The affordance of culturally-based texts and EFL Arab college students' gain in communication skill: A mixed method study

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Abstract

The purpose of this mixed-method study was two-fold. The first purpose was to investigate the role of using culturally-based materials on contributing to the advancement of oral communication of five EFL Arab college students through a six-week program. The second purpose was to explore the college students' views and experiences of using culturally-based materials. The study results revealed a noticeable, incremental gain in communication skills by using culturally-based materials. Additionally, the tactful pedagogical strategies that were used enhanced this incremental gain in oral communication. Moreover, college students viewed the use of culturally-based materials as relevant and pertinent to their lived experiences and gave them a sense of enchantment and euphoria. They also viewed their experience as a weaving process by which they connected their prior knowledge with new knowledge or their social and pragmatic knowledge with their academic language, which enabled them to extend and build communication edifices. The study incorporates some recommendations and implications.

1. Introduction

Unfamiliar culturally-based texts pose a real challenge and add a real burden for EFL/ESL learners. When EFL leaners approach oral communication with less certainty of the topic that uses unfamiliar language context, their oral communication could be impeded in using language that is socially and culturally-based language. Many EFL leaners know very little about how to culturally communicate using authentic English language because they have learned English, which is exclusively based on academic language instruction rather than the practical or functional use of the language in social settings. Therefore, the learners' focus on academic language leaves little room for the students to understand language in social sphere where the language is used in daily communication, and mediate mundane activities in instrumental and interactional ways for satisfying ordinary needs in everyday

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communication. Oral language can exhibit a real function as mediator of how students establish, talk and think about issues, and it offers venues for how students use language discourse at a larger scale (Brown, 2000; Halliday, 1975; Hymes, 1972; Krashen, 1982; Richards, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

EFL learners measure their English language success through communicative proficiency (Austin & Haley, 2004) and Arab EFL students are no exception. Many EFL learners want to see their inner-selves and agency manifested through oral communication, and to achieve that goal, they try to use their language knowledge in real social settings (Austin & Haley, 2004). For example, some researchers (e.g. Kayi, 2006; Nunan, 2010; Thornbury, 2005) believe that EFL students deploy unprompted communicative and functional English language usage to compensate for their lack of proper use of culturally and socially-based topics that can be deployed in real authentic communication. Communication skills, then, are not just uttering words; instead, communication means the ability to convey meaningful messages through real expressions. Therefore, accurate language acquisition develops through a genuine communication of opinions, emotions, or information using a well-crafted two–way communication process that feeds in developing their EFL learning (Kayi, 2006; Nunan, 2010; Thornbury, 2005).

Arab learners have numerous difficulties because of the learning context surrounding them. As Vygotsky (1962) specifies that motives surrounding the learner have a significant influence on language output. During conversation, each sentence is prompted by a specific motive and the desire to request or to answer a question that will likely lead to a bewilderment if the response is not appropriate. Furthermore, instructional strategies and the types of unfamiliar teaching materials that Arab college instructors use produce further difficulties which make the acquisition of a new language extremely difficult. Many researchers (i.e. Fauzan, 2016; Holt & Kysilka, 2006; Junaidi, 2011; O'Brien, Alfano & Magnusson, 2007; Somjai & Jansem, 2015) indicated that difficulties in English communication skills for EFL or ESL learners include: lack of sufficient input, cultural awareness, text familiarity and cultural knowledge; the selected instructional methods and materials, the language context, first language interference, and lack of real practices. Therefore, there is a critical aspect that should be taken into account which is the quality of the selection for the materials and pedagogical strategies used in improving oral communication skills. In addition to that the learners' attitudes, needs and interests toward this selection should be taken into account (Erkaya, 2005; khan, 2016; Krashen, 1982; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Miller, 2003; Richards, 2006).

A tangible evidence that reflected this issue, is found in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which is used widely within some Arab countries as an educational assessment tool. In this test, EFL college students are asked to communicate their views about a variety of cultural and social topics related to their culture or other cultures. Difficulties for those students are markedly noticed in the speaking skill whereas college Arab students exhibited low performance as reported in the official IELTS website in 2018, compared to other nationalities. Arabic students on average scored between 5 (modest users of English language) and 6 (barely competent users of the language) in both academic and general versions (IELTS, 2018). Therefore, the unfamiliarity of texts that are culturally and socially-based found in learners' schemas, caused real challenges to orally communicate ideas. For example, Bartlett (1932) investigates schema as a cultural concept in memory. Schemata are not just cognitive phenomena that existed in learners' minds, but they are expanding to the learners' social and cultural aspects when they deal with different types of texts whether in written or oral form (McVee, Dunsmore & Gavelek, 2013; Carrell, 1981).

