The Role of Reading Comprehension Passages in Consolidating Sudanese Cultural Diversity

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of the reading comprehension passages in consolidating 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 designed to include the accumulated aspects of Sudanese cultures to assist the enhancement of the students' cultural diversity. The study adopts the analytical descriptive method by employing a questionnaire administered to 80 4th year students of English, College of Languages, Sudan University of Science and Technology and 40 Sudanese university teaching staff of English and the data obtained was analyzed 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, mainstream culture and subcultures, tribes, social status and integrating them into the English reading comprehension syllabus in order to consolidate cultural diversity among undergraduates.. The paper 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 responsive pedagogy, stereotypes, etiquette, curriculum

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة 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 وكذلك وزعت على عدد (80) من طلاب اللغة الانجليزية الفرقة الرابعة بكلية اللغات جامعة السودان للعلوم والتكنولوجيا. وأوضحت النتائج وجود علاقة ذات دلالة إحصائية ايجابية بين تعزيز التنوع الثقافي السوداني ونصوص القراءة. توصلت الورقة إلى عدة نتائج والتي من أهمها أن تبني الأوجه والمكونات الثقافية السودانية المختلفة مثل الإثنيات والنوع الثقافة السائدة والثقافات الاخرى والقبائل والوضع الاجتماعي وتضمينها في منهج القراءة الانجليزية يلعب دوراً هاماً في تعزيز التنوع الثقافي لطلاب الجامعات ، كما توصلت الورقة إلى العديد من التوصيات نلخصها في الآتي: ضرورة دمج المكونات والخصائص الثقافية المختلفة للثقافات السودانية كمكون أساسي ضمن منهج القراءة الانجليزية بالجامعة. وأوصت الورقة بضرورة إجراء مزيد من البحوث على المهارات اللغوية الأخرى مثل مهارات السمع والمخاطبة والكتابة.

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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. Weinstein, Tomlinson – Clarke and Curran (2004) developed a five – part concept of cultural Responsive classroom management derived from the literature on culturally responsive 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 is to create an environment in which students 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 are the students (cognitively socially and emotionally), and create a safety net that equitably responds to what teachers know about their students. The multi-cultural classroom provides an opportunity for students from different cultures bring their enormous rang of experiences, knowledge, perspectives and insights to learning- teaching classrooms setting.

The research entitled: Learning styles, culture and inclusive instruction in the multicultural classroom: A business and management perspective, is conducted by Glauco De Vita (2001), Oxford Brookes University, UK. It examines the learning style profile exhibited by students in a multicultural class of international business management and how culture conditioning is reflected in the learning style preferences of home and international students. Using the Felder and Solomon's index of learning styles, this study find that each learning style dimension measured by the instrument is amply represented and that the scores reported by international students on all but one learning style dimension show much wider measures of dispersion compared to those of home students suggesting that greater variations in learning preferences likely to co-exist in culturally heterogeneous cohorts. Suggestions on how to move toward a multi style teaching approach to business management education so as to enfranchise all students in the multi culture classroom are then put forward and discussion of the implications of these finding with respect to the business management curriculum design is provided.

The existence of cultural influences in the development of individual learning preferences is due to that culture, by influencing the way we perceive,

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organize and process information (Samorvar etal. 1981), the way in which we communicate, interact with others and solve problem, mental categories, and retriever them in order to create patterns which allow us to generate new knowledge by means of previously acquired knowledge (Triandis 1965), must by definition, affect, the preferences students have for thinking, relating to others, and particular types of classroom environments and experience, which is how Grash (1990) defined learning styles with reference to student learning. The importance of cultural background in the development of individual learning style finds further support in the influence that culture – based educational experiences have in predisposing individuals to certain ways of learning.

Pesch (2008), University of Colorado Hospital and Kemp (2008), Oxford Brookes University-US, conducted a study entitled: Management Diversity- an American Perspective, in which they examine an American perspective on managing diversity in educational groupings, with a look at Marian University, Wisconsin, and more particularly at their Sport and Recreation Management Programme (SRMP) run by the school of business. Marian educators identified the need to develop a global perspective, become literate about diverse cultures and learn how to manage the implications of having more than one culture present in an academic programme. This "diversity literacy" not only has and influence on the way lecturers approach teaching and programme development, rather, it is a level of awareness, a broader way of seeing themselves and the students who participate in their programmes, that shapes everything they do as educators,

form planning and preparation to programme delivery. Through examination of personal cultural assumptions, individuals may realize and discover more suitable approaches to designing and teaching higher education programmes. Subsequently it may be possible to encourage students in turn to consider their cultural assumptions and stereotypes, their cultural programming. Lectures are previously familiarized and were made aware of the students cultures early enough before the start of the academic programme.

