

Investigating Teachers' Perspective on the Role of Reading Comprehension in Enhancing Sudanese Cultural Diversity

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Abstract

This research investigates teachers' perspective on the role of the reading comprehension passages in enhancing the Sudanese students' cultural diversity and reinforcing Sudan's national unity in diversity. Sudanese university students of English are of various diversified cultural backgrounds. English reading comprehension curriculum has to be based on the accumulated aspects of Sudanese cultures to assist the enhancement of the students' cultural diversity. The study adopts the descriptive analytical method by employing a questionnaire administered to 40 Sudanese university teaching staff of English by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Results demonstrate a significant positive relationship between the reinforcement of Sudanese cultural diversity and the reading comprehension passages as well as adopting diverse elements of Sudanese cultures as that of ethnicities, gender, Nomads and Bedouins, indigenous languages, types of food and clothing and integrating them into the English reading comprehension syllabus in order to enhance cultural diversity among undergraduates.. The research comes up with a number of recommendations as that the various aspects of the Sudanese diversified cultures have to be integrated within the reading comprehension passages in order to enhance Sudanese cultural diversity. Suggestions for further studies to be carried out on other language skills as that of listening, speaking and writing skills.

Keywords: pedagogy, ideology, CDA, discourse

المستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث منظور اساتذة الجامعات حول الدور الذي تلعبه النصوص الانجليزية للقراءة في تعزيز التنوع الثقافي السوداني. تهدف الدراسة لتبيان دور نصوص القراءة في تعزيز التنوع الثقافي السوداني لما تتضمنه من الأوجه الثقافية السودانية المختلفة ودورها في تعزيز الوحدة الوطنية وسط طلاب الجامعة بمختلف اعراقهم وهوياتهم الثقافية. تبنت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي في تحليل البيانات التي جمعت عبر الاستبانة باستخدام الحزم الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS) والتي أجريت لعدد (40) من أساتذة الجامعات السودانية من حملة الماجستير والدكتوراة. وأوضحت النتائج وجود علاقة ذات دلالة إحصائية ايجابية بين تعزيز التنوع الثقافي السوداني ونصوص القراءة. توصلت الدراسة إلى عدة نتائج والتي من أهمها أن تبني الأوجه والمكونات الثقافية السودانية المختلفة مثل الإثنيات والنوع والبدو والرحل واللغات الأصلية وأنواع الأطعمة والملبس وتضمينها في منهج القراءة الانجليزية يلعب دوراً هاماً في تعزيز التنوع الثقافي لطلاب الجامعات ، كما توصلت البحث إلى العديد من التوصيات نلخصها في الآتي: ضرورة دمج المكونات والخصائص الثقافية المختلفة للثقافات السودانية كمنهج أساسي ضمن منهج القراءة الانجليزية بالجامعة. وأوصت الدراسة بضرورة إجراء مزيد من البحوث على المهارات اللغوية الأخرى مثل مهارات السمع والمخاطبة والكتابة.



Introduction

Cultural diversity, or multiculturalism, is based on the idea that cultural identities should not be discarded or ignored but rather maintained and valued. Based on the above statement, the researcher investigates the roles played by both students and teachers of English in administrating this culturally diversified classroom setting in terms of the context of teaching English reading comprehension and tries to measure the extended impact upon students of multicultural various backgrounds.

The researcher observes several situational contexts of which cultural diversity among Sudanese university classrooms were poorly treated. This has an influential impact upon students in terms of knowledge construction process and the negative consequences extended to dominate the entire teaching learning educational operation.

Multicultural education formulate a theory that is consistent with various dimensions (Back, 20 126): content interaction, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy and an empowering school culture and social structure. It is important for teachers as well as students to understand how knowledge is constructed within all disciplines. The knowledge construction process consists of methods, activities, and questions teachers use to help students understand, investigate and determine how implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed. When the knowledge construction process is implemented in the classroom, teachers help students to