Different studies conducted in EFL context (e.g. AL-Mahrooqi, 2013; Boonkit, 2010; Erten & Razı, 2009; Khan, 2016; Shirzadi, 2015; Sabatin, 2013; Yoon, Park, and Commeyeras, 2002) found that the limitation of cultural and social background shackle the flow of meaningful communication and comprehension when using English language. Generally, to use English language meaningfully, Arab

EFL learners need linguistic and culturally-based texts that could whet their understanding in communication. So, there is a reason to argue that cultural schema is very important to communication, since through communication, EFL learner can exhibit their real thoughts patterns and communicate what teems in their minds. More specifically, this study could contribute to our understanding of EFL students' cultural schema and their communication skills. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the role of cultural schema and text familiarity on promoting EFL Arab college students' English language oral communication skills. Furthermore, the study tries to fathom the students' views with regard to their usage of cultural familiar and unfamiliar topics through communication activities.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. The Importance of oral communication

Human communication is a complex process where a desire to communicate develops by transmitting information or being part of a conversation (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Speakers apply language according to their own goals, and reply to what they hear in a conversation. In this regard, English language learners should be both attentive receivers and communicators of messages. Even though all skills are essential, oral communication is the most critical skill because it is one of the crucially needed abilities to convey messages and mediate thinking. Speaking in English is not an easy task because speakers must know many significant components like pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. EFL/ESL researchers stressed on the importance of communication as viable critical tool for understanding (Leong & Ahmadi, 2016; Brown, 2000; Rivers, 1981). For example, in a study conducted with ESL learners, Rivers (1981) found that speaking outside the classroom is used as twice as reading and writing combined.

1.1.2. Cultural schema and oral communication skill

The idea of schema was first used by Emmanuel Kant (1781) who alludes that new concepts could become meaningful only when they are related to something the human already knew. That is, the human possesses general concepts to which he/she relates more specific concepts. Moreover, Bartlett (1932) describes schema as a structured organization of previous reactions or experiences, which are constantly functioning. When a human encounters new experiences, these experiences are understood only as they can be related to an existing schema and simultaneously become part of it. The idea of schema in fact has contributed immensely to different research in cognition, language, and culture to show the interface among these three variables (e.g., D'Andrade ,1995; Rice, 1980; Sharifian, 2008; Strauss and Quinn, 1997). This is due to the generally agreed view of "schemas as cognitive phenomena that are in most cases derived from cultural experience and which are often instantiated and embodied in linguistic expression" (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2011, p. 229).

Cultural schema refers to a discipline of cognitive anthropology that is derived from social structure. The term cultural schema is used interchangeably with cultural models that include schematic representations of general concepts shared among individuals of a culture. The amount of knowledge among individuals is not the same, therefore, the degree of "schematization" varies (Sharifian, 2007; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Cultural schema is instantiated in language through using whether the mother tongue or the target language to communicate about cultural topics, which need to have both cultural schemata and language schemata such as, morphosyntactic features, lexical items, idiomatic expressions, cultural metaphors, speech acts and discourse markers (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2011).

Many studies (e.g. Bernhardt, 2005; Gaffney & Anderson, 2000; Gürkan, 2012; Li & Lai, 2012; Liu, 2015; Pulido, 2007; Rawson & Kintsch, 2004; Sabatin, 2013; Yousef, Karimi, & Janfeshan, 2014) addressed the idea of cultural schema in association with reading comprehension skills. However, little research is found in the area of cultural schema in relation to the oral communication skill in second

language learning. For example, some researchers (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2011; Sharifian, 2001, 2007, 2008) had focused on the cultural pragmatic schema and the way it could facilitate intra-cultural communication, while on the other hand, it could debilitate intercultural communication due to misunderstanding and misinterpreting caused among the interlocutors as a result of the lack of cultural schema. From another perspective, Wierzbicka and Goddard (2004) who developed the idea of cultural scripts which include cultural values and attitudes and give rise to the pragmatic devices that interlocutors use in a conversation. The notion of the cultural scripts is tied to the notion of shared schemata. Therefore, miscommunication occurs when such of these cultural scripts are not met the interlocutors' schema. Nevertheless, none of these studies tackled the issue of how building up a cultural language schema could serve in facilitating and promoting English oral communication skills within EFL context. It is not a matter of cultural communication, rather it is about how to communicate about cultural topics using cultural language schema.

1.2. Research questions

Grounded on the purpose of the study, three main research questions were emanated:

1. Does the use of culturally-based texts make a difference in EFL Arab college students' English communication?

2. How does the use of culturally-based texts enhance EFL Arab college students' English communication?

3. How do Arab college students view the role of using culturally-based texts in promoting their English oral communication skills?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The framework of this explanatory sequential mixed method study consisted of two phases. In the first phase, quantitative means were used through an implementation of an intensive oral communication program. Therefore, a pre and posttest were used prior and after the implementation of the program. The second phase of the study featured a collection of qualitative data by means of oral document analysis and a semi-structured interview protocol.

2.2. Sample / Participants

The sample of this study was selected purposefully (n=5). The primary criteria for participants' selection include their academic level as female college students, sharing of Arabic cultural background, their availability and willingness to participate in the program and their close level of proficiency in English language (IELTS speaking band between 4.5 and 5.0). The choice of female students rather than male was to have a homogeneous group that shares topics relevant to females' interest.

2.3. Instrument(s)

The implementation of the program unit occurred over six weeks where participants met a minimum of nine hours a week. The cultural topics (customs and traditions) were selected based on the students' needs and interests. The materials were selected from different authentic resources, such as national magazines, videos, and websites. In addition to that different pedagogical strategies were adopted from Richards (2011) and Jones (2008) in the program unit (See Appendix A). Based on that, three major

instruments were used: 1) Pre and posttest; 2) Audio recorded documents of the actual conversation exchange; and 3) A semi-structured interview.

