes related to culture and its role in English language education. The main and most important finding of the research indicates that EFL teachers think that it is necessary to teach elements of the target culture that are not at odds with their local cultures. Another related finding is that the target culture is conceptualized in monolithic terms and is equated with American and British cultures.

Keywords: Role, Target Culture, English, Teachers, Perspectives

INTRODUCTION

It is self-evident that culture and language are dialectically intertwined (Brown, 1994). As a conceptual structure, culture is encoded in and transmitted through language. Consequently, studying language presupposes studying culture and the reverse is equally true. In fact, Peck (1998) maintains that if culture is not included, foreign language teaching and learning will be imperfect and incorrect. In a similar vein, Purba (2011) takes it for granted that it is necessary to include elements of the target culture into the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL). However, the fact that English has become a lingua franca has raised many questions about the need for EFL learners to study a specific target culture. Birch and Liyanage (2004) stated that “the relevance of British culture to a Thai businessman (Expanding Circle) negotiating in English with an Indian trader (Outer Circle) is almost nonexistent.” Obviously, this suggests that the context determines the relevance of teaching a specific target culture.

Furthermore, both of the proponents and opponents of the incorporation of elements of the target culture into EFL language teaching and learning seem to assume that culture is unitary which is why the pertinent question of whose target culture should be taught is not even raised. In other words, whose target culture within the inner circle countries is taught? Whose values

are included and excluded? Whose interests are served by including certain cultural elements? The answers to the questions lies in what constitutes culture?

Numerous researches have been conducted to inquire into EFL teachers' attitudes toward the necessity for culture teaching in EFL classes (Rohmani and Andriyanti, 2022; Onalan, 2005; Damar, 2013). Though these studies were carried out in different EFL contexts, the main findings were more or less the same in that EFL teachers believed that teaching culture is important. Similarly, culture is used in a broad sociological sense: habits, values, clothes, food, etc... the issue of whose target culture is taught has not been adequately addressed, which is what the present research set out to do. This question is crucial because it unmasks the hidden power dynamics underlying the way culture teaching is framed and practiced. Therefore, this research set out to investigate the following research questions:

- Q1.** How do EFL teachers define culture?
- Q2.** How do EFL teachers conceptualize the link between language and culture?
- Q3.** How do EFL teachers conceptualize the role of the target culture in English Language Teaching?
- Q4.** Whose target culture is perceived by EFL teachers to be the dominant in English textbooks?
- Q5.** To what extend do EFL teachers perceive English Language Teaching to be neutral?
- Q6.** How do EFL teachers account for the spread of English language?

Conception of Culture

“The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people” (Marx, 1845, p. 9).

This quote encapsulates the ensemble of dialectical relations which constitute the dynamic process of social evolutions. Within this conceptual framework, culture is seen as dialectically bound up with other relations within the totality of the system. To put it another way, culture is a set of conceptual expressions of the dominant material conditions. This raises the questions of why certain cultural symbols prevail at a given time and place and then give way to a new set of ideas as has been the case throughout recorded history. The materialist conception of history offers deeper insights into the answers to these questions.

in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations with each other, corresponding to stages of development of the material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society. That this economic structure is the real foundation of society on which is built up the corresponding legal and political superstructure, and definite forms of social consciousness, the social, political and spiritual processes of life (Marx, 1859, p. 1)

This brief statement ties together all the different elements that go into the making of a given social structure at a given historical period. Viewed from a materialist perspective, mental conceptions such as cultural symbols arise from particular social relations as conditioned by the level of the development of productive forces. Therefore, the materialist conception brings into sharp focus the socio-economic and political dimensions of culture. By the same token, social consciousness is expressive of a certain mode of production. For example, chivalry, loyalty, and honour were the social and individual values under Feudalism whereas “freedom”, “democracy”, and competition represent the social and individual values

under capitalism. This begs the question of whose ideas gain prominence in a given social structure. In this regard, Marx shines a light on this issue when he says:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. (Marx, 1845, p. 21)

The implication is that the prevailing ideas in a society have a social function: to maintain and reproduce the existing social order. To put it differently, a given social structure is perpetuated not only through economic and political coercion but also through cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). Cultural hegemony is one of the numerous manifestations of class-structured society where the dominated classes internalize the ideology of the dominant class (Phillipson, 1992).