understand how knowledge is created and how it is influenced by the racial, ethnic, and social- class positions of individuals and groups (Code,1991; Harding, 1998). In western empirical tradition, the ideal within each academic discipline is the formulation of knowledge without the influence of the researchers personal or cultural characteristics (Hyrdal, 1969), however, as critical theorists, have pointed out personal, cultural and social factors influence the formulation of knowledge even when objective knowledge is the ideal within a discipline (Banks, 1996; Code, 1991; Collins, 2000). This study values and presents cultural diversity as an emerging global trend. People from different race, ethnicity, language, nationality, religion, tribal group, social background, etc. have different life experiences, expectancies, learning style preferences as well as various mental cultural frames of references and previously shaped schemata. This favors their interpretation of learning - teaching of the curriculum content and influence instructional procedural components. Such differences can bring about strength to the classroom audience if only it is valued and integrated into the classroom management dynamics. Thus, this can only be realized via the adoption of open-minded, willingness to adapt to cultural -based techniques and approaches as well as maintain non-judgmental teaching – learning attitudinal styles.

Chiamello (2012), states that at the core of culturally responsive pedagogy is the idea that education must account for the lives experiences and cultural reference points of the students.



Culturally responsive teachers craft the education their particular students deserve – one that acknowledges their voice, validates their concerns and connects to their experiences. In the literacy contexts, this can mean giving students things to read that by or about people with whom they can relate and allow students to write on topics they care about. We must also challenge our students and not patronize them by merely reenacting what they already know. We want students to become what Jacqueline Jordan Irvine calls “cultural bridge builders”. Our jobs to search for ways to relate the less familiar with the more familiar, increasing our students’ vocabulary and knowledge base. As a literacy expert as Alfred w. Tatum who writes that young readers should be exposed to texts that connect with multiple identities, have personal and cultural relevance and are as diverse as the students we teach. These are enabling texts. Tatum (2000) distinguishes them from disabling texts, which ignore the student’s context. An enabling text, he explains, “moves beyond a sole cognitive focus, such as skill and strategy development – to include an academic, cultural, emotional, and social focus that moves students closer to examining issues they find relevant to their lives.”

Dodson (2016), advocates that students should have many opportunities to read the literature of our countries and cultures. Students who are familiar with the customs and life styles of many cultures are better able to understand the literature of those cultures. The researcher goes so far to state that he often thinks about reading passages in terms of the benchmark that is addressed or the way the item is written. He has considered differences in the passages by thinking about literary texts and informational texts or by considering

difficulty of reading. But he hasn’t paid a lot of attention to the culture, ethnicity, or diversity of the writers of the passage that seem to pose particular difficulty for the students.

Banks (1998), illustrates the philosophical and definitional issues related to pluralistic education, and design and implement effective teaching strategies that reflect ethnic diversity, and prepare sound guidelines for multi ethnic programs and practices. It describes actions that educators can take to institutionalize educational programs and practices related ethnic and cultural diversity. Conceptual issues and problems related to education. He emphasizes the role of multi- cultural reading skills, thus focus his main interest in multicultural education curriculum. The major research and programmatic paradigms related to ethnicity and education, curriculum has to be reformed to reflect the ethnic and cultural characteristics of the students. Reducing prejudice in students’ language, diversity, and curriculum guidelines.

Putnam (1993), cooperative Learning and Strategies for inclusion: Celebrating Diversity in the Classroom – Socio cultural perspective, Baltimore investigates assisting educators to meet the needs of a diverse population of students with varying cognitive abilities; developmental and learning disabilities sensory impairments; and different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This study based on the premise that students of differing abilities and backgrounds will benefit both academically and socially from cooperative learning. Maintaining several academic and educational aspects of cultural inclusions, techniques of teaching- learning and instructions.



Robertson (2015), connects students' background knowledge to content in EFL classroom and highlights visualization that takes place as we read that the pictures in our minds reflect our own experiences. We connect what we read to our context, and we comprehended new ideas more deeply if we can relate to them. When students read a passage about wedding from their own culture (the native passage), researchers observed the following behaviors: subjects read the passage more rapidly, recalled a larger amount of information, and produced more culturally appropriate elaborations of the content. When the subjects read the "foreign passage" about other culture's wedding, they read the passage more slowly, recalled much less information, the results indicated that cultural context influences comprehension, and that this phenomenon occurs regardless of an individual's background.