Pre and posttest. The general features of the pre and post-test were adapted following the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). It consisted of three tasks which were: 1) Reflect on a Picture; 2) Respond to Questions; and 3) Express your Opinion. The time needed to compete the oral test was four minutes (See Appendix B). The measurement criteria of the test were adapted and taken from popular standardized tests including the TOEIC (2016) and the IELTS (2016) rubrics for speaking; besides the use of the English proficiency teachers' handbook issued by Cambridge English Language Assessment (2016). The rubric included three main criteria; Fluency, Vocabulary & Grammar, and Content which in turn composed of 10 components. The components of Fluency criterion are: Pronunciation, Lapses and Pauses, Hesitation and First Language Interference. The components of Vocabulary and Grammar criterion are: Words or Phrases Repetition, Isolated Words or Phrases, Grammatical Errors and Self-correction. The components of the Content criterion are: Short Responses and Digression.

Audio-recorded document. To collect the audio-recorded document some pedagogical strategies were used to elicit students' communication. The rubric described above was also used to assess the students' performances while practicing particular activities in the program unit. The strategies that were analyzed are described below:

Talk in a Minute. This strategy was used to provide the students an opportunity to speak freely and fluently within a time limit about the proposed culturally relevant topics without repetition, hesitation or digression. It represented a real challenge to the participants because they have to reactivate their cultural schema, think about new vocabulary and express their ideas properly. It was used frequently with students (four-time sessions) to track their progress over time. The researchers provided students with culturally-based selected reading materials and videos related to customs and traditions to talk about them (Richards, 2011).

Retelling Actions. This strategy was adapted to practice fluency and to understand new vocabulary, structures and the utilization of expressions used. It was applied by showing participants culturally-based texts such as videos or reading texts. Then the participants were asked to retell what they have already seen or read (Jones, 2008). The Retelling strategy was taken place during six-time sessions.

Interview. A semi-structured interview was used to fathom the participants' views regarding culturally relevant topics with communicative pedagogical strategies for promoting their oral communication skills. In this case study, the researchers adopted Kvale's (2007) stages in planning and conducting the interview, in which each of the five participants was interviewed individually for 25 minutes.

2.4. Data analysis

In this study, the researchers analyze the pre and posttest through counting the errors that were made by the participants during the oral test. The counting was made by the three researchers to ensure reliability. To calculate the errors, each component in the rubric was assigned 10 points. The oral errors for each component were collected by the three raters. The total and the average for each participant were taken out of one hundred, then the total mean scores of the five participants were calculated and represented as general collected data. To check the internal reliability of the test, Cronbach alpha was calculated with a value of (.887). In terms of audio-recorded documents, the researcher adopted an analytical strategy that was advanced by Coffey (2014) which allows the researchers to analyze documents that were based on the process of data production, linguistic features, and content. The process in this document analysis represented the number of sessions used in both the Talk in a Minute and Retelling activities. The linguistic feature and the content analysis were based on the main criteria used in the
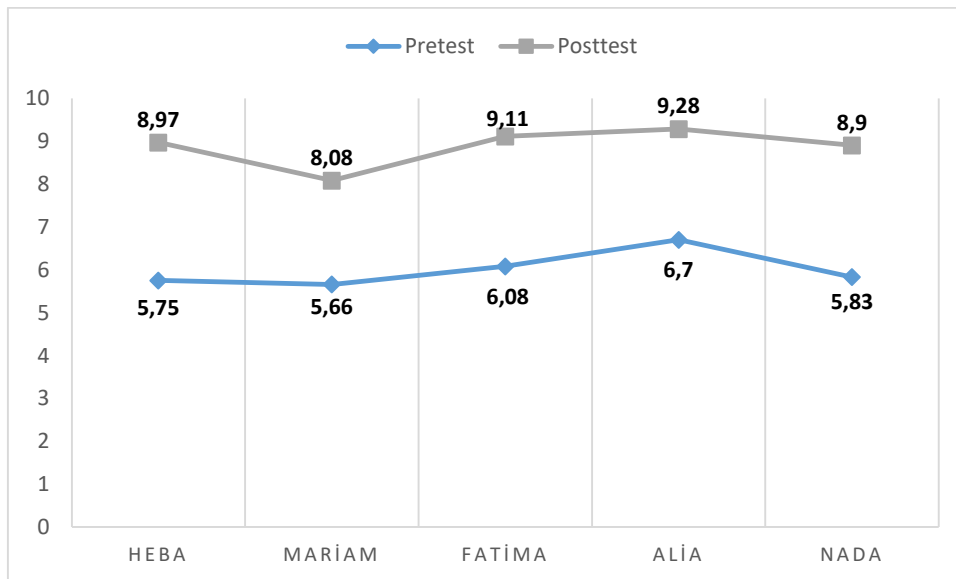
rubric to quantify the qualitative data through counting the errors as done in the pre and posttest. To check the internal reliability of the final scores, the Cronbach's alpha value was extracted for each activity with a value of (.624) for Talk in a Minute activity and (.953) for Retelling activity.

The interview data analysis was completed by transcribing and analyzing the researchers' recorded interviews. This analysis was then given meaning by the meaning coding process employed in the next stage. The overall intent was to categorize the meaning of the code into themes regarding the participants' views (Kvale, 2007). Thus, four themes were extracted.