Such a class-based analysis of culture can be seen in the concepts of “high culture” and “low or popular culture” where the culture of the elite is associated with prestige and hence serves as a tool for upward mobility by the “lower classes”. looked at from global perspective, Western cultural values in general and American in particular have come to be seen as superior (high) and worth emulating by the rest of the third world (low) simply because they happen to be the ideas of the ruling power in the world.

Another distinctive feature of this framework is that it dialectically incorporates the seemingly disparate elements of culture. For instance, Adaskou et al (1990) make a distinction between four different meanings of culture. The esthetic sense with capital C which refers to the media, cinema, music, and above all literature, the sociological sense which has to do with “organization and nature of family, of home, of interpersonal relations, material conditions, work and leisure, customs, and institutions”, the semantic sense which is related to “the conceptual system embodied in the language”, and the sociolinguistic sense which is concerned with the “background knowledge, social skills, and paralinguistic skills that, in addition to mastery of the language code, make possible successful communication. (pp. 3-4)” Seen from a materialist outlook, culture with capital C is expressive of culture with small c where both are reflected in the conceptual system embodied in the language. However, as stated above, these four dialectically interrelated senses of culture represent the mental conceptions that, in turn, are expressive of a certain dynamic and interacting socio- economic power structure.

Culture and Language

Since language stems from social life, it would be inconceivable to think of the existence of culture independently of language. In fact, it is through language that children are socialized into the cultural norms of society. This dialectic interconnectivity between culture and language has been conclusively demonstrated by philosophers such as Adorno (1993), Foucault (1994), and Chomsky (1968). Likewise, the political and socio-economic linkage to culture and language has been extensively researched by critical academics such as Phillipson (1992), Fairclough (1989), Giroux (1992) and Pennycook (1998). For instance, Pennycook draws a dialectic connection between economic forces of international capitalism and the ubiquitous spread of English language along with its cultural baggage. Bapuji (1993) sees imperialism as enmeshed in a cobweb of practices such as economic exploitation, military coercion, political oppression, cultural domination and linguistic imperialism. He maintains that “imperialism sees education in general and language education in particular as main instruments for disseminating its culture” (Bapuji, p.40). This economic exploitation embedded in the spread of English language and culture was highlighted by a statement made by the Director-General of the British Council in its 1987/1988 annual report.

Britain's real black gold isn't North Sea oil but the English language. It has long been at the root of our culture and now it is fast becoming the global language of business and information. The challenge facing us is to exploit it to the full. (Phillipson 1992, p. 146)

This explicit statement shows the value-laden link between globalization and commodification of ELT. Marxists view this link as emblematic of capitalist ethos where the inbuilt quest for profit propels capitalism to explore new markets and in doing so, the world gives the impression of being the personification of capitalist value system.

Therefore, the spread of English language and culture is interwoven with the quest for global markets. It is an undisputed fact that initially the pursuit of new markets led the British imperialism to explore new places through colonization. However, with the downfall of the British Empire, American capitalism has taken over this role. In other words, the spread of English language along with its culture is concurrent with the spread of capitalism. Among the manifestations of this trend in today's world is MacDonaldisation of the world (Ritzer, 1993). The invasive influence of marketing famous brands on local cultures across the globe is self-evident. Each brandname comes wrapped up in a glamorized story that extols the

virtues of western lifestyles which eventually led to what Phillips (2006) called cultural cringe which is defined as a sense of inferiority whereby people feel a given culture is superior to theirs.

The ramifications of this state of affairs for ELT can be seen in teaching methods and materials as well as culture teaching and practices in that there is an economic-driven and hegemonic flow from centre countries to the periphery where anything local such as course-books, non-native teachers, accent and so on are perceived to be inadequate by the local people. Similarly, language institutes in the expanding circles contribute immensely to promoting cultural cringe in structuring language teaching and learning along lines drawn by the inner circles practitioners. A case in point, the mainstream teaching method which is perceived to be communicative language teaching is practiced regardless of its relevance to local contexts. Alptekin (1993) aptly remarks on communicative approaches and materials as being value-laden modes of behavior which reflect western modes of communication that may run counter to the traditions of local cultures, including learning conventions.