Elfreda (2009), states that reading performance of cultural diverse students indicates improved reading performance for culturally diversified students when text matches students' cultural prospective. This experimental research investigates whether Caucasian and African American students with learning disabilities read diverse text differently. Curriculum based measures (fluency level, comprehension score, and meaning- changing deviations) were used to assess reading performance by ethnicity and reading ability. Elfreda (2009) designs a Two-way MANOVA tests yielded interactions for reading ability x passage and reading ability x ethnicity. Results indicates that low achieving readers comprehended more and had fewer meaning- changing deviations when cultural cues were embedded in text. Results of this study indicates that further consideration must be given to the cultural prospective of readers and text used in reading assessment.

Generalization about students reading ability must be contextualized in discussions about the presence or absence of cultural in text to be read. Using curriculum – based measurements to assess reading: the cultural connections of diverse students with hearing disabilities in classroom context, many students with learning disabilities face reading challenges.

There are three main theories which explain the nature of learning to read. First, the traditional theory, or bottom up processing, which focused on the printed form of a text. Second, the cognitive view, or top-down processing enhanced the role of background knowledge in addition to what appeared on the printed page. Third, the metacognitive view, which is based on the control of manipulation that a reader can have on the act of comprehending a text, emphasizes the involvement of the reader's thinking about what he is doing while reading (Omaggio 1993).

Reading passages are of greater significance for enriching English language in terms of vocabulary, knowledge, as well improving the reading skills. Reading passages that include elements of the diversified cultures can definitely serve as a multi-purpose mechanism for the development of both reading skills and enlighten the various aspects of cultures. Reading texts that are contained with cultural components can stimulate learning of English language via the improvement of reading skills as well as facilitate exchange of the knowledge of the varied cultures that make the Sudan.

Culturally diversified reading passages derive their significance from the fact that as far as cultural elements of the Sudan are an integral part of the reading comprehension, reading skills shall there be developed and cultural diversity of the Sudan be enhanced



The importance of culturally varied texts can extend to include the exchange of knowledge of the different cultures. Varied cultural discourses of reading stimulate learning of English language as well as equip learners with satisfactory varied vocabulary and motivate students of English.

Jones (2001) emphasizes that ideology works “at the institutional, subjective and text levels to position people in particular ways”. Making reference to Van Dijk, Dellinger (1995) states that ideologies provide the cognitive base for attitudes of various groups in the societies, which eventually furthers their particular interests and objectives. Van Dijk (1993) argues that the ideological posture results from a particular form of social cognition.

Students shall also benefit from the culturally diversified content of the passage in cultural exchange as well as acknowledging the other linguistic aspects of reading passages.

Teachers benefit from the culturally diversified reading comprehension passages as well, via facilitating comprehension of the passages by adopting cultural responsive methods of teaching. Adopting culturally diversified reading passages as a part of reading comprehension shall be of great importance for both teaching learning process stakeholders, students and lecturers of the university. Syllabus designers are also very much concerned in terms of monitoring bias to the sole mainstream culture –based curriculum. Instead a rather multi-cultural syllabus of reading will then emerge and cultural diversity shall there be maintained and strongly enhanced.

Sudan is a multi-cultural society, where diversity of cultures, tribes and ethnic

social groups are the characteristic of the whole country. Different cultures are realized and reflected in different cultural elements and wide range of various aspects.

University undergraduate students of English reflect the diversity of the cultures of the Sudanese society.

Sudan is not merely an exception to the phenomenon of diversity of cultures. Yet the modern world experience diversity of cultures. Humans are diverse everywhere and in all walks of life. There is a trend among the American syllabus designers to design culturally diversified reading comprehension passages to enhance both comprehension of passages as well as building bridges among the different sectors of the American society towards enhancing and strengthening unity in diversity.

Multi-cultural literature adopted in the reading comprehension passages serves as a tool for bridging the gap among the different Sudanese cultures and helps raise awareness within undergraduates on enhancing the value of tolerance, respect and responsibility towards cultural diversity maintenance and diffusion among society.

It could be utilized to serve other purposes of developing of reading skills.

Seeking to deliberately and consciously include these syncretic and/or supra-cultural modalities of diversity that stem from contemporary youth cultures, in the modes of interaction acknowledged in the school sphere, however, would evidently mean to “revolutionize” not only the current conceptions of intercultural education, but the institution of school itself.



Thus, finally, the true problem posed by the recognition, treatment and/or “management” of diversity becomes evident: the main obstacle that any strategy directed towards interculturalizing and/or diversifying education will have to face is the institution of school and how deeply rooted it is not only in nationalizing pedagogy, but in the nation-state itself.