3. Results

3.1. The difference made using Culturally-based Texts in English Oral Communication

To answer the first research question descriptive statistics were used. The manifestation of the difference between the pre-test and the post-test results were based on comparing the mean scores for each test criteria and its components. As shown in Figure 1, it is noted that there is a noticeable general gain in the participants' total scores between the oral communication pre and post-test with a mean difference around (M = 3). As per individual cases, Heba, Nada and Mariam had very close mean in the oral pretest total scores: (M = 5.75), (M = 5.83), (M = 5.66), respectively as for the gain in the posttest their general mean scores are as follows: (M= 8.97), (M = 8.9), and (M = 8.08). Additionally, Fatima and Alia, who scored higher in the pre-test as compared to the other three participants with initial scores of (M = 6.08) and (M = 6.7), kept in maintaining these higher scores in the posttest: (M = 9.11) and (M = 9.28), respectively.

Figure 1. Total Average of the 5 Participants' Pre-Post Tests in Oral Communication

Figure 2 compares the means of the components of the main criteria in the oral pre- and post-test for the five participants. Generally, there was a clear difference in the mean scores in the pre-test as compared to the post-test among components. The highest gain was noted in the "Isolated Words & Phrases" component and the "Word or Phrase Repetition" component of the Vocabulary and Grammar criterion where in the pre-test, the mean scores were (M = 4.15) and (M = 4.8), and rises up in the posttest to (M = 9.44) and (M = 9.8) respectively. The "Hesitation" component of the Fluency criterion and the "Grammatical errors" component of the Vocabulary & Grammar criterion witnessed a double increase. The mean score of the "Hesitation" component rises from (M = 4.02) in the pre-test to (M = 8.23) in the post-test, and the mean score of the "Grammatical Errors component" increased from (M = 3.8) to (M

= 6.94). A visible gain was depicted in the "Lapses & Pauses" component of the Fluency criterion as well as in the "Short Responses" component and the "Digression" component of the Content criteria. The mean scores of these criteria in the pre-test were (M = 1.52), (M = 7.7), (M = 8.2), and increased in the posttest to (M = 5.57), (M = 9.9) and (M = 10) respectively. Finally, a slight increase was noticed in the "Pronunciation" component of the Fluency criterion from a mean score of (M = 9.15) in the pre-test to (M = 9.38) in the post-test. Similar was the case of the "Self-Correction" component of Vocabulary and Grammar criterion with a mean score of (M = 9.2) in the pretest to (M = 9.6) in the post-test.
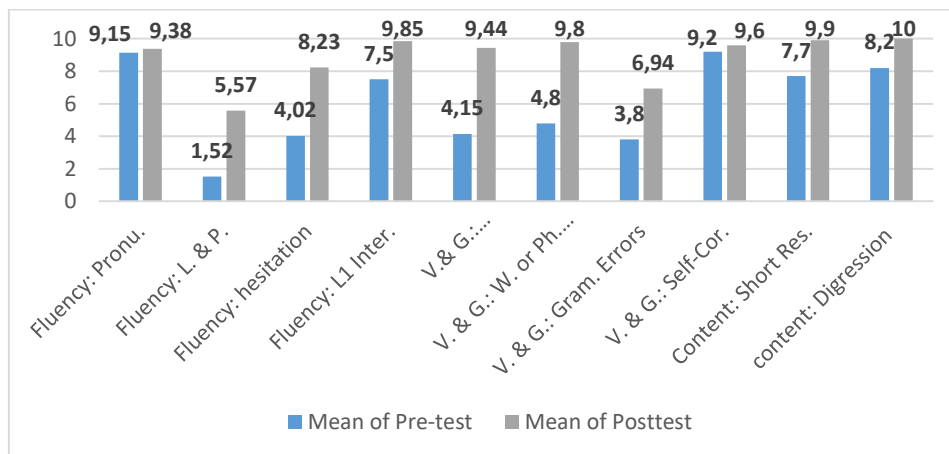