Theoretical Background

Kristina Beckman-Brito of the University of Arizona, Tucson investigates cultural diversity through a research entitled: Classroom Etiquette: Across- Cultural Study of Classroom Behaviors. Cultural diversity in an ESL\EFL class offers both teacher and students the opportunity to meet and become familiar with various aspects of the students' home countries. However, the resulting gulf between what is considered appropriate or inappropriate in a classroom setting can prove disconcerting if a teacher is not adept at interpreting those behavioral displays. This study was undertaken to compare the classroom etiquette i.e. Appropriate and inappropriate behavioral displays in an instructional setting, across eight countries (Argentina, China, Italy, Japan, Korea Taiwan, The Ukraine and Vietnam).

Understanding the various culture ESL teachers may encounter in their classroom is an essential component in creating positive classroom environment. It is impossible to have a clear understanding of every culture, from a pedagogical perspective, it is important to have some sense of common behavior al displays made by students in an ESL classroom.

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Given the diverse nature of an ESL classroom, international students have different assumptions about the educational setting. Tomie (1996) believes it is the teacher's responsibility to have more than a casual understanding of the dynamics found in a diverse grouping. She also believes understanding the student's cultural backgrounds also helps the students to better understanding one another's behaviors in the classroom.

Anita Mak (2010), University of Canberra, Australia conducted a research paper under the title: Enhancing Academics' capability to Engage Multicultural classes and Internationalize at Home, she reports the rational, design, implementation, and outcomes of a strategic diversity course for developing the intercultural capability of academic staff at an Australian University. The interactive work shop called" Engaging and Building Alliance across cultures" aims at developing awareness of and practical skills in facilitating the inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse students in classroom, while also engaging local students in internationalization at their home University. This paper reports the participating academics' workshop ratings, as well as their learning reflections regarding curriculum development, strategies that they intend to apply to engage their culturally diverse classes, and the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the workshop. Implications for the potential use of cultural diversity training to internationalize learning and teaching in a higher education environment are discussed. The cultivation of intercultural capability (including sensitivity, engagement and competence) among University staff and students is both instrumental to and an outcome of an internationalized curriculum (Leask,2008,2009). Growing academics' intercultural capability is essential for engaging and including students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the classroom, and for developing in internationalized outlook and global citizenship in all students (Othen, 2003, Stone, 2006, Ward 2006). Professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy could increase academic staff's awareness and skills in intercultural competence, and enhance their capability to engage culturally diverse students and facilitate positive intercultural interactions in the classroom.

Under the title: No problem! Avoidance of cultural diversity in teacher training, both researchers, Roux (2002), Latrobe University, Australia and Moller (2002). University of Pretoria, South Africa, conducted a multicultural research programme in which they state that research all over the world indicates that initial teacher training, as for as multicultural education is concerned, is grossly inadequate or, in many instances, non- existent. In many cases it is still regarded as a luxury which cannot be afforded in a time of scarcity of resources, or as a contentious politically sensitive area best avoided. Avoidance or so- called "no problem!" strategies are often the outcome of teacher training that fails or falls short of addressing issues of diversity in schools. There is much talk world wide of permeating a multicultural perspective in teacher training programmers. Most educational stakeholders agree on the feasibility of training perspective teachers to teach in a multicultural society. In practice, however, very little, if any (in some cases), is being done to impregnate existing initial teacher training courses with a pluralistic vision or perspective.

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Teachers can't be expected to be effective in teaching multicultural content and working effectively with ethnically diverse students groups without being professionally prepared for this task. When teachers encounter multicultural classroom, two approaches are readily available: the first the teacher simply proceeds as always. This is the result of ignorance and a sketchy knowledge of multiculturalism. If trained for a model of "Mono-culturalism", the teacher calls upon tried and tested "recipes" as well as his or her experience in teaching. A second possibility is a radical and total reconsideration of the global education setting in all its facets. It requires a drastic change in attitude, an unprejudiced empathy, a critical review of one's own classroom practice and an explicit preparedness to change, to adept and to learn anew. The teacher manages the multicultural classroom, in a proactive manner, the learning experiences of a culturally diverse group of learners by being sensitive to culturally related styles of learning, culturally prejudiced styles of teaching and culturally unprejudiced evaluation

strategies. This proactive model requires a new spirit, an innovative attitude, a culturally reappraisal and a co-partnership in building a new, democratic educational dispensation. Teachers are the managers of the entire process of education for cultural diversity in classrooms.

