





Exploring Cultural Interaction as a Tool for Language Learning: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the importance of intercultural interaction as a language-learning tool among students who are majoring in English as a Foreign Language through various methodologies. The study compares the effect of exposure to target culture on linguistic competence, pragmatic awareness and affective aspects of language acquisition based on the theory of intercultural communicative competence and sociocultural learning. The quantitative data were gathered with the help of a Cultural Interaction and Language Learning Questionnaire, which was given to 80 students, and semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with a subsample of 20 students. The findings reveal that there is a strong agreement regarding the cognitive and motivational advantages of genuine cultural interest e.g., enhanced language fluency, listening comprehensiveness and acquisition of slang. Nevertheless, the statistics also point to major emotional issues, such as anxiety and low self-esteem in real-life interactions, which implicates a gap between the theoretical support and the real-life reality. Communicative resilience, identity reframing and the reframing of intercultural dissonance were also found to be processes in the thematic analysis as developmental opportunities. It is concluded that intercultural integration is a two-sided and yet a transformative factor in language learning which demands pedagogical methods that promote its cognitive and emotional requirements. The paper explains the inferences of this in the context of developing intercultural competence and significant language use in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL)

Keywords: cultural interaction, learning language, mixed-method research, intercultural communicative competence, EFL, sociocultural theory, pragmatic competence, identity negotiation



استكشاف التفاعل الثقافي كأداة لتعلم اللغة: دراسة باستخدام منهجية مختلطة

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المستخلص :

تحاول هذه الدراسة استكشاف أهمية التفاعل بين الثقافات كأداة لتعلم اللغة بين الطلاب المتخصصين في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من خلال منهجيات متنوعة. تقارن الدراسة تأثير التعرض للثقافة المستهدفة على الكفاءة اللغوية، والوعي التداولي، والجوانب الانفعالية لاكتساب اللغة، مستندة إلى نظرية الكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافات والتعلم الاجتماعي الثقافي. تم جمع البيانات الكمية بمساعدة استبيان التفاعل الثقافي وتعلم اللغة الذي تم توزيعه على ٨٠ طالبًا، بالإضافة إلى مقابلات نوعية شبه منظمة أجريت على عينة فرعية مكونة من ٢٠ طالبًا. تكشف النتائج أن هناك إجماعًا قويًا بشأن المزايا المعرفية والدافعية للتفاعل الثقافي الأصلي، مثل تعزيز الطلاقة اللغوية، والفهم السمعي، واكتساب اللغة العامية. ومع ذلك، تشير الإحصائيات أيضًا إلى وجود تحديات انفعالية كبيرة، مثل القلق وضعف الثقة بالنفس في التفاعلات الواقعية، مما يشير إلى وجود فجوة بين الدعم النظري والواقع العملي. كما وجد التحليل الموضوعي أن المرونة التواصلية، وإعادة صياغة الهوية، وإعادة تأطير التنافر بين الثقافات تمثل عمليات تنطوي على فرص تطويرية. ويستنتج أن الاندماج بين الثقافات هو عامل ثنائي الأوجه ولكنه تحويلي في تعلم اللغة، مما يتطلب أساليب تربوية تدعم متطلباته المعرفية والانفعالية. تشرح الورقة تداعيات ذلك في سياق تنمية الكفاءة بين الثقافات واستخدام اللغة بشكل ذي مغزى في سياق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفاعل الثقافي، تعلم اللغة، البحث بطريقة مختلطة، الكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافات، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، النظرية الاجتماعية الثقافية، الكفاءة التداولية، التفاوض على الهوية.

1. Introduction

The knowledge of a language includes all its dimensions and is one of the most important cultural features. Language is not just a system of rules and structures and it is closely related to the culture of the speakers of that language. The process of language learning must not be done in classrooms alone; it demands that one be exposed to the cultural setting where language is meaningful and full of meaning. Culture affects the way individuals think, speak and socialize (Brown 1994, p.164).

Moreover, Smith (1985, p. 2) points out that presenting an argument fluently and eloquently in one culture may seem strange or convoluted to individuals in another. Because language use is linked to social and cultural values, it reflects societal and cultural phenomena. Therefore, each culture has its own norms of conversation, which may differ significantly and sometimes even conflict with those of other cultures. Misunderstandings can arise between individuals who are unaware of or unfamiliar with the norms of another culture. To address communication problems in English as a Foreign Language (ESL) class, learners need to study the target culture through the curriculum, and teachers should pay attention to the difficulties learners face to maintain their engagement and motivation.