By the same token, it is striking to note the absence of serious issues in commercialized textbooks. This has to do with the fact that over the last three decades, there has been a relentless process of commercialization of culture through the imposition of neoliberal agenda on the world. As a result, learners of English are exposed to an insidious process of cultural commodification. Cultural commodity as coined by Adorno (1993) refers to cultural products designed solely for their marketable surface effect rather than their intellectual content. For this reason, mainstream ELT textbooks are devoid of any intellectual content and aid and abet in the spread of the culture of consumerism which is vital to the existence of capitalist system. Given such a set-up, language teaching tends to promote certain types of knowledge and culture (Pennycook, 1994).

The culture-language dialectic has generated heated debate with respect to the teaching of English in relation to its culture in light of the political reality of globalization. To put it differently, globalization raises many questions regarding culture teaching in EFL settings. Taking into account the inseparability of language and culture, the question of how culture is or should be taught has come to the fore over the last three decades.

EFL and the Question of Target Culture

The internationalization of English language, which echoes an all-pervasive internationalization of almost every aspect of life, has raised numerous questions concerning the incorporation of culture into language teaching and learning in EFL contexts. Some

researchers argue that learning a language without its culture leads to learners becoming fluent fools (Bennett, 1993), hence it is necessary to expose learners to the “target culture”. Others maintain that since English has become a lingua franca (Crystal, 1997), the need for learning its culture is irrelevant.

The first argument raises a number of contentious issues. First, whose target culture from the inner circle countries should be incorporated? Second, the concept of culture isn’t monolithic which suggests that there are cultural variations within inner circle countries, so whose cultural variation should be taught? Third, what are the criteria for selecting cultural information to be included in the language curriculum? And more importantly, what are the implications for language teachers? In other words, should non-native teachers take a course on the “target culture” in order to be able to teach it or should native teacher be in charge of transferring their cultural information?

The answer to the first question used to be straightforward: American or British culture. Anachronistic as it may seem, ELT still gives the same answer which can be seen in the mainstream textbooks. However, this contradicts the new realities of English as a global language. For one thing, non-native speakers outnumber native speakers three to one (Crystal, 2003). Likewise, many people from the expanding circle want to learn English for instrumental purposes, which mean they are not interested in the cultural aspect. For instance, Coskun (2010) demonstrated that most English learners in Turkey are learning English for Business or tourism purposes. The persistence of these outdated ideas and practices in ELT can be attributable to the fact that ELT is dominated by the US and UK for hegemonic purposes.

The class-based analysis of culture provides an answer to the second question (whose cultural variation should be taught? A closer examination of the mainstream textbooks in terms of its cultural content will reveal that they predominantly represent the culture of the upper and middle classes while the cultures of minorities are excluded. As a result, whether consciously or unconsciously the cultural values embedded in those textbooks are selected in terms of the social class in power. Mainstream English textbooks reflect the same marginalization of minorities in American society where cultural diversity is backgrounded and mainstream culture is foregrounded (Naylor, 1998).

Moreover, the incorporation of the target culture tends to favour native teachers over non-native teachers with the result that they have better job opportunities and better pay. Another downside is that these arrangements tend to make non-native teachers feel inadequate and incompetent because they are less familiar with the cultural content. Many researchers have raised concerns about this practice in creating political inequalities within ELT (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1994). In a nutshell, this position tends to maintain the existing arrangements in favour of those in control.

The view that teaching a specific variation of the “target culture” is out of tune with English as a global language makes intuitive sense. This has prompted researchers such as Kachru (1992) to call for “world Englishes across cultures”. Such a model is less culturally intrusive than the previous one and it captures the realities of the ways in which English has come to be used in this era of globalizations. Equally significant is the fact that world Englishes is by implication counterhegemonic in the sense that it doesn’t promote the inner circle cultures at the cost of the diversity of world cultures. This has led to attempts at incorporating world Englishes into language teaching and learning. Similarly, it has given rise to novel ways of conceptualizing culture teaching that are more in line with the needs of our time.