Figure 2. The Means of Oral Communication Components

3.2. The role of the Cultural schema in Promoting English Oral Communication

To answer the second question which was aimed at probing the role of the cultural schema in promoting English oral communication, the two audio-recorded actual data documents were analyzed. Overall, the participants showed a noticeable gain while practicing talk in a minute activity, which is shown in Figure 3. As per individual cases, Alia began the activity with a strong score (M = 8), then her score slightly decreased by the end of the second activity by (M = 7), which signifies that there was a lack in her cultural schema regarding the cultural topic addressed in this session. During the final two activities, her score increased (M = 8.5) for activity three (M = 9) for activity four. In contrast, Nada's performance in the first activity was the weakest among all the participants (M = 5); however, she had showed a remarkable increase through frequent practices to reach (M = 9) in the fourth activity. Hanan, Salama and Sara underwent an incremental increase in their performances along the four activities.
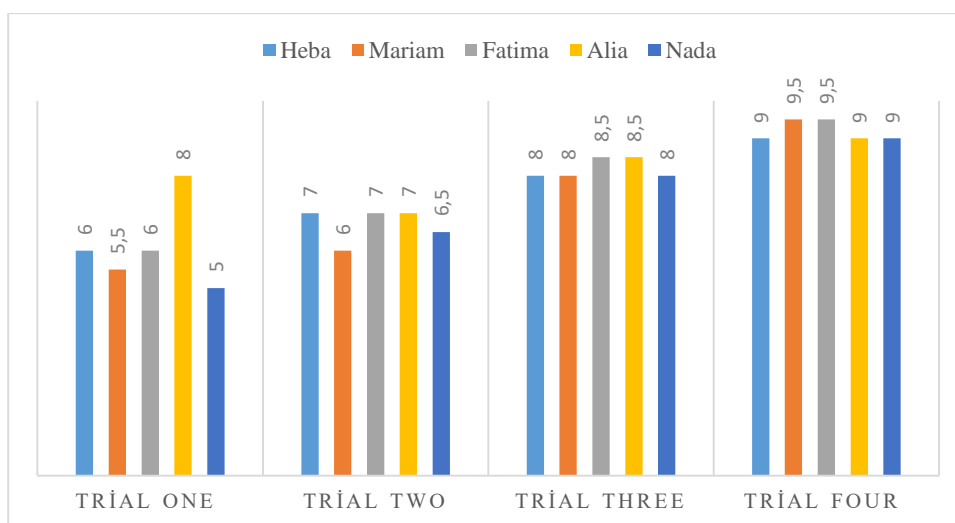

Figure 3. Tracking of Oral Productivity through Talk in a Minute Strategy

The results of the Retelling activity, illustrated in Figure 4, showed a noticeable incremental gain starting from the first trial of the activity, a mean score among the five participants was (M = 6.6) and gradually increased over the course of the study to a mean score of (M = 9) in the sixth trial of the activity. As per individual cases, Fatima was the lowest student, starting at (M = 5). However, her score increased consistently until her final score (M= 8.9). Heba, Mariam, Nada and Alia had almost the same mean score at the beginning of the program activity (M =7) and as the program progressed, all the participants showed significant gradual increases culminating in the sixth trial (M = 9).

Generally, in terms of the measurement criteria in both activities, the gain was mostly perceived in Vocabulary and Grammar Criteria in which the use of isolated words and phrases, the repetition of ideas and the grammatical mistakes were lessened from one trial to another in each activity. Moreover, the gain in Fluency criteria was also noticeable, in which lapses, pauses, hesitation and first language interference were reduced while they were communicating their ideas confidently as they were relying on their progressed cultural schema.
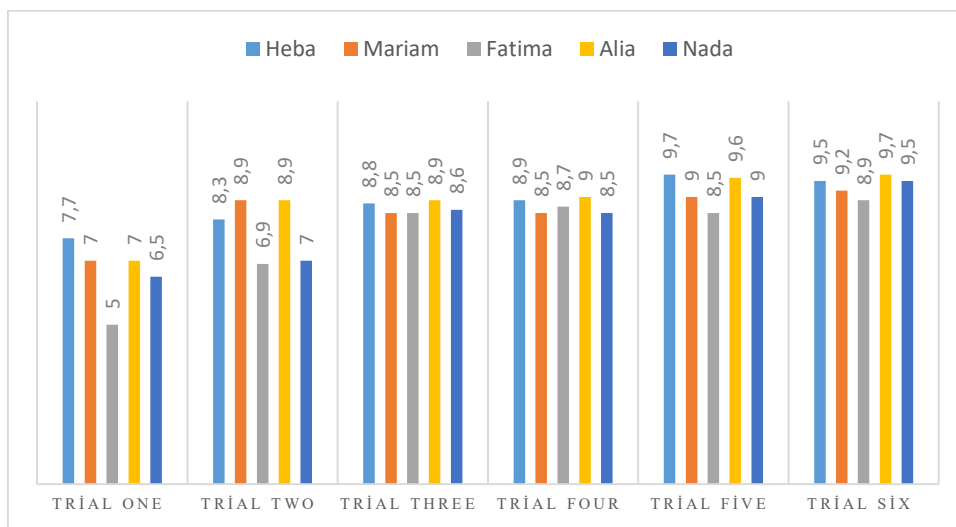

Figure 4. Tracking of Oral Productivity through Retelling Strategy

3.3. Views towards the Use of Cultural-based Materials in Oral Communication

To answer the third question, an interview was conducted with the participants, in which four major themes were emerged as follows:

Culturally-relevant Topics Help in Promoting Communication. Culturally-relevant topics enhanced the student' communication skill. The students reiterated that the use of topics that akin to their culture and social interests enabled them to build cultural schema that served their communication goals. All of the students stressed that the selection of culturally relevant topics, relevant pragmatic materials and the use of pedagogical strategies helped in activating their cultural schematic imagination about issues they have already known which enabled them to speak without using prompts or prepared outlines. For example, Fatima viewed that using culturally relevant topics was vital for facilitating her oral communication and enabling her to speak fluently without formal preparation, Fatima: "from the program, I built a good background of different cultural topics such as, traditional food, wedding ceremonies and clothing styles. So, I can reply instantaneously and automatically during any real conversations without having the need to use prompts for communication, so I can express my ideas spontaneously"

The Euphoria of Using Cultural and Social Relevant Texts in Communication. The interviewees believed that the use of the social and cultural relevant texts raised their level of interaction and made them enjoy the experience of learning through cultural context. Most of the five students' responses

evolved around the importance of the social and cultural relevant topics, the elation and satisfaction they found in communicating those topics, which also helped in raising their consciousness about using cultural schemata in communication as reflected in Heba's words: "I personally gained benefits from these materials, so I know their values in teaching and learning. The absence of the social and cultural use of the language leads us to lose the joy of practicing English language."