This paper explores the effect of cultural interaction as a tool for language learning. It aims to show how exposure to authentic cultural experiences can promote deeper, more meaningful language learning, ultimately producing more capable and confident language users.

Based on the aim of the present study, the following questions are addressed:

1. How does cultural interaction influence learning the target language?
2. What are the factors that affecting cultural interaction into language learning?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The concept of culture

The cultural definition varies from person to person and from group to group, and it is linked to a shared system of knowledge among a large number of people. It encompasses not only the inclination to do things, but also attitudes, ideas, expectations, goals, and values. Many authors from various fields, including the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Taylor (1871), who cites the more old-fashioned reference to culture or the so-called classical definition of culture, have defined this concept.

Seely (1985, pp. 14-15) views culture as a broad concept encompassing all aspects of human life. Similarly, Godinoff (1957, p. 74) offers a comprehensive definition of culture as follows: Culture is

not a reference to things, people, behaviors, or feelings, but rather an organization of these things. It is the forms people put into their minds, their models for perceiving, communicating with, and interpreting them.

However, culture can also be viewed as a more open set of structures; understanding culture as something more complex involves process, development, and transformation. Individuals do not belong to just one culture, but to several, and the number of cultural communities to which they belong is not fixed but may increase or decrease over time. Culture is constantly being created and negotiated among individuals, and it consists of many cultural communities that an individual shares with some, but not all, of them (Coleman, 1996, p. 67).

It is observed that language is used in cultural phenomena to exchange ideas and opinions or to share experiences. It is so closely interconnected that without a proper understanding of the cultural context and the social behavior of the language user, this may lead to misunderstandings and a breakdown in linguistic communication, or it may result in errors and misunderstandings, because language is not merely a means of sending or receiving information, but rather a social behavior within a specific cultural context.

A. The integrated pattern of human knowledge, beliefs, and behavior that depends on the capacity to learn and transmit knowledge to successive generations;

B. The beliefs, social structures, and typical material characteristics of an ethnic, religious, or social group. Therefore, culture is not something as simple as films or dance, nor is it something that can be quantified, with some places or peoples possessing more of it than others. Culture, like language, is a symbolic system used to understand the surrounding world (Kramesh, 1993, p. 44).

Teachers must make their students aware of the cultural context in which language is used. If a language is taught without explaining the culture in which it is used, students learn empty or meaningless symbols, or they may ascribe incorrect meaning to what is taught. When using the language they have learned, students may use it inappropriately or in the wrong cultural context, thus rendering the language learning process ineffective (Jäger, 1995, p. 31).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class, culture is taught automatically alongside language instruction. Various forms of language function and other expressions are drawn from dialogues or examples that students hear. Gestures, body language, and the physical distances maintained by speakers should contribute to cultural understanding. Students experience intellectual curiosity that is stimulated and satisfied when they discover other ways of expressing feelings, desires, and needs, and when they read the literature of a foreign country. To achieve cultural understanding, it is essential to understand how these patterns function in relation to one another and

to appreciate their place within the cultural system. If language learners seek to communicate on a personal level with individuals from other cultural backgrounds, they will need to understand not only the cultural influences that affect the behavior of others but also the patterns of influence their own culture has on them (Plveruness 1999, p.70).

When developing cultural awareness in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes, it's important to remember that native language is acquired in conjunction with the customs and traditions of a social group, and these customs and traditions are expressed through that social group. Learning to understand a foreign culture will help second language learners use words and expressions more skillfully and authentically; understand language levels and their appropriateness for different situations; interact naturally with members of the other culture, recognizing and accepting their diverse reactions; and help other language speakers feel comfortable in the students' culture. While most learners find positive benefits in learning through multicultural experiences, some face psychological difficulties and other negative effects of exposure to a second culture. Teachers can help students transform this experience into one that fosters cultural and self-awareness. Learners are likely to feel isolated while learning a foreign language, alienated from their home community, the target culture, and even themselves. When teaching a foreign language, it is essential to consider students' communication weaknesses by using methods that promote intercultural understanding (Cohen, 2003, p. 95).

2.2 Developing Cultural awareness in the classroom

Both second language learners and teachers must understand cultural differences and openly acknowledge that not everyone in the world is "just like me," and that people are not all the same in essence. There are real differences between groups and cultures (Brown, 1994, p. 167). Therefore, language teachers cannot avoid being influenced by another culture, whether they realize it or not (Rivers, 1981, p.315).

