

Need for Supplementing ELT Course Material in Middle East

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Abstract

In Middle East, English Language Teaching has been linked to course books framed in United States or Britain. Handling such course texts are considered appropriate because they implement the theory that EFL students must internalize native speaker's fluency. Exercises that could enable Saudi students/English learners in Middle East to talk about their native culture and belief have been left aside and ignored. Consequently, conventional teaching EFL classes to English (Major) students have produced Saudis who did not learn how to communicate their country's culture in English. The rising demand for learning English language includes participating in global business, tourism, higher education, science and technology. Consequently there is a growing demand to localize course materials that will enable students to verbalize their own ideas, culture, ethics etc. This paper will aim to focus on the EFL teacher's role in creating supplements that can be localized to encourage student's communicative skills; the objectives is to prepare Saudi students to speak English confidently when they encounter international English –speakers either at home or abroad and to Saudi English bilinguals also.

Key words

English Foreign Language (EFL), English Language Teaching (ELT), Inner Circle Countries, Middle East, Localization, Arabic culture, Localized Supplements, Situation-based Activities.

Introduction

Presently, the globe is expanding into one enormous market place and English educators are reappraising the validity of emphasizing United Kingdom's or United States of America's culture and context to motivate a learner. The motivating reason for learning includes global business, higher education, research, science and technology and tourism. However, at the same time, there is a growing trend to localize or change the text materials so that learners can express their opinions, culture, ideas in English. How can a Saudi learner, in particular, communicate not only about USA but every activity related to their daily life like cultural and social practice, attending school, doing business, etc?

The course material in ELT programmes projects British and American culture. In order to teach Saudi students to talk about their homeland, an Islamic country, which is comparatively opposite to western culture, in English requires a modified approach by EFL teachers, both native speakers and bilingual Saudi teachers.

The paper will present the western culture favoritism in ELT text books, the rising trends to localize the exercise related to enhance communicative skills, and guidelines for designing conversation supplement.

EFL Conversation Texts and Inner Circle Culture: History

Inner, outer, and expanding circles symbolize the patterns of acquisition, the type of spread, and the functional allocation of the English language in diverse cultural contexts in the world. The inner circle (also known as core English-speaking countries), is defined by Kachru as one of the three concentric circles of World English. It covers countries in which the first language or the dominant language is English. These countries include Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand,

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and the United States (1985, 1996). “[T]he most generally held view is that the Inner Circle ... is norm-providing; this means that English language norms are developed in these countries and spread outwards. The Outer Circle (mainly New Commonwealth countries) is *norm-developing*, easily adopting and perhaps developing its own norms. The Expanding Circle (which includes much of the rest of the world) is norm-dependent, because it relies on the standards set by native speakers in the Inner Circle. This is a one-directional flow and learners of English as a foreign language in the Expanding Circle look to the standards set in the Inner and Outer Circles” (M. Gould and M. Rankin: 2014). In linguistics, Americanization is the influence of the distinctive lexical and grammatical forms of American English on other varieties of the English language, also called Linguistic Americanization. As Leech and Smith (2009) observe, “If the term ‘Americanization’ is taken to imply direct influence of AmE [American English] on BrE [Britain English], it should be treated with caution.” All over the world, “Globalization in the current era is associated, for better or for worse, with Americanization. This is particularly true of its cultural dimension. For it is the United States, as the world’s ‘hyper-power,’ that has the economic, military, and political power to project its culture and values globally (Selma K. Sonntag: 2003).

One can easily observe that UK and US culture is central theme in every unit in the course books. Riches (1999) noted that the factor at the back is economical. “Publishers seek the widest possible market for ELT textbooks while striving to minimize the costs” (p:1). Educational institutes worldwide buy these texts “because of the inherent prestige associated with the English language expertise emanating from UK and USA” (p:3).

Given this backdrop, Middle East countries like Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Dubai, Oman prefer American teachers for recruitment to teach English in schools and high school with handsome salary. Even most reputed universities prefer IC native speaker on teaching positions.

Smith (1976) noted that “learners do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers. The educational goal of learning international language is to enable the learners to communicate their ideas and cultures to others”. McKay (2003) states, “Many current learners of English may desire to learn English in order to share with others information about their own countries for such purposes as encouraging economic development, promoting trade and tourism, and contributing to international scholarly exchanges” (p:10). Further, “Textbooks are published in Inner Circle countries; some ELT educators believe that western culture example motivate learners, ... such contents may be largely irrelevant, uninteresting, or even confusing for students” (ibid, p:10).