Weinstein, et al (2004) developed a five-part concept of CRCM derived from the literature. According to them “The five point concepts were: culturally responsible pedagogy, multicultural counseling and caring: recognition of one’s own cultural lens and biases, knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds, awareness of the broader social, economic and political context, ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies, and commitment to building caring classroom communities. In turn, the goal of classroom management was to create an environment in which students would behave appropriately from a sense of personal responsibility, not from a fear of punishment or desire for a reward. As such the environment must acknowledge and be responsive to who were the students (cognitively, socially and emotionally), and create a safety net that equitably responds to what teachers knew about their students. Students should have many opportunities to read the literature of other countries and cultures. Students who are familiar with the customs and life – styles of many cultures are better able to understand the images and needs portrayed by the literature of those cultures. They should also become immersed in literature by and about both men and women, including those with disabilities and other differences. At the core of culturally responsive pedagogy is the idea that education must account for the lived

experiences and cultural reference points of students. Culturally responsive teachers craft the education their particular students deserve one that acknowledges their voice, validates their concerns and connects to their experiences. In the literacy context, this can mean giving students things to read that are by or about people with whom they can relate and allowing students to write on topics they care about. We must also challenge our students and not patronize them by merely reenacting what they already know. We want to become what Jacqueline Jordan I roine calls " Cultural bridge builders." our with the more familiar, increasing our students' vocabulary and knowledge base. As literacy expert Alfred W. Tatum (2000) writes that young readers should be exposed to texts that connect with multiple identities, have personal and cultural relevance and are as diverse as the students we teach. These are enabling texts. Tatum distinguishes them from disabling texts. Which ignore the students" context. An enabling text, he explains, " moves beyond a sole cognitive focus – such as skill and strategy development – to include an academic, cultural, emotional, and social focus that moves students closer to examining issues they find relevant to their lives.

Materials and Methods

This paper adopts the descriptive analytical method for data analysis via employing a questionnaire which was made up of five statements. Each statement reflects a unique element of the Sudanese various cultures. These elements were been analyzed against a hypothesis that the teachers’ perspective, forty Sudanese university teachers responded to the questionnaire, who assist the positive role of reading comprehension passages in enhancing undergraduates cultural diversity.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary field of study and its main concern is to study discourse. The paper invests the findings of CDA in

interpreting the imbedded ideas of the different ideological perspectives as well as understanding of the principles behind these systems of thought.

Quantitative Analysis

Table (1) Frequencies and percentage of the hypothesis:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Result
When reading texts include elements of the Sudanese culture such as housing, the students' cultural diversity will readily be enhanced.	1	1	3	21	14	Agree
	2.5%	2.5%	7.5%	52.5%	35.0%	
When reading passages contain cultural elements relevant to types of food and methods of cooking, cultural diversity of the students of English will be enhanced.			3	21	16	Agree
			7.5%	52.5%	40.0%	
When reading passages include aspects of the Sudanese culture of typical family life, the students' cultural diversity will definitely be enhanced.			6	24	10	Agree
			15.0%	60.0%	25.0%	
When reading passages embody elements of the culture of war, cultural diversity of the university students will automatically be enhanced.	2	3	5	20	10	Agree
	5.0%	7.5%	12.5%	50.0%	25.0%	
When reading texts include elements of the Sudan culture of peace and greeting, the students' cultural diversity will be enhanced.			5	19	16	Agree
			12.5%	47.5%	40.0%	

The table above shows the frequencies and percentages of the hypothesis statements of “The views of teachers of English language on the role of reading comprehension passages enhance Sudanese cultural diversity”. In the first statement of the hypothesis the responses of the (21) teachers tend to agree with percentage (52.5%). The researcher

notices the tendency of the teachers' responses to agree as the percentages 52.5%, 60%, 50.0% and 47.5% respectively show that. The result means that teachers agree that the views of teachers of English language on the role of reading comprehension passages enhance Sudanese cultural diversity.