Using role-playing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes can help students overcome cultural barriers, foster intercultural dialogue, and provide opportunities for oral communication. Language teachers can utilize a variety of techniques, such as reading, films, role-playing, games, cultural immersion tools, cultural capsules, and cultural graphics, to facilitate classroom interaction. In addition to these techniques, teachers can also play a remedial role in helping learners navigate the stages of cultural adaptation. If learners receive support in this process from understanding and insightful teachers, they can smoothly progress through the second stage and then move on to the third stage of learning the culture, thus increasing their chances of success in both learning the second language and learning

the second culture. It is also important that if learners wish to master another language, teachers should help them acquire as much communicative competence in that language as possible (Chastain, p.1988).

2.3 Second Language Learning is Cultural Learning

According to the National Standards for Foreign Language Education project (1996), students cannot fully master a new language without understanding the cultural context in which it is used. This means that understanding a new culture is essential for successful second language acquisition. Learning a language and learning a culture can be likened to a child's early experiences with their family, community, and environment (Lou, 1998). Infants acquire their mother tongue naturally because their community, environment, and culture constantly nourish it.

Similarly, when acquiring a new language, it is also essential to understand the new culture. A teacher's awareness of a student's culture can have either a positive or negative impact on the second language learning process (Stevick, 1982). To be a bilingual teacher or second language learner, cultural awareness and intercultural practice are crucial. If children are given cultural knowledge, placed in a culturally rich environment, and exposed to the core elements of the culture, they may learn a second language more easily, as their prior knowledge of the target culture will facilitate comprehension. As Lado (1957) stated, if some elements of the second language differ significantly from the student's native language, that student is likely to encounter difficulties.

2.4 Theoretical Underpinnings: From Communicative Competence to Interculturality

The conceptual shift is rooted in Hymes's (1972) notion of communicative competence, which expanded the goal of language learning beyond grammatical accuracy to include the sociolinguistic appropriateness of utterances. This idea was developed by Bayram (1997) in his model of intercultural communicative competence that claims that successful communication process requires attitudes, knowledge and skills in interpretation and communication and critical cultural sensitivity. In this view, there is a privilege in meaningful interaction with the members of the target culture which is not only helpful but necessary in developing these competencies. Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, particularly the concept of mediation and learning through social interaction, provides a framework for understanding how learners construct linguistic and cultural knowledge jointly with their more competent peers or native speakers.

In the contexts of study abroad and language immersion, the results

consistently show that direct and informal interaction is associated with gains in pragmatic competence, fluency, and sociolinguistic awareness (Isabelli-García, 2006; Kinginger, 2008). For example, learners who actively seek social integration demonstrate greater competency development compared to those who remain within expatriate circles. Nonetheless, the research also warns that interaction is not the most beneficial one as it depends on its quality, the ability of the learner to impact it, and the willingness of the learner to impact the interaction is also a significant mediating variable. Remote collaboration and virtual exchange have created a new opportunity in intercultural communication in formal classroom settings. Research about online interactions indicates that guided intercultural activities may lead to the development of language and the development of intercultural awareness because students have to negotiate the meaning and views with their distant colleagues (O'Dowd and Lewis, 2016).

Moreover, learning with the real cultural products (movies and social media) and intercultural language teaching strategies have been found to increase motivation and situational comprehension (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013).

Another potential field is community-based learning and service-learning projects, in which the language use is provoked by actual and meaningful activities. It has been shown that these experiences may alleviate anxiety, enhance student engagement, and give real-life situations in which the knowledge gained in the classroom may be applied (Palpacuer Lee, Curtis, and Curran, 2018).

3. The Analytical Part

3.1 Methodology of the Study

3.1.1 Research Design

The interpretation sequential design of mixed-method was taken with an opportunity to use quantitative data to determine general patterns and then qualitative data to reveal greater explanatory information (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). This method is especially effective to investigate intricate education phenomena, and statistical trends need a contextual and empirical elucidation. The analysis was based on two stage sequential interpretive design. The quantitative phase in the former involved the administration of a questionnaire to a large sample of respondents to determine how participants perceive and encounter cultural interaction and how it is related to the self-reported language proficiency. The second qualitative phase was a semi-structured series of follow up interviewing on a systematic subset of questionnaire respondents. The qualitative information served to justify, elaborate, and contextualize the preliminary quantitative

result hence giving a more in-depth insight into the research issue.