This might be the reason why academicians are taking hard look at the mention of UK and USA culture in the text books. Presently, English teachers are questioning the validity of forcing students to acculturate IC culture contents. Bahumaid (2008) states “... global materials are often produced for broad range of contexts; they may not particularly reflect the need, interest, and concerns of learners in certain situations” (p:427).

Need and Design of Localized Material

The objective of incorporation of source culture activities in course design is not actually teaching Saudi students their culture. The teacher’s goal is to provide the English vocabulary that facilitates students to speak fluently. Localizing teaching material entails revising them to relate more specifically to the culture and experiences of EFL students. Otherwise students may not respond to the material that is not linked to their culture, experiences, opinions and ideology. Localized material can transform a passive student into an active English speaker. Finch (2003) states, “Well-designed supplementary material can greatly enhance learning, since they are made for the specific learning needs of specific students, by the people who have been trained to

identify those needs” (p:1). Cortazzi and Jin (1999) stated that “local teaching is recognized by three culture materials: source culture- the culture of learner’s country culture; target culture- English speaking culture; international culture. Various English and non-English speaking countries around the world” (p:201). Therefore, the need is to develop the ability in localizing and personalizing the course material. Kramsch and Sullinan (1996) call it “ global thinking, local teaching” (p:200).

The importance of incorporation of source culture in the course material and activities will provide students a chance to speak more about their culture and to learn English language needed to explain their culture.

After the author of this paper joined the Department of English Language and Linguistics at Taibah University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the year 2014, she was assigned to teach students of English Major at the college level. In addition to teach some core subjects from the field of linguistics like Syntax, Morphology, Discourse Analysis, the author was also provided a series of course material namely Interactions 2 ME (specifically taught in all ELT institutions and universities Middle East), GOLDEN edition by Elaine Kin and Pamela Hartmann. This series of 18 books is a fully integrated, academic skills series. Language proficiencies are expressed from the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels within each of four skills strands. All the practical examples are student-centered, task-based, and cooperative. Critical thinking is developed so that the learner presents his/ her opinion in target language. While teaching language skills in English to the Saudi students, all the activities are focused on participation that allows student to access cultural frame, professional settings, trade and commerce, life in educational institutes, travel and English vocabulary. For expressing things in English from target language, all the students were performing nicely. But when it comes to practical usage of target language to express their daily activities, foods, cultural activities, describing places and festival in their culture, they were not confident and fluent. On seeing this situation, the author tried to supplement the oral and writing practice work on the topics related to their culture and country in the target language. These practices were also student-centered, based on communicative method of teaching: task-based, cooperative and meaningful repetition and revision of the target vocabulary and grammar. For example, when this author asked them about famous beverages of the world, they could easily give list of choices like, cappuccino, Americano, espresso, macchiato, nocha, latte coffee, world famous carbonated drinks. But when the author asked about the local beverage, they were not able to answer or felt shy to answer. It does not mean they don’t have local beverages. Rather Saudi Arabia has the ‘Arabic Coffee’ that is famous all over the world. Saudis of all age groups would like to have Arabic coffee at their breakfast, during office time, in parties, meetings and on all occasions. Similarly, when asked about famous Saudi meal or snacks, they were not able to provide an answer. They could fluently talk about famous meals available in KFC’s, Mcdonald, Pizza Huts, Baskin Robbins ice-cream, but felt shy and lack of words to talk about their popular Saudi meals like Khabsa, Mandi, Albaik chicken, sambusa, Saudi Eish-Bil-lahem, Barbusa, Haleem. Likewise when asked about famous festival, sports, religion and trade fairs, describing places, seasons, cultural dress etc. they were not fluent to communicate.

The author tried to formulate and dramatize oral practices supplemented with local substance. The examples of localized supplementary activities are mentioned below:

1. Generic Travel

Saudi Arabia: Tour and Travels (Saptco Bus Service)

Warm up: Best places in Makkah/ Madina/ your home town/ Saudi Arabia; pilgrimage, shopping, sightseeing, entertainment, historic sites etc.

Teacher: Provide students downloaded course map for Saptco Tour and Travels Bus and give short description of sightseeing spots, holy cities, shopping malls etc. Also distribute handouts as examples of the tour guide's script.

Scenario: You are English-speaking and get a tour guide on a tour for international tourist.

Essential Elements:

- I. Describe a tour of Makkah, Madina, your home town, or any your favourite spot in Saudi Arabia. The tour must include three to four stops: historic site, religious holy city, shopping and entertainment.
- II. Create a tour theme. For example; Umarah (a religious pilgrimage to The Holy city Mecca, Sightseeing, etc.
- III. Write a 3 to 4 minutes tour guide script. Give all important information about the tour and the facilities.