METHOD

Participants

This was a cross-cultural study in which a total number of ten practicing EFL teachers were randomly selected from language institutes in Tehran and Khartoum. Of this number, five teachers were from Tehran and the remaining five from Khartoum. The ages of the participants ranged from twenty-six to forty-three while their teaching experience ranged from one year to eighteen years.

Instrument

This is a qualitative inquiry in which audio-recorded semi-structured interviews constituted the main source of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study because it was important to let respondents express themselves as freely as possible to obtain their most genuine opinions on the questions asked, and at the same time it was necessary to collect data which were comparable. In order to meet these requirements respondents were asked to answer open-questions during the interview to ‘minimize the imposition of predetermined responses’ (Patton, 1986, p. 122). A set of open-questions were prepared in advance and asked in each interview. The questions asked addressed the research issues. Many other spontaneous questions emerged from the pre-prepared questions and varied in nature from respondent to respondent. It is noteworthy that the first draft of the interview questions was piloted and refined over time to remove ambiguity and to ensure that it addresses the research questions.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of ten audio-taped one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the above respondents based on the interview questions. Each interview lasted between twenty to thirty minutes. The purpose of the study was explained prior to conducting the interviews but the question of anonymity and confidentiality did not come up simply because the respondents were EFL teachers and the subject matter of the interviews wasn’t even remotely detrimental to their practice but nonetheless pseudonyms were used. The recorded interviews were carefully analyzed for responses that addressed the research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Since this study sought to critically investigate EFL teachers’ perception of culture teaching and practice, the responses to each one of the interview questions were selected on the strength of their relevance to the research questions. The Findings are presented thematically based on the questions asked in the interviews.

How would you define culture?

The first interview question dealt with the way teachers define cultures. It is striking to see how the respondents in both countries unanimously echo the definition of culture reflected in the English textbooks they teach; namely, culture with small c which is seen as comprising routine habits, customs, and traditions.

Culture is the traditions and beliefs of a society and different communities have different cultures. (Abdullah, Khartoum)

Culture is a combination of beliefs, traditions, some subcategories like beliefs, language, food, different things combined in order to make something called culture. (Shirin, Tehran)

This consensus among EFL teachers in Tehran and Khartoum on the sociological sense of culture as a way of life has gained currency as a result of the shift in language teaching from

grammatical competence to communicative competence (what to say and what not to say to whom, where, when and in what manner). The commercialized English Textbooks are fraught with culture c topics which supposedly aim at familiarizing learners with so called appropriate use of language.

Such conceptualization of culture which permeates ELT profession covers only the observable manifestation of culture i.e. what is going on but what is left out of this understanding of culture is how we got here. In other words, ELT establishment set the framework within which culture is viewed and EFL teachers conform to it.

How do you see the link between language and culture?

As with the definition of culture, this question also yielded unanimity in the sense that all the responses indicate that language and culture are perceived as inseparable. Though the nature of this link isn't clear to them, language is seen as a medium for transmitting culture.

Language is the means for transferring culture. To show your culture, you have to use language. (Ahmed, Tehran)

Teaching a new language is teaching a new culture. Once you want to teach a language, you have to contextualize it through cultural ethics. (Hamid, Tehran)

Language and culture are inseparable. (Abdullah, Khartoum)

If you separate the culture and language, we can't learn the language at all. (Modasir, Khartoum)

What is the role of the target culture in language teaching and learning?

Although all the respondents agreed that teaching the target culture is important, some expressed ambivalence over the issue of teaching elements of the target culture that run counter to the local culture.

One cannot teach a language without first having a cultural understanding of the people (mainly the native speakers) who speak that language. To teach a language often requires knowing and teaching *about* that language and much of this about-the- language- includes cultural elements. Being as such, teaching a language becomes more problematic where the language taught and learned is more at odds with the learners' first language culturally. (Ali, Tehran)

While acknowledging the need to teach culture alongside language, Ali seems to question the soundness of doing this especially when the target and local cultures clash. In order to circumvent this conundrum, He draws learners' attention to cultural differences.