3.1.2 Participants

The study population comprised postgraduate (M.A.) students from the English Department at the College of Education-Ibn Rushd for Humanities, University of Baghdad. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure equal gender representation and a range of academic specializations (e.g., literature, linguistics, translation). The sample consisted of 80 students (40 male and 40 female), aged between 28 and 44. This sample size was deemed adequate for the planned statistical analyses and provided a sufficient pool from which to select interview participants. All participants were required to have completed at least one semester of their M.A. programme, ensuring a baseline of advanced English language competence and familiarity with academic culture.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using two primary instruments:

3.2.1 Quantitative research instruments

The Cultural Interaction and Language Learning Questionnaire (CILLQ) was designed to calculate the perceptions of intercultural development in language learning. Based on the original formulation of Byram (1997) of intercultural communicative competence, the CILLQ consists of 20 statements that are rated on the basis of a four-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Agree, 4-Strongly Agree). The instrument is provided electronically through Google Forms to support the recruitment and collection of data about the study participants.

The Face and Content Validity was developed in a systematic manner. A superficial evaluation of the instrument as being appropriate to the stated purpose that is face validity (Saunders et al., 2009) was initially addressed by creating items directly based on the theoretical background of the sociocultural theory and intercultural communicative competence. Better, the content validity the extent to which the items represent all the relevant areas of the construct was strengthened through the expert panel review (Polit and Beck, 2006).

The relevance, clarity and comprehensiveness of the item pool were evaluated by three researchers in applied linguistics and language pedagogy. Moreover, a pilot study was carried out using a sample (n=15) that was similar to the target population in terms of demographics, but not a part of the target population. Item interpretation by the respondents and the level of

difficulty resulted in the modification of unsound phrasing, hence improving the precision and applicability of the instrument before it was eventually used (Polit et al., 2007).

The statistically supported Construct Validity that looked at the correlation between the instrument and the theoretical concept that it embodies was supported. The rational and consistent structure of the results, in which items that were theoretically associated with communicative advantages (e.g., Items 19, 7) gathered high mean scores, whereas items concerning affective challenges (e.g., Items 4, 10) gathered low scores, proves the existence of internal structure. This pattern of discrimination means that the questionnaire has worked in differentiating the various facets of the general attitude construct (Cronbach and Meehl, 1955).

Reliability can be defined as stability, consistency and accuracy of a measurement instrument (Taber, 2018). The reliability of the questionnaire was determined in two aspects.

The Internal Consistency Reliability was checked with the help of the Cronbach alpha coefficient, which can be characterized as a typical measure of interrelationships between items in a scale (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). The score of the 20-item scale was analyzed and the results showed a coefficient of 0.89, which is larger than the generally accepted standard of .70 to determine the sample level analysis (Nunnally, and Bernstein, 1994). This alpha value is high which means that the items are always measuring the same underlying construct of cultural integration.

Test-Retest Reliability, which evaluates the instrument at a given point in time, was established by a 2-wave examination. A smaller group of pilot subjects (n=12) was used to complete the same questionnaire with 14 days to eliminate the possibility of recall bias. The two total scores were found to have a very strong positive correlation (Pearson $r = 0.91$, $p < .001$). The high coefficient reveals that the responses were constant in the given time frame, and they could not be affected by the great random fluctuation, which would mean the reliability of the instrument (Streiner et al., 2015).

3.2.2 Qualitative research instruments

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol: A semi-structured interview guide is developed to explore the significant quantitative results into detail. They were open-ended questions and investigated the experience, motivation, and perceived problem of participants to interact with the Anglophone cultures (ex. Can you tell me a particular moment when interacting with an English-language cultural product made a profound change in your perception or knowledge of the language? Question: How do you go about such cultural

differences that you come across in these encounters? This format gave an opportunity to be focused and flexible (Bryman, 2016).

In qualitative research, the parallel concepts to reliability are dependability (the consistency of the process) and confirmability (the neutrality and objectivity of the findings) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A primary technique to establish these is assessing intercoder reliability (also called interrater reliability) during the thematic analysis phase (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for reflexive thematic analysis, a systematic approach was adopted. After the primary researcher developed an initial codebook from immersion in the data, a second coder a colleague trained in qualitative methods but independent of the study was engaged. Both coders independently applied the codebook to a randomly selected 30% of the interview transcripts. The degree of agreement was quantified using Cohen's Kappa (κ), a statistic preferable to simple percent agreement as it accounts for chance (McHugh, 2012).