Meaningful Connection between Pragmatic and Academic Language. The social and cultural materials used, did not only served as an integral part of real-life communication but also played an integral part in the development of the academic aspect of English language. The great connection between the pragmatic and academic usage of language, from the communicative aspect appeared in most of the participants' responses. They noted the agility and the fluidity of their communication with their instructors and colleagues. They also felt that they extend this practice beyond the classroom. This is reflected by an example from Mariam when she said: "As a university student, I feel I gained a bigger pool of professional vocabulary suitable to my level, which will serve me in my communication with my instructors and my colleagues".

Extension of Building Communication Edifices. The use of the cultural and the social authentic materials and activities served in building communication edifices. The building up of these communication edifices were manifested in the different gains in the participants' English oral communication. From their responses, different gains were attributed to different components. For example, the participants expressed an expansion on their vocabulary repertoire, a decrease in hesitation and pauses, a proper use of structures and new expressions in communication and a general improvement in listening skills. An example of these different communication edifices can be found in Nada's words: "I have learned different structures and new vocabularies which I have built in my mind. My grammar became better now", "I became less hesitant in my ways of communicating ideas, I used to pause a lot while I was communicating because of the lack of the vocabularies and expressions used to convey my messages".

4. Discussion

The result of this study revealed that there was a progressive gain of five college students in their oral communication skills due to the exposure to culturally-based texts and the use of different strategies. This result supports the hypothesis that intensive exposure to authentic, culturally-based relevant materials and activities had real bearings on the students' communication performance. These findings resonate with findings of other researchers (e.g. Ellis 2005; Hammond & Gibbon, 2001; Krashen, 1982; Nunan, 2010) who emphasized the importance of providing really cultural and social materials and mundane activities which help in mitigating the academic learning with functional language use. In this case, the use of these materials was instrumental in creating meaningful communicative edifices that suited the learners' background knowledge and schema, and they use this schema when they try to mold it in different contexts. Moreover, the concept of enculturation by which participants can strive to build a higher order thinking can be served by providing them with relevant cultural materials that fit their needs and interests (Vygotsky, 1978). This idea is also emphasized by Kayi (2006) who believed that the essence of communication is to leave a room for learners to create true communication events by expressing their true feelings and opinions through true interactions.

This study capitalized on culturally-based materials and pedagogical activities that served true communication via constructing a cultural schema. At the beginning of program, the researchers realized that the students lack the necessary cultural expressions and English vocabulary to communicate simple ideas. However, the use of cultural materials through videos, internet and magazines helped in stimulating students' thinking and whetting their comprehension to put these materials in actual

meaningful communication. This finding supports some researchers (e.g. Erkaya, 2005; Khan, 2016; Praneetponkrang & Phaiboonnugulkij, 2014; Sabatin, 2013; Yoon, Park & Commeyeras, 2002) who found, that the use of cultural materials in stories, poems, folktales and relevant cultural topics helped their participants in understanding the use of language in a functional way, particularly when they use similar strategies that were used in this study such as the retelling, role playing and discussion to promote communication skills. Moreover, this finding is supported by Shayer (2003) who found that the selection of pedagogical instructions and scaffolding strategies are crucial for EFL learners. Those culturally based materials used in the program unit were challenging but at same time achievable for progressing and enhancing cultural schema.

The interview results corroborated that the participants had positive attitudes toward the use of culturally-based materials in promoting their English oral communication skills and building up their cultural and language schema. This finding is supported by (Austin & Haley, 2004; Krashen, 1987; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Millar, 2003; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Richards, 2006) who postulated that EFL learners want to be meaningful users of the English language, so they can communicate freely and comfortably in real life situations. Their positive views were shown when they affirmed the exigency of utilizing culturally-based relevant materials that served to strengthen their knowledge about the cultural topics. Moreover, the use of cultural relevant topics enabled the students to navigate through content that is familiar to them which is supported by Carrell (1984) who emphasized the role of content schema which deals with the degree of familiarity learners have of the topic and how content schema has a significant impact on EFL leaners' understanding of the language. Additionally, other studies (e.g. Erten, I., & Razi, S., 2009; Li, C. & Lai, H., 2012; Sharifian, 2007; Sharifian, F. & Jamarani, M., 2011; Strauss & Quinn, 1997) stressed the crucial role of cultural schema which help in mitigating leaners' prior knowledge with familiar relevant topics that instigate and trigger their abilities to communicate and express their ideas.

All the interviewees in this study viewed the use of cultural relevant materials as a positive tool that raise their consciousness and awareness of the functional and pragmatic use of English language. This notion is supported by (Boonkit, 2010; Ellis, 2005; Rivers, 1981; Sabatin, 2013; Thornbury, 2005) who indicated that in order to understand topics learnt in English language, learning needs to be based and derived from cultural, authentic, pragmatic and social application.