It is important to remind students of the cultural differences especially when we come to sharp oppositions. Sometimes it's good to change the content (its setting and atmosphere) so as it comes closer to the learners' culture while preserving the important linguistic elements. Generally *what* determines *how* to deal with something. There are also some positive points in every culture and if teachers highlight them, it may help reduce the negative aspects. (Ali, Tehran)

Ali explicitly challenges the unexamined but widely held belief that focusing on the target culture is necessary. He seems to suggest that what matters ultimately is the function rather than the context which he feels free to ignore if it happens to clash with the local one. His counterpart in Khartoum went even further in making a connection between the practice of teaching the target culture and American domination.

English language represents American culture. This is globalization. So, they try to teach their language to spread their culture. (Ahmed, Khartoum)

This is a clear reference to the role of English language in globalizing American culture. However, Ahmed believes that learning English can cut both ways in the sense that English language can be used to familiarize the western world with Islamic culture. Similarly, he shares Ali's view that some elements of the target culture are beneficial for learning.

As Muslims, our goal is to display our culture to the western world. There are good aspects of western culture but not all of them are good. So, we have to take what is good and try to apply in our own lives. (Ahmed, Khartoum)

I focus on the target culture only when it doesn't influence my local culture. If something has bad influence on my local culture, I try to avoid it. I focus on the language skills. (Omar, Khartoum)

Most EFL teachers in Khartoum share this perception of the role of the target culture while only one teacher from Tehran (Ali) subscribes to this view. What's more, EFL teachers from Tehran seem to take it for granted that teaching the target culture is necessary.

When you want to learn a language it is very important to get familiar with the culture which that language has come from. You would know how to express your feelings. It is very important to concentrate on target culture in the class (Sahar, Tehran)

Overall, the respondents from both countries agree on the role of target culture in language learning. However, they differ as to what to do when elements of the target culture are incompatible with the local one. EFL teachers in Khartoum, for the most part, tend to eschew teaching a particular cultural aspect of the target language when it is perceived to have a bad influence on the local one while almost all EFL teachers in Tehran find it necessary to focus on the target culture.

Whose target culture is taught?

The responses to this question reveal a monolithic understanding of culture. In the view of EFL teachers in both Tehran and Khartoum, target culture is mostly associated with American culture and partly with British culture. None of them questioned the appropriacy of looking at culture as uniform and homogeneous and more importantly none of them considered the question of whose cultural variation or subculture within America or Britain is represented and reflected in the practice of ELT.

In the textbooks I currently teach English culture (mostly American one) is dominant. Whenever there may be parts about other cultures, they mostly attempt a comparison with the American culture. (Ali, Tehran)

American culture is the strongest one because of may be political, economic, or some other reasons. Most teachers are trained to speak with American accent and most of the books available in the market are American again. So, I think American culture is being expanded in our country. (Shirin, Tehran)

Though Shirin is aware of how pervasive American culture is in EFL contexts, she seems to think this state of affairs is okay because America happens to be powerful economically and politically. However, there is no doubt in her mind that American culture in its monolithic sense is being taught.

I teach headway and it is heavily British culture which includes something like Halloween which is a Christian celebration and we don't have it in Sudan. (Ahmed, Khartoum)

The textbooks which I teach in Sudan are almost British or American culture. They contain the culture of the origin of the curriculum. (Omar, Khartoum)

The perception of EFL teachers in Sudan seems to indicate that British rather than American culture is predominant in the textbooks taught in Khartoum. This may have to do with the fact that Sudan was colonized by Britain. However, American textbooks seem to be vying with British ones to gain the upper hand. Still, whether it is British or American, the general sense is that culture is monolithic.

It is striking that all the participants didn't entertain the idea that the prevailing culture in ELT textbooks and practices reflect the lifestyle, accent, behavior, and attitudes of the dominant social class (upper Middle white class) whether in Britain or America. In other words, the subaltern cultures of minorities such as African-American, Hispanic and Native Americans aren't represented.