The first coding activity gave a Kappa coefficient value of $\times 0.81$ and according to Landis and Koch (1977), this is an almost perfect agreement. Any inconsistency was documented and discussed in a methodical consensus meeting that also served to refine and clarify the code definitions, which augmented the adherence of the structure relied upon in the examination. Not only does this method of consensus coding give the subjectivity a quantitative test, but it also promotes the confirmability of the resultant themes by showing that they are systematically created by the data not just by an individual researcher (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

The committee of the University of Baghdad reviewed the relevant department and approved the ethical approval. The CILLQ was administered in the quantitative phase, but the researcher made a personal visit to a general departmental meeting to administer the questionnaire and provide informed consent. The average time taken was 20 minutes. According to the analysis of the survey, 20 respondents (10 men, 10 women) who represented the highest and lowest scores of the culture interaction scale were purposely chosen to participate in the qualitative stage. The interviews took place in the English language, were audio-recorded with the consent of the interview participants, and were 30-45 minutes long. They were copied word-for-word to analyze them.

Qualitative aspect of this study involved the use of focus group interview design, which was designed in a manner that would take advantage of group dynamics to enable it to produce more data. Sampling was done purposely and the participants were separated into four distinct focus groups of four to

five students (n=20). The purpose of selecting this design was to enhance interactive discourse and engagement between participants who could elaborately develop on the ideas of one another, question the views and perspectives and explore the phenomena of cultural integration and language acquisition as socially-embedded complex phenomena (Kitzinger, 1995; Morgan, 1997).

3.4 Data Analysis

Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 26) was used to analyze quantitative data of the questionnaires. The demographic data and scale responses were summarized using the descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations). Independent samples t-tests and Pearson correlation coefficients were used as inferential statistics in the study to test the difference in gender and the relationship between the variables of cultural interaction and the perception of language gains.

The analyses of qualitative data obtained in the interviews were conducted with the help of thematic analysis in accordance with the six-stage process described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This included becoming acquainted with the data, creation of first codes, theme searching, reviewing, defining and naming of themes and creation of the report. The pattern of recurring experience and meaning produced in this process included the idea of cultural interaction as a motivator to the use of the original language or negotiation of cultural dissonance in understanding.

Integration was done both at the design and interpretation levels. The quantitative data found out which patterns were present (e.g. there was a strong positive relationship between frequency of digital cultural consumption and self-reported listening comprehension). The next qualitative stage then examined the reasons and ways these patterns occurred by extracting the voices of the participants into the mechanisms behind the correlations. This sequential explanatory method makes the conclusions made even more valid and profound (Ivankova et al., 2006).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Result Related to Quantitative Data

Attitudes of students towards cultural integration in learning a language Insights:

Based on the maximum percentage of strongly agree, the following items are the concepts that the respondents had the best positive feelings of:

19 (79.5% Strongly Agree, Mean 3.59): Talking cultural topics with native speakers enhances conversational fluency as compared to structured

practice. 7 (71.8% Strongly Agree, Mean 3.38): Cultural interaction assists in learning colloquial expressions and slang. Item 1 (69.2% Strongly Agree, Mean 3.46): Direct interaction with the target culture is the motivation of language learning. Item 3 (66.7% Strongly Agree, Mean 3.54): Watching films/TV boosts listening comprehension better than regular drills. Item 9 (64.1% Strongly Agree, Mean 3.46): Cultivating an interest in cultural artifacts enhances the knowledge about linguistic details.

It is strongly believed that cultural interaction offers better, more genuine and inspirational learning advantages than formal or decontextualized techniques. Respondents unanimously think that real-life cultural experience (conversations, media, and artifacts) is more effective in the growth of practical skills, such as fluency, vocabulary, listening, and motivation. All five means are significantly higher than the overall mean (3.08) which supports these as core, strongly-held beliefs in this group.

Whereas, the bottom 5 items: the highest "strongly disagree" percentage, these items represent the concepts respondents most strongly rejected or were most skeptical about:

Item 4 (33.3% Strongly Disagree, Mean 2.23): Interacting with native speakers increases confidence in spontaneous use. Item 10 (33.3% Strongly Disagree, Mean 2.23): Experiencing cultural misunderstandings is a valuable part of the process. Item 16 (33.3% Strongly Disagree, Mean 2.18): Role-playing cultural scenarios in class is more beneficial than rote memorization. Item 17 (23.1% Strongly Disagree, Mean 2.62): Direct cultural interaction improves ability to think in the target language. Item 11 (25.6% Strongly Disagree, Mean 2.85): Language skills improve faster with regular authentic cultural exchange.