Sample of Script to develop a Script

Introduction: Asalam-u-aliqum, Good Morning. Welcome to *Umrah – the pilgrimage Holy city of Makkah*. My name is _____. I am your tour guide. Mecca is famous for _____ (3 to 4 sentences). There are three stops: Jeddah, *Mekaat* (a mosque where you can buy an attire and other important essential for yourself for initiation of pilgrimage of *Umrah, Kabba-* the Holy shrine.

Body

3-4 sentence about the first stop.

3-4 sentence about the important steps to taken care of during the pilgrimage by the Muslim pilgrims.

3-4 sentence about the special and specific attire during the pilgrimage.

3-4 sentence about some shopping malls after completing the *Umrah* (pilgrimage by Muslims to *Mecca*).

Closing Discourse

We hope that you enjoyed this tour of holy city in Saudi Arabia. Our first stop was *Jeddah*, the capital of Saudi Arabia (1-2 sentences about the place). Second, we went to *Makkah* for dressing and performing other religious rituals pertinent to this holy pilgrimage. Finally, we went to *Kaabah*, the destination where we wish to perform *Umrah* in the holy city of *Makkah*.

Assignment for Other Students to Comment: write a report on the topic as a foreign tourist to Saudi Arabia.

Evaluation/feedback: teacher criteria

2. Cooking Recipe T. V Show

Situation: Group of two students. Consider yourself to be telecasted overseas in English cooking show. Explain one famous Saudi Arabian dish and demonstrate how to prepare it.

Essential Elements

- I. Choose any one famous recipe- Khabsa, Mandi, Albaik chicken, Sambusa.
- II. Title of your show
- III. Situation: Restaurant or hotel where you are a master chef.

- IV. Write five-minute script. Create a poster(s) to highlight the ingredients and preparation steps. (do not bring cooking utensils or ingredients to the class)
- V. Script must be memorized.
- VI. List of English vocabulary used in this show.

Sample of Script to enhance writing script

A: Asalam-u-alikum. Good morning. I am master chef. My name is

B: Hello. My name is I am master chef.

A: Welcome to our programme,

B: Our today's recipe is(any traditional food), Chef tell our viewers, what exactly is our recipe?

A: This traditional food is
.....

Background Information

B: Before we start, we will give some facts and history about the chosen traditional recipe.

A: To begin with, it is or is not the indigenous dish of Saudi Arabia.

B: if not indigenous Talk about origin..... like Egyptian/Pakistani/Indian etc.

A: (time and occasion) it is relished mostly.

Ingredients and preparation steps:

A or B: Let's start preparing our shows recipe Master chef....., please tell our viewers the ingredients used in this famous traditional recipe of Arabian cuisine. ... (Take turns in explaining the ingredients)

A or B: chef, how do we make this dish? (Take turns in explaining the stepwise preparation of the item)

End: than viewers and invite them to watch again.

A or B: hope you enjoyed preparing the food.

A or B: "next time(title of show) will telecast how to prepare another item(Name of the food) of Arabian cuisine.

A: Bye Bye, stay blessed and healthy.....

B: see you again in our programme..... with the host- master chefs and

Evaluation: Teacher's criteria

- 3. **Famous Festival of Saudi Arabia** (like flower festival in Yanbu- Royal Commission, the largest flower festival in the world)

Scenario/ Cultural Context

Royal commission, 15 days in February to enjoy pleasant season, blossoms of flowers from all over the world, exhibition of some royal concepts or theme with flowers, lightings, food courts, exhibition of pets for sale, sports for kids etc.

Essential Elements

Writing Project Reports

- I. Theme of the festival.
- II. Location of the festival in Saudi Arabia.
- III. Target visitors.
- IV. Entertainment and sports for kids.

- V. Food court – focusing on different traditional and international cuisines.
VI. Advertising: create posters.

Oral practice

Develop dialogue in which all students will speak in front of the class to talk about the festival. Each student will speak about the main attractions of the festival. Students are engaged in question and answer sessions/ survey; ask “wh” question.

Conclusion

Internalizing Inner Circle culture and accurate American accent need not to be the goal of learning English language for Saudi learners. The need and motivation of English learner is nowadays related to participate in global demands of communication in deferent fields like higher education, trade and commerce, science and technology and tourism. To expedite these goals, the English educators must supplement the American culture context with Saudi culture context in ELT course material. Harris (2009) argues for a “localized pedagogy”. Teachers must be trained to design localized speaking skill and activities in order to facilitate them to speak fluently and confidently about their culture in English. Localized activities with the help of task-based oral practice and providing English vocabulary will boost learning of English language. When these learners travel overseas, every encounter with an English speaker is going to provide an opportunity to communicate and promote culture, business, education and tourism of their country.

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