How neutral is English Language Teaching?

This question asked the respondents to make a comment on the following statement: English language teaching is neutral and value-free. The comments made by the respondents were almost unanimous in maintaining that besides the language, culture is also being taught through Textbooks which indicates an implicit awareness of hidden curriculum. Below are some quotes to illustrate this point:

I don't know about neutral. I don't think it can be neutral. You see language has a psychology and certain belief system attached to it and to teach it is to teach that belief system as well (Arash, Tehran)

No. you can never separate language from culture. Definitely it comes with the culture that the language comes from. (Sara, Tehran)

Again I have to go back to the cultural items because definitely when you are teaching American books you are going to get American culture in them. (Ibrahim, Khartoum)

If someone is learning a language, he or she is getting another culture. When you are learning about language, you are learning about another country. In Sudan, having a boyfriend or a girlfriend is something decried and it is against the law, it is against the religion. So when you start teaching it, you must ask about blind date, boyfriend, girlfriend,

and ex-boyfriend. It is a change in culture, you are also teaching that. So definitely it isn't value-free. (Mohammad, Khartoum)

To recap, this question elicited responses echoing what critical educators believe, namely that ELT is highly charged with hidden agenda but once more the main difference is that almost all the respondents hold the implicit belief that teaching those hidden agendas is part and parcel of ELT whereas critical educators explicitly hold the belief that ELT doesn't necessarily have to be embedded in those hidden agendas.

How do you account for the spread of English Language?

Unlike their counterparts in Khartoum, most EFL teachers in Tehran hold a dehistoricized view of the spread of English. The dominant perception is that technology, the media, and easiness of learning account for the internationalization of English language. Even when the role of power and domination is acknowledged, it is somehow perceived to be less significant than other factors. Below are some responses to demonstrate this point:

Because of technology, media, internet, and satellite. (Shirin, Tehran)

Different things especially new technologies such as internet and also satellite. (Hamid, Tehran)

I have no idea. I think it is the easiest one in my opinion or maybe it was exported when Europeans left to America. They somehow spread it around the world and they colonized different countries. (Sara, Tehran)

I have read something about how it spread but now I don't remember. In my opinion, it is easy and I love it. Maybe it can be for political reasons or may be some conquerors. (Mostafa, Tehran)

These views indicate that the history of how English language became what it is today is a matter of indifference to them. However, Ali seems to have a good grasp of the way in which English has gained its lingua franca status. Once more, he shares this view with his counterparts in Khartoum.

What made it international, I think, was and has been more a matter of power and domination, regardless of the fact that we need a language to be a common means of communication throughout the world. English became international since powerful people at a certain time in our contemporary history used it and wanted others to use it. There might be other reasons as well such as its relative easiness to learn, but political reasons override others. (Ali, Tehran)

American dominance and British Dominance by the exploitation of human resources. (Ahemd, Khartoum)

British and American colonization. (Omar, Khartoum)

One plausible explanation for why EFL teachers in Khartoum are well aware of the history of the spread of English is the British colonization of some African countries including Sudan. However, there seems to be a general sense in which the global spread of English is seen as inevitable, natural, and independent of any historical trajectory. For instance, according to

some EFL teachers in Tehran, English language is endowed with the quality of being easy to pick up compared to other languages.

Discussion

These findings offer deeper insights into the ways in which culture teaching is structured in EFL contexts. The main insight has to do with the fact that the mainstream approach to teaching culture aims at legitimizing, naturalizing, and ultimately perpetuating the existing capitalist social order. This is done primarily by getting the dominated to internalize certain categories of thoughts held by the dominant whereby the dominated become complicit in their own domination (Gramsci, 1971). Within ELT, this translates into infusing language teaching and learning with inner circle ethos which is extension of capitalist ethos. As a consequence, and as with every aspect of life under capitalism, there is a terrible disjunction between such practices and the realities of English as a global language. This anachronism is particularly pronounced when it comes to culture teaching and practices. To put it differently, despite the fact that English is recognized as a lingua franca, teaching the “target culture” is still perceived to be necessary as indicated by the respondents in this study. The relevance of the “target culture” in our globalized world isn’t questioned.