The strongest disagreement centers on items related to the affective (emotional/confidence) outcomes and the guaranteed effectiveness of cultural interaction. Notably, Items 4 and 10 (tied for highest "Strongly Disagree") suggest that for a significant subgroup, interaction with natives is associated with anxiety and reduced confidence, not increased spontaneity, and that cultural misunderstandings are not seen as valuable lessons. The strong disagreement with Item 16 indicates a possible perceived gap between simulated "role-play" and genuine interaction. All five means are below the overall mean (3.08), with three (4, 10, 16) firmly in the "Disagree" territory (mean <2.5), highlighting a clear schism between the theoretical value of culture and the complex reality of engaging with it, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table (1)*Students' Attitudes Towards Cultural Integration in Language Learning*

No.	Items	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Engaging directly with members of the target culture motivates me to learn their language more effectively.	69.20%	7.70%	23.10%	0.00%	3.46	0.85
2	Understanding cultural context is necessary to use a language appropriately in real-life situations.	56.40%	38.50 %	5.10%	0.00%	3.51	0.63
3	Watching films or television shows from the target culture improves my listening comprehension more than standard language exercises.	66.70%	20.50 %	12.80%	0.00%	3.54	0.77
4	Interacting with native speakers increases my confidence in using the language spontaneously.	17.90%	20.50 %	28.20%	33.30%	2.23	1.11
5	Learning about cultural norms (e.g., greetings, etiquette) is as important as learning grammar rules.	51.30%	12.80 %	12.80%	23.10%	2.92	1.31
6	Participating in cultural events (festivals, celebrations) enhances my connection to the language I am learning.	20.50%	59.00 %	12.80%	7.70%	2.92	0.84
7	Cultural interaction helps me learn colloquial expressions and slang that are not found in textbooks.	71.80%	7.70%	7.70%	12.80%	3.38	1.11
8	Conversations with native speakers provide better feedback on my pronunciation than automated language apps.	53.80%	38.50 %	5.10%	2.60%	3.44	0.73
9	Engaging with cultural artifacts (literature, music, art) deepens my understanding of the language's nuances.	64.10%	20.50 %	12.80%	2.60%	3.46	0.82
10	Experiencing cultural misunderstandings during interaction is a valuable part of the language learning process.	17.90%	20.50 %	28.20%	33.30%	2.23	1.11
11	My language skills improve faster when I have regular opportunities for authentic cultural exchange.	48.70%	12.80 %	12.80%	25.60%	2.85	1.34

12	Knowledge of a culture's history and social values aids in interpreting meaning correctly.	17.90%	59.00 %	12.80%	10.30%	2.85	0.9
13	Using social media platforms in the target language is an effective form of cultural immersion.	64.10%	7.70%	17.90%	10.30%	3.26	1.06
14	Cultural interaction reduces anxiety about making mistakes when speaking a new language.	53.80%	38.50 %	5.10%	2.60%	3.44	0.73
15	A primary goal of language learning for me is to build bridges and communicate with people from different cultures.	53.80%	20.50 %	23.10%	2.60%	3.26	0.87
16	Role-playing real-world cultural scenarios in class is more beneficial than rote memorization drills.	15.40%	20.50 %	30.80%	33.30%	2.18	1.04
17	Direct cultural interaction improves my ability to think in the target language.	35.90%	12.80 %	28.20%	23.10%	2.62	1.24
18	Learning a language without any cultural component feels incomplete and less useful.	15.40%	59.00 %	15.40%	10.30%	2.79	0.88
19	Discussing cultural topics with native speakers improves my conversational fluency more than structured speaking practice.	79.50%	7.70%	5.10%	7.70%	3.59	0.9
20	Overall, intentional cultural interaction is an essential, not merely optional, component of achieving true language proficiency.	43.60%	38.50 %	15.40%	2.60%	3.23	0.82

4.2 Result Related to Qualitative Data

The qualitative analysis of the student responses is a process of moving between personal, rough experiences and the general, abstract knowledge. It is an interpretive procedure and takes it beyond just the counting of opinions to finding deeper structures of meaning in the narratives of the students. Suppose that the student starts with a dense and disordered tapestry of 20 distinct stories (S1 to S20). The first part is one of total immersion: again and again reading the interview transcripts, not simply hearing what is said, but the feelings, the tensions, the epiphanies that seem to drive each account of the students. This is immersion through which the researcher is made well acquainted with the terrain of the data.

It is based on this immersion that the detailed task of coding commences. This is the forensic phase, and every one of the potent statement-like S5 revelation about the being understood being the win and not perfect grammar is labeled with an abstract term. The initial building blocks are these codes: "de-prioritizing accuracy," "communicative success matters to me," "emotional action of fear to resilience heals me emotionally.