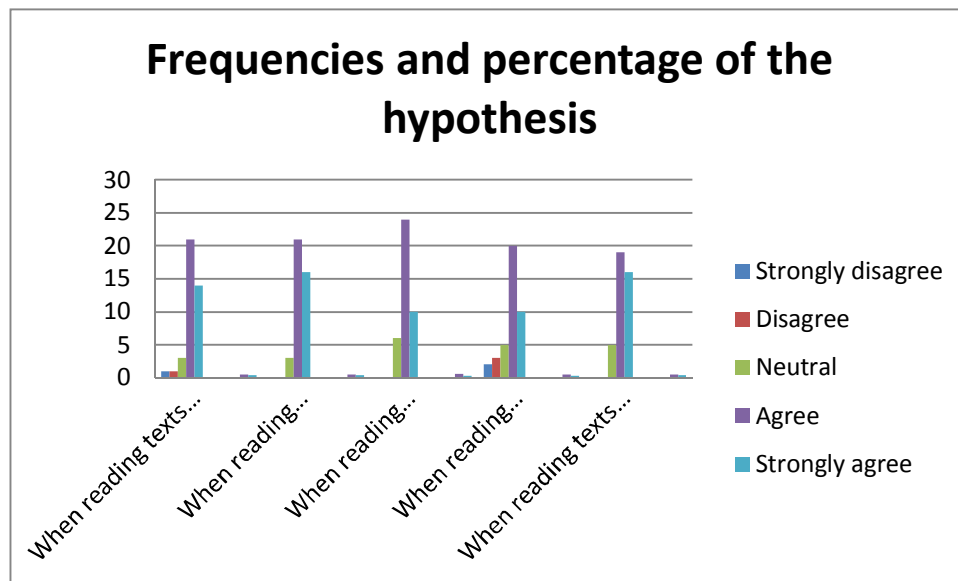


Figure (): shows frequencies and percentages of the statements of the hypothesis in teachers' questionnaire

Table (2) Descriptive analysis for the hypothesis:

	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation
When reading texts include elements of the Sudanese culture such as housing, the students' cultural diversity will readily be enhanced.	4.1500	4.00	.86380
When reading passages contain cultural elements relevant to types of food and methods of cooking, cultural diversity of the students of English will be enhanced.	4.3250	4.00	.61550
When reading passages include aspects of the Sudanese culture of typical family life, the students' cultural diversity will definitely be enhanced.	4.1000	4.00	.63246
When reading passages embody elements of the culture of war, cultural diversity of the university students will automatically be enhanced.	3.8250	4.00	1.05945
When reading texts include elements of the Sudan culture of peace and greeting, the students' cultural diversity will be enhanced.	4.2750	4.00	.67889



The table above shows the descriptive analysis of the hypothesis' statements. As it is shown in the table, the mean (average value) is 4 as well as the mode (the most frequent value) is 4. Depending on the values of the mean and the lekr scale which is demonstrated earlier, the number indicates (agree). This clearly means the opinion of the participants on this hypothesis' statement is acceptance (agree). The last column, result, shows that clearly.

Results and discussion

This paper's results demonstrate a significant positive relationship between the reinforcement of Sudanese cultural diversity and that of the reading comprehension passages, as well as adopting diverse elements of Sudanese cultures such as types of good, indigenous languages, types of clothing culture into the components of the English reading comprehension syllabus in order to enhance cultural diversity among undergraduates.

The research came up with a number of results and findings. The main findings are summed up in the fact that reading comprehension passages that are contained with the various aspects of the Sudanese diversified cultures can enhance and strengthen Sudanese cultural diversity. They also consolidate the necessity for inclusion of the various Sudanese cultural aspects within the components of the English reading comprehension texts which have to be clearly and equally represented and exposed to the extent that all the diversified cultures that make up Sudan community feel they were been part of the components of the reading curriculum. The different cultural elements of Sudan as that of clothing stereotypes, food habits, housing styles, physical features, regional variation, indigenous languages differences and the varied social and cultural

aspects have to be an organic part of the reading comprehension passages in order to enhance cultural diversity in unity as well as maintain and consolidate national peaceful co-existence.

The inclusion of the various cultural aspects of the Sudanese community within the components of the reading comprehension passages at tertiary level is of greater significance in enhancing cultural diversity and helps preserve social makeup of the Sudan. This result tends to assist the hypothesis of the study that says: Reading comprehension passages can enhance Sudanese cultural diversity. University teachers' views are also tend to promote the hypothesis of the study in the fact that reading comprehension passages that are rich with various aspects of cultures can enhance Sudanese cultural diversity and support national unity in diversity.

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