Methodology

This paper adopts the analytical descriptive method by employing a questionnaire made up of fifteen statements each of which reflect unique element of Sudanese culture, tribes, social status, gender issues, ethnicities, Bedouin, and nomads, subcultures and main stream culture and male and female issues. These statements of the research hypothesis are designed for the participants to reflect on and the data obtained was analyzed against chi-square. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) is used to statistically analyze the study sample of 40 Sudanese university teaching staff of English and 80 4th year students of English, college of Languages, Sudan University of Science and Technology.

Analysis:

Frequencies and percentage of the hypothesis:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Tendency
When a reading passage contains information about different social status, learners' cultural diversity will be enhanced	1		9	47	23	Agree
	1.3%		11.3%	58.8%	28.8%	
When a reading passage includes information about the different tribes of the Sudan, learners' cultural diversity will be developed		2	13	25	40	Strongly agree
		2.5%	16.3%	31.3%	50.0%	

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When the reading texts are explicitly rich with knowledge about the Sudanese various ethnicities, this serve as a tool to raise learners' awareness of cultural diversity	1	10	16	24	29	Strongly agree
	1.3%	12.5%	20.0%	30.0%	36.3%	
As far as other subcultures rather than Sudan's main stream culture are reflected in reading passages, learners of English shall acquire adequate knowledge of cultural diversity	7	11	27	23	12	Neutral
	8.8%	13.8%	33.8%	28.8%	15.0%	
When male and female issue are readily addressed within the reading texts, gender bias will definitely be avoided and consciousness will be raised of cultural diversity	7	17	21	23	12	Agree
	8.8%	21.3%	26.3%	28.8%	15.0%	

The table above shows the frequencies and percentages of the statements of the hypothesis "*Reading comprehension passages can enhance Sudanese cultural diversity*". In the first statement of the hypothesis the responses of the students tend to agree with percentage (58.8%). In the second statement students' responses tend to strongly agree with highest percentage (50%). The same for the third statement, as the highest percentage is (36.3%) for strongly agree. In the fourth statement, students' responses tend to neutral with highest percentage (33.8%) while in the fifth statement the responses tend to agree with highest percentage (28.8%).

The summary of the table shows that the students agree with the hypothesis claim as the percentage of the ones who strongly agree is (),
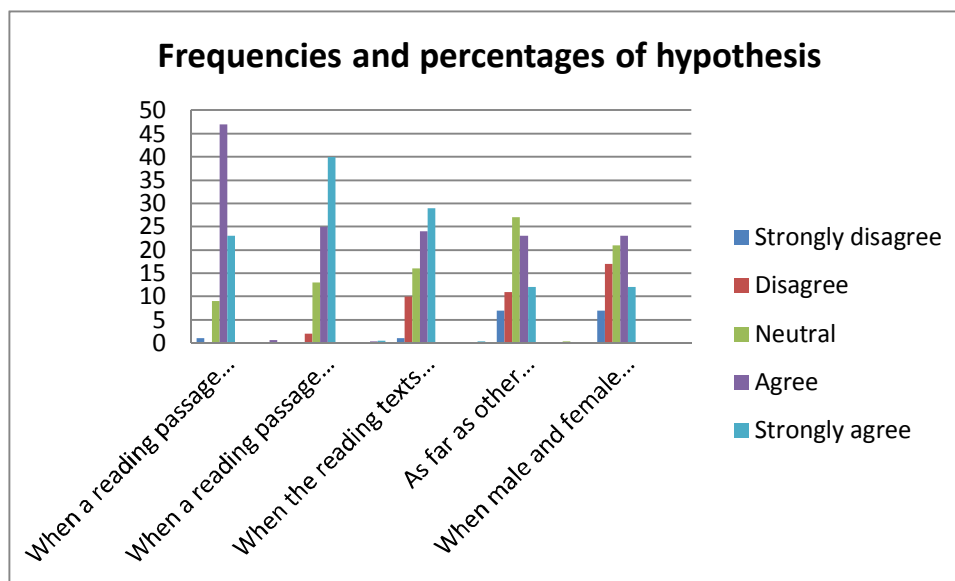
Figure (): shows frequencies and percentages of the statements of the hypothesis in students' questionnaire

Descriptive statistics of the hypothesis:

	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation	Result
When a reading passage contains information about different social status, learners' cultural diversity will be enhanced	4.1375	4.00	.70699	Agree
When a reading passage includes information about the different tribes of the Sudan, learners' cultural diversity will be developed	4.2875	5.00	.82973	Strongly agree
When the reading texts are explicitly rich with knowledge about the Sudanese various ethnicities, this serve as a tool to raise learners' awareness of cultural diversity	3.8750	5.00	1.08354	Strongly agree
As far as other subcultures rather than Sudan's main stream culture are reflected in reading passages, learners of English shall acquire adequate knowledge of cultural diversity	3.2750	3.00	1.14709	Neutral
When male and female issue are readily addressed within the reading texts, gender bias will definitely be avoided and consciousness will be raised of cultural diversity	3.2000	4.00	1.19493	Agree

The table above shows the descriptive analysis of the hypothesis' statements. As it is shown in the table, the mean (average value) is range between 4 and 5 as well as the mode (the most frequent value) is 4 and 5. Depending on the values of the mean and the lekrt scale which is demonstrated earlier, the two numbers indicate (strongly agree) and (agree). This clearly means the opinion of the participants on this hypothesis' statement is accepted (agree and strongly agree). The last column result shows that clearly.

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Chi-square value of the hypothesis:

Statements	Chi-Square(a,b)	Df	Sig.	result
When a reading passage contains information about different social status, learners' cultural diversity will be enhanced	61.000	3	.000	Acceptance
When a reading passage includes information about the different tribes of the Sudan, learners' cultural diversity will be developed	39.900	3	.000	Acceptance
When the reading texts are explicitly rich with knowledge about the Sudanese various ethnicities, this serve as a tool to raise learners' awareness of cultural diversity	30.875	4	.000	Acceptance
As far as other subcultures rather than Sudan's main stream culture are reflected in reading passages, learners of English shall acquire adequate knowledge of cultural diversity	18.250	4	.001	Acceptance
When male and female issue are readily addressed within the reading texts, gender bias will definitely be avoided and consciousness will be raised of cultural diversity	10.750	4	.030	Acceptance

To evaluate the significance of the students' opinion on the hypothesis, the researcher uses Chi-square value for the statements. The chi-square values range from 10.750 to 61.000 with degree of freedom (df) range from 3 to 4 for all statements with significance value less than the standard (sig) 0.05. That means there are statistically significant differences in all the statements of the hypothesis and looking at the previous tables of the frequencies, descriptive analysis and chi-square, the researcher finds that there are statistically significance differences for the participants' opinion on the hypothesis' statements tend to (acceptance). So, students agree that Reading comprehension passages can enhance Sudanese cultural diversity.

Results and Discussion

Reading comprehension passages at the tertiary level are of greater significance for the development of the students' reading skills. Culturally diversified reading comprehension passages have crucial role to play over the enhancement of reading skills. As far as reading passages adequately include several elements of the Sudanese various and diversified cultures, thus reading skills shall there be automatically enhanced. The incorporation of the diversified cultural elements within the components of the reading comprehension passages of the Sudanese University syllabus can empower the enhancement of both the English language reading skills as well as can widen the scope of the learners and raise their awareness about their native and indigenous cultures of their own community.

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With reference to question one which investigates the extent to which culturally diversified reading passages can enhance the reading abilities of the university students. This research findings confirm the importance of the inclusion of the cultural elements within the components of the reading passages and the great role it plays in enhancing the reading abilities of the students. Question two of the research realizes the students` view about the role of the culturally diversified reading comprehension passages in enhancing the students` reading skills. Finding of this research emphasize the great role played by the culturally diversified reading passages in enhancing the reading skills of the students. In question three where teachers` views are investigated about the inclusion of the diversified reading passages within reading texts and resulted findings that indicated the significant role of the culturally diversified reading passages in enhancing the students reading skills. Students of diverse cultural backgrounds and who study reading passage where all or part of his /her culture is there in the passage, is likely to be deeply involved in the other aspects of the text (linguistic aspects) because he/ she is familiar with the cultural content of the passage. Reading passages include various elements of Sudanese cultures inspire interest and indirectly enhance reading skills practice and development. Similar findings can be realized as stated by (Chiamello, 2012). "the idea that education must account for lives experiences and cultural reference points of the students" and (Roboslo, 2014) indicated that "cultural context influences reading comprehension skills". It is worth mentioning that cultural elements within the reading passages that match the students` schemata is of greater enhancement to the development of the Students` reading skills. Due to the fact that all students shall be deeply involved in the relevant familiar text of reading, and shall there be highly motivated in practicing reading skills.

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