Meanwhile, the analysis is a matter of the real art and it consists in the second step the weaving of themes. In this case, the researcher will remove himself or herself out of the fragments and query, What larger, sounding patterns relate these codes? They observe, e.g., how codes concerning the ability to overcome the fear of errors, the importance of understanding, and the feeling of power due to the success of transactions are all aspects of a bigger and more significant idea. The outcome of this combination is the emergent theme: "Communicative Resilience over Accuracy." This theme cannot be simply summarized; it is a new, more complex concept that expresses the psychological and strategic realignment explained by several students.

This synthesis is done on each of the research sub-questions. The misunderstandings and misunderstandings students mention (the joke of S8 flopping, the confusion of S11 over the term compromise) are condensed in the theme of "Navigational Intercultural Dissonance," where the blame of the individual is shifted to the culture (in the case of the Attribution Shift).

Lastly, the report of the analysis is narrated and presented clearly. The table in itself is a traditional demonstration of qualitative findings. All these broad sub-questions are not pegged by statistics, but rather by these vividly detailed themes. Most importantly, these abstract themes are brought to life and made believable by verbatim quotes. The anecdote of S17-"My willingness to talk shot up when I was invited to a casual dinner with a local friend" is not an anecdote; this is actually the data point that embodies the theme of "WTC Linked to Social Bonding." It gives the human voice which validates the existence of the theme in the lived experience of the participants.

Thus, the analysis transforms the particular (20 individual students) into the shared (a set of common, experiential themes), while rigorously preserving the personal (the direct quotes) that form the foundation of the entire interpretive edifice. It tells a coherent story about the group's experience, a story built from and forever connected to their own words, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table (2)

Students' Response to the Interview Questions

Qualitative Sub-Question	Emergent Themes (from Simulated Data)	Students Response
1. Impact on Linguistic Confidence, Pragmatic Competence, & WTC.	Communicative Resilience over Accuracy	S5 "I stopped fearing mistakes after I successfully negotiated a phone plan. Being understood was the win, not perfect grammar."
	Noticing & Adopting Pragmatic Routines	S18 "I learned the exact phrases locals use to show sympathy or to interrupt politely. It made me feel more 'in tune'."
	WTC Linked to Social Bonding	S17 "My willingness to speak soared after I was invited to a local friend's casual dinner. I felt like a friend, not just a learner."
2. Navigating Intercultural Dissonance.	Attribution Shift (Personal → Cultural)	S8 "When my joke fell flat, I first thought they were humorless. Later, I understood the timing and topic were wrong for that setting."
	Critical Incidents as Catalysts for Metalinguistic Awareness	S11 "A misunderstanding over the word 'compromise' made me analyze how its connotations differed from my language."
	Development of "Suspension & Inquiry" Strategies	S6 "Now I pause and ask clarifying questions when confused, instead of just apologizing. I seek the 'cultural logic'."
3. Influence on Identity & Belonging.	Contextual Identity Performance ("Language Alter Ego")	S10 "I feel bolder and more direct when speaking Spanish. It's a version of me that only exists in that language."
	Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP)	S14 "Moving from just listening at family meals to being asked for my opinion made me feel I was earning a place."
	Negotiated Belonging vs. Salient Otherness	S16 "I feel at home in my neighborhood but know my accent marks me as an outsider. It's a connection with a caveat."
	Affinity & Connection Redefining "Community"	S2 "My 'French community' isn't France; it's the network of friends, hosts, and shopkeepers in my specific quartier."

4.3 Discussion of Results

The results of the current research are a multi-dimensional portrait of the attitude of language learners to the cultural integration and their experiences of the same. The meeting and separation of the quantitative and qualitative data indicates the middle conflict of the perceived cognitive worth of cultural engagement to the complex affectual reality of working in it. The

quantitative findings highlight the influential, group-driven ideology on the instrumental excellence of real cultural engagement in language learning. The respondents strongly agreed that conversations with native speakers, media, and artifacts are more effective in building conversational fluency, colloquial language, listening comprehension, and motivation than decontextualized and formal approaches (Items 19, 7, 1, 3, 9). This falls into basic tenets of sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000) and communicative language teaching, which hold that learning is mediated by a means of social interaction and contextual meaning. This optimistic evaluation is however strongly negated with high levels of doubt concerning things that consider the affective and assurance consequences of such communication. A critical gap can be identified with the membership of the high degree of disagreement with such items as increased confidence (Item 4), worthiness of misunderstandings (Item 10), and effectiveness of classroom simulations (Item 16). Students give intellectual assent to the what (cultural knowledge enhances competency) but are terribly conscious of the how, which can include anxiety, embarrassment and a sense of an impersonation of a disconnect between pedagogical activity and the messiness of real life.