The social and pragmatic use of the language will also trigger and stimulate the academic use of English language. The students alluded that there is a relationship between the pragmatic and the academic use of the language. For example, the students viewed that the use of cultural-based materials helped them in improving their IELTS scores as an academic requirement for college entry. This idea goes in tandem with Aboudan's study (2011) who emphasized that most students faced difficulty in passing the IELTS due to the lack of authentic exposure to English language. The limited materials and activities provided for English learners were not sufficient to enhance their English language skills.

The final major finding in the interview is the use of cultural-based relevant texts, whether visual, oral or written, have strengthened the participants' fluency, vocabulary, structures, expressions, listening skills, and pronunciation. For example, Carrell (1984) indicated that in linguistic schema as she coined it, English learners are constructing their knowledge of phonetics, grammar, and vocabulary by being exposed to different experiences where their prior knowledge serves as a building block of what they are experiencing cognitively. Moreover, Leong & Ahmadi (2016) emphasized the importance of schematizing significant components of English as a Foreign Language that include pronunciation, grammar, fluency, vocabulary, listening and comprehension while communicating meaningfully in real-life situations.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Recommendations

The study recommends doing more research in the process of natural and culturally based learning and to see the effect of early, orderly and systematic use of culturally-based materials on promoting writing and other language skills. For example, a longitudinal study could be considered for tracing the effect of culturally-based and schema-based learning on reading, writing, speaking, listening, visualizing and visual representation skills. Moreover, teachers' views and beliefs should be taken into consideration on how they view teaching by using culturally and socially based text in EFL contexts.

5.2. Limitations and Implications

This study has some limitations such as the small sample size, as five students participated that may affect the probability of generalization of the results. Additionally, conducting interviews with the participants might have led to some subjectivity and bias. It is expected in qualitative studies; yet, it can be perceived as a limitation.

In terms of the pedagogical implications, the thoughtful selection of teaching materials is crucial. The culturally-based materials will maximize the likelihood of stimulating and promoting communication. Moreover, the use of strategies with effective pedagogical tact that connect cultural and social topics will serve in facilitating leaners' comprehension and communication, this may in turn make it possible for teachers to be involved in active teaching and learning. The use of what English learners knew and what they expose to could make the process of weaving the background knowledge with new materials as an active and natural learning process. This will enable teachers to increase their awareness of the importance of using cultural-relevant texts in a way that assists in building EFL learners' cultural schema and thus fuel their communicative aspects of language.

6. Ethics Committee Approval

The authors confirm that ethical approval was obtained from United Arab Emirates University (Approval Date: 04/04/2016).

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Appendix A. The Designed Program: Customs and Traditions

Talk in a Minute Activity

Select from the following topics to talk about in a minute:

Talk in a minute about one of your traditional dish.

Talk in a minute about traditional clothes from other cultures.

Talk in a minute about your traditional wedding ceremonies

Listening 🔵

Say It with Feeling Activity

Listen and practice the following conversation

Maha: Guess what! I just got invited to my teacher's house for dinner. She is an Emirati.

Maitha: Oh, how nice!

Maha: Yes, but what do you do here in the United Arab Emirates when you're invited to someone's house?

Maitha: Well, it's the custom to bring a small gift.

Maha: Really? Like what?

Maitha: Oh, maybe some flowers or chocolates.

Maha: And is it all right to bring a friend along?

Maitha: Well, if you want to bring someone, you're expected to call first and ask if it's OK or not.

Maha: Ok, Is there anything that I have to know about Emirati customs of hospitality?

Maitha: Yeah. When somebody comes to us. As a kind of hospitality, the incense and Oud must be served to the guest.

Maha: That sounds interesting!

Adapted from (Richards, 2011)

Retelling Activity

Reading Time

Work Alone: Students will Read the following snapshot. Then they will retell what did you understand from the text. You can take notes.

So imagine my delight to land in Al-Ain in 1988 and find myself in a city with a history dating back over 5.000 years with ancient tombs, old oases and a trading history involving camels, frankincense, carpets, and silver amongst many other things. I remember walking into some of the houses of expatriates who had already been here a considerable time by the time I arrived, and jealously looking at their Middle Eastern house decorations. Beautiful Persian carpets, Mandoos wedding chests and antique silver jewellery often adorn the spaces of the large villas and I was always drawn to examine them and where

Assorted antique silver jewellery and an anklet
تحف فضية متنوعة وخلخال

they might be found. One of my earliest items of interest was a heavy silver anklet. I was told that it had been purchased for a mere Dh 100 about five years earlier and similar pieces could still be found in the souqs of Abu Dhabi or Al-Ain if I was lucky.

Coffee pots and pearl chests
دلال للقهوة وصناديق صدفية

(Oasis Living, 2015, November, p

Talk in A Minute Activity

Students will watch the following video and will talk about it in a minute.

My Abaya Never Held Me Back!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cev0LwgRNVI&list=PLUR84KR14hnepbFYFaBs7 48SZAhr5uozI&index=27

Note Taking Card

Retelling Activity

Read the following Egyptian traditional food, then retell the step. You can add extra information if you have a background about these dishes.

Traditional Food in Egypt

Kushari

Considered to be the Egyptian national dish, it consists of pasta and tomato sauce, among other items, including rice, lentils, caramelized onions, garlic and chickpeas. Having four sources of carbohydrates has made it the most popular lunch item in most common food outlets in Egypt for over 100 years. Interestingly enough, Kushari's origins are not Egyptian at all, in fact it was a dish brought in by the British army in Egypt in the 19th century: the pasta was imported from Italy, the tomatoes are from Latin America and the rice from Asia, however the idea to mix them all together in one extremely delicious and vegetarian dish was conceived in Egypt.