Another misleading perception of culture held by the participants in this study has to do with its monolithic nature. This way of looking at culture masks the power relations embedded in any class-divided society with the result that the culture of the dominant class rides roughshod over the cultures of the dominated. Incidentally, the few EFL teachers who are concerned about safeguarding their “culture” from the culturally intrusive materials of ELT are themselves gatekeepers of the dominant culture in their own class-structured societies. For instance, while Sudan is characterized by an amazing cultural diversity, EFL teachers in Khartoum tend to think of Sudan as having a uniform culture (Islamic, Arabic) which they seem a bit anxious to shield from what they think is the bad influence of the target culture of English language. So, EFL teachers can end up wittingly or unwittingly becoming self-appointed guardians of the status quo.

Another interesting finding is the way in which English language is fetishized especially by most EFL teachers in Tehran. They seem to think that English has spread worldwide because of some intrinsic qualities peculiar to English language. This perception smacks of ideological mystification where reality is distorted to mask it. Even when the recognition of the colonial history behind the spread of English slowly dawns upon them, it is seen as inevitable. What’s more, there is a sense that how English spread is irrelevant; as a result, they seem unconcerned about this question.

Having said that, the ideologically-laden ELT practices are not entirely unchecked. There seems to be spotted resistance when it comes to teaching cultural content related to English language. This is especially true in Khartoum where teachers, for the most part, appear to be charier of teaching elements of the target culture if they happen to be intrusively at variance with their local culture. Still, this resistance isn’t strong enough to constitute a counterweight to the mainstream pedagogical practices.

CONCLUSION

The implications of these findings are fourfold; for teachers, for students, for teacher educators and for the profession as a whole. The implications for teachers are that the overwhelming majority of them are deprived of opportunities to broaden their teaching horizons by exploring other venues. Language teachers in Tehran and Khartoum find themselves exposed just to what is loosely defined as communicative teaching method and they go about teaching without being given another perspective on it. Consequently, as stated above,

teachers end up disempowered and deskilled. Moreover, critical awareness isn't a viable option when the market is solely dominated by mainstream pedagogy.

Teacher education should set the stage for prospective teachers to engage in praxis with a view to making a difference in the profession and the world at large. One way to do this is to reinforce their intrinsic motivation for teaching by encouraging them to have a big say in curriculum design and in developing their own pedagogical approach. Unfortunately, most EFL teachers are caught up in a pedagogical set-up with very little room for their own creativity. Ideally, teacher education should help teachers take up the challenge of playing the role of change agents. Merryfield (2000) argued that teachers should be trained for globally interconnected world.

The implication for students has to do with the need for locally-situated materials that can best reflect the fact that teaching a target culture is irrelevant for EFL learners who want to learn English in order to communicate with their counterparts elsewhere. Therefore, EFL teachers and learners can negotiate to create a fulfilling learning environment based on the lived experiences of the learners. Learners can easily relate to materials that flow from their local context.

The implications for the profession are that with mainstream pedagogy being very much in the foreground, there isn't much hope to capture the complexity of language teaching and learning in an ever changing world. As a consequence, the profession lags behind. ELT profession would benefit a lot if alternative approaches were allowed to gain a foothold.

The most significant and general implication of this finding is that a radical reconfiguration of culture teaching is essential in order to contribute to transforming our world which is hovering on the brink of total annihilation. This can be done by incorporating a content that would challenge the existing status quo and at the same time offer a vision of a better world. This approach has the merit of counteracting the insidious mainstream ideology. For instance, instead of the trivial cultural content of mainstream English textbooks which ultimately reinforces the existing social order such as a reading titled "shop till you drop" in Interchange for elementary level, we can choose a reading that promotes ethical consumption by spotlighting sweatshops. The idea is to come up with a cultural curriculum and pedagogy that would offer a totally new perspective on every aspect of our life.

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