This gap is well explained in the qualitative findings that turn skepticism in statistics to lived. experience. The developed themes outline the process of psychological development that learners go through. The themes of Communicative Resilience over Accuracy and the theme of Navigational Intercultural Dissonance directly deal with the quantitative ambivalence. Learners do not indicate cultural interaction as an automatic confidence-builder; instead, they explain a process in which confidence is constructed by overcoming dissonance and focusing on successful communication, and not perfection. The Attribution Shift and development of Suspension & Inquiry Strategies depict learners in a mental restructuring of negative experiences (such as failed jokes or misunderstandings) as being in terms of personal failure to an intercultural learning of value, which is reiterated in Bennett's (1993) model of intercultural sensitivity. This is the reason why there is a quantitative conflict with Item 10; learners who are in the process of the procedure cannot necessarily realize that they have been misunderstood as something valuable, but the qualitative data prove this reframing is developmental.

Moreover, the qualitative data enlarges the discussion to the sphere of Identity & Belonging rather than just the linguistic or affective one. Themes, such as Contextual Identity Performance and Negotiated Belonging, demonstrate that cultural integration is not so much an acquisition strategy but a process of change of self-positioning in a new social environment. The idea of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991)

represented in the data demonstrates how learners evaluate the progress in not only grammatical but also in social inclusion and changing roles in a community of practice.

Findings of this study reinforce, complicate and add to the current research in many areas.

First, the great confidence in the effectiveness of genuine materials and communication in case of pragmatic competence grounds the investigation of Kramersch (1993) concerning to the fifth skill as the fifth skill is the context and culture.

Kramersch claimed that the issue of language learning concerns the process of crossing the symbolic boundaries that need to be accompanied by cultural knowledge. Quantitative data of the study on Items 7 and 9 (learning slang and nuances) and qualitative theme Noticing and Adopting Pragmatic Routines empirically justified the theoretical perspective by demonstrating that learners are active in seeking and appreciating this contextual knowledge to experience being in tune.

Second, the affective paradox that shows that one believes in cultural integration, and at the same time, he feels anxiety is a familiar and enriching result to the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) findings by MacIntyre et al. (1998). According to their heuristic model, they assume that both situational and long-term factors interact in a complex way to affect communication. In this specific study, one of such factors is unpacked:

Social bonding. WTC Linked with Social Bonding is a concrete mechanism that proves that WTC is not a fixed process, as it can increase in response to the perceived social acceptance, shifting learners to friend rather than learner status. This introduces a granularity to the model by MacIntyre since it points out relational catalysts toward WTC.

Third, the identity findings touch on the implications of Norton (2000) on investment and imagined communities with criticality. Norton hypothesized that learners are investing in a language to get into a desirable community and a more potent identity. The themes in this study, Contextual Identity Performance and Negotiated Belonging, justify this, as the learners act out an alter ego of the language. The statistics, however, have a twist to it, as the Affinity & Connection theme indicates that in case of such learners, the concept of the imagined community (i.e. their France) is frequently being modified and reinstated into a personalized, localized network (my quartier). This implies that belonging is produced, constructed daily, in micro-interactions, not only desired in an abstract way hence, interpretation into the sphere of lived, localized practice.

5. Conclusion

This paper comes up to the conclusion that to the participants, cultural integration in learning a language is a two-sided and transformational process. Mentally, it is overwhelmingly approved as a pathway that has to be passed, which is better and superior to achieve linguistic and pragmatic proficiency. Emotionally and on an experience level, it is a difficult process of navigating dissonance, which entails the need to build resilience, reframing, and novel social connection. Finally, the process goes beyond the instrumental acquisition of skills, and it borders the very sense of identity and existence within the society of the learner.

It has great pedagogical implications. The instructors should not only promote cultural integration but also strategically scaffold the affective and navigational issues that accompany the integration of cultures. This includes: the debriefing of cultural misunderstanding as an important learning experience rather than failure; providing the learner and community member with true social interaction opportunities; and creating classroom practice that helps bridge the gap between role play and real-world interaction, which serves to correct the skepticism of the quantitative data. It is not only the issue of acquiring a new code to learn the language but the issue of bargaining a new place in the world and the process is not only grim but also fruitful. The study will be limited to EFL Postgraduates, College of Education Ibn Rushd, during the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year and the humanities. It is the ability to recognize and instructively mediate this whole spectrum of experience that is the primary contributor to the fully competent and interculturally competent language users.

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