(Atiatalla, 2011)

Crossing Cultures in Wedding

Group A: Emirati Wedding Ceremony

First of all, since Emirati weddings involve separate ceremonies for men and women, you won't be able to bring your husband. However, local couples are generally happy to accommodate as many wedding guests as physically possible (typically upwards of 300), so bringing a female friend shouldn't be a problem. If possible, try to confirm this in advance with the bride's father or another senior member of the wedding party. Though modest attire is expected when you arrive at the venue, once guests are assembled abayas and shaylas will be removed, revealing glitzy designer dresses and decadent jewellery. Sometimes this even culminates in a fashion show, with guests taking it in turns to slink along a specially erected catwalk. If this happens, do your best to get involved and follow the lead of the local women. Leave your camera at home, though – despite the opulent clothes and decor, taking pictures at an Emirati wedding is usually forbidden, and is more than likely to cause offence. Food will be served up in vast quantities (usually after coffee and dates), so it's best to arrive on an empty stomach, else you'll risk appearing discourteous. You won't be expected to clear your plate entirely, but as long as you try a bit of everything you should escape any accusatory looks. Also, remember to keep your scarf to hand once the plates are cleared, since this is usually when the groom will be arriving, meaning the women will be required to cover up. Gifts aren't expected on the day, but if you're particularly close to the bride or groom, feel free to send something before or after the ceremony. Most weddings are preceded by a similar gathering at the bride's house the day before the main reception, which is the perfect opportunity to hand over your offerings. As with most cultures, gifts of food, clothing, ornaments or domestic items are all considered appropriate. Of course, not all of the aforementioned points are set in stone, and you'll find that traditions vary depending on a family's background. Therefore, the best way to clarify any concerns is to approach a member of the organizing party. It is far more likely they'll appreciate the effort you've gone to than take offence at your ignorance (Timeout Dubai, 2011).

Appendix B. Oral Communication Rubric

Criteria	Components	Participants' Error count (--/10)				
		Haba	Nads	Mariam	Fatima	Alia
Fluency	Pronunciation					
	Lapses and Pauses					
	Hesitation					
	First Language Interference					
Vocabulary & Grammar	Isolated Words and Phrases					
	Word and phrase Repetition					
	Grammatical Errors					
	Self-Correction					
Content	Short Responses					
	Digression					
Total Average (100 – Number of Errors)						

Pre and posttest

Section One: Reflect on a Picture

Directions: In this part of the test, you will describe the following picture in as much details as you can. You will have **30 seconds** to prepare your thoughts. Then you will have **45 seconds** to speak about the picture.

(Wallengren, 2015)

Note Taking Card

Jot down your ideas to prepare yourself before starting to speak.

Section Two: Respond to Questions

Directions: In this part of the test, the examiner will ask you three questions and you will respond immediately with providing full detailed answers with real examples. No preparation time is provided. You will have **30 seconds to respond to question A and B**, and **45 seconds to respond to question C**.

A.   What kinds of traditional food do you like to eat at home?

B.   Do you like home-made food or food from restaurant? Why?

C.   Tell the recipe of your favorite traditional dish.

Section Three: Express Your Opinion

Directions: In this part of the test, you will express your opinion about your preparation a wedding party. You have **30 seconds to prepare**. Then you have **one minute to speak**.

Note Taking Card

Jot down your ideas to prepare yourself before starting to speak.

Kültüre dayalı metinlerin uygunluğu ve YDİ Arap üniversite öğrencilerinin iletişim becerisindeki kazanımı: Karma yöntem çalışması

Öz

Bu karma yöntemli çalışmanın amacı iki yönlüdür. İlk amaç, altı haftalık bir program aracılığıyla beş EFL Arap üniversite öğrencisinin sözlü iletişiminin ilerlemesine katkıda bulunmada kültürel temelli materyalleri kullanmanın rolünü araştırmaktı. İkinci amaç, üniversite öğrencilerinin kültürel temelli materyalleri kullanma konusundaki görüşlerini ve deneyimlerini keşfetmekti. Çalışma sonuçları, kültürel temelli materyalleri kullanarak iletişim becerilerinde gözle görülür, artan bir kazanım ortaya çıkardı. Ek olarak, kullanılan incelikli pedagojik stratejiler sözlü iletişimdeki bu artan kazancı artırdı. Dahası, üniversite öğrencileri kültürel temelli materyallerin kullanımını yaşadıkları deneyimlerle alakalı ve ilgili olarak gördüler ve onlara büyü ve coşku duygusu verdiler. Ayrıca deneyimlerini, önceki bilgilerini yeni bilgilerle ya da sosyal ve pragmatik bilgilerini akademik dilleriyle birleştirdikleri ve iletişim yapılarını genişletip inşa etmelerini sağlayan bir dokuma süreci olarak gördüler. Çalışma, bazı öneriler ve çıkarımlar içermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: kültüre dayalı malzemeler; kültür şeması; EFL sözlü iletişim; Arap üniversite öğrencileri

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