



The mixed curriculum approach (MCA): A reflection from the learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Majmaah University

Jalel Ben Haj Rehaïem ^{a,1} , Majed Aba Hussain ^b 

^{a,b} Department of English, College of Education, Majmaah University, Al-Majmaah, 11952, Saudi Arabia

APA Citation:

Rehaïem, J.B.H., & Hussain, M.A. (2022). The mixed curriculum approach (MCA): A reflection from the learners of English as a Foreign language (EFL) at Majmaah University. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 18(1), 94-115. Doi: 10.52462/jlls.169

Submission Date:23/01/2021

Acceptance Date:30/09/2021

Abstract

How best to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been a complicated issue that has bedeviled curricula designing. Starting from the argument that today's EFL curricula do need a complete overhaul to reflect the recurrent debate about culture clash and culture cooperation. This study offers an alternative to those who advocate either "blending" or "incorporating" culture studies into EFL curricula; it seeks to fill the gap between these two approaches, as it argues for the viability and relevance of a Mixed Curriculum Approach (MCA). It applies this new MCA method to the case study of a Majmaah English department by administering an open-ended questionnaire, and the findings show that the overall majority of the students surveyed are interested in learning about the corresponding culture of the very foreign language they are learning. The findings also demonstrate the EFL learners' wish to see their curriculum revised into an MCA one, corroborating the major argument that EFL curricula ought not to be fixated to outdated theories, and therefore need to adapt to today's EFL teaching requirements, which is itself a recommendation for future curricula designers.

Keywords: EFL teaching; EFL curriculum; MCA; culture studies; culture clash; cultural appropriation; Majmmah; English Department

1. Introduction

The globalized education setting of the 21st century is undergoing profound changes and urgently needs curriculum adjustments to enhance the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL). Contemporary issues of language and culture, as well as their complex influence on our understanding of the other, comprise an updated EFL curriculum priority at a time when the world is becoming ever more interconnected, like a small village. A major concern in modern EFL instruction is how to apply the knowledge generated in the classroom to comprehend target culture constructions, which are like lenses through which we grasp matters of gender, class, and ethnicity in our respective cultural contexts. Human language reflects its speakers' lifestyles and beliefs, given the extent of language's influence on culture (and vice versa). Therefore, acknowledging the link between EFL teaching and the target culture requires reviewing EFL curricula, which should help EFL learners see how diverse aspects of culture can dialectically affect language.

In the past—and with the widespread application of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in recent decades—English instruction has focused on how to teach the language to attain the

¹ Corresponding Author

E-mail address: j.rehaiem@mu.edu.sa

communicative competence required to convey meaning (even in a confused, hurried way purportedly aimed at meeting labor market needs). To become proficient in a foreign language, one should not merely develop speaking skills to the detriment of what Kovacks (2017) calls the “fifth skill” (p. 74); that is socio-cultural competence. After all, communicative adeptness “requires the active involvement of the learner in the production of the target language” through cultural exposure (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995; Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 1).

By its very nature as a cross-disciplinary sphere, culture studies have a significant influence on undergraduate students, especially on learners of English as a Foreign Language. Learning English through culture is the new trend in cross-disciplinary fields, as culture is an integral part of the overall learning process. Gabriella Kovacs argues that “learning a language means also the study of a different culture” (pp. 73-86); hence, the inextricable link between learning a foreign language and absorbing its corresponding culture. The latter reflects essential aspects of a society whose cultural and educational characteristics merge into its language. This connection is better expressed by Claire Kramsch in her book *Culture in Foreign Language Teaching*, in which she states that “language is not a bunch of arbitrary linguistic forms applied to a cultural reality that can be found outside of language...[w]ithout language and other symbolic systems, the habits, beliefs, institutions, and monuments that we call culture would be just observable realities, not cultural phenomena” (Kramsch, 2010, p. 62). Equally important, in 2018, for the first time, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) addressed the need for “pluricultural education” (Council of Europe, 2018)¹ involving linguistic as well *cultural* aspects, skills, and declarative knowledge.

Accordingly, communicative competence (which the CEFR is referring to) encompasses a variety of skills, such as the following: (1) *Linguistic competence* involves making grammatically correct sentences. (2) *Socio-cultural competence* entails behaving appropriately in a given cultural context (including the commitment to the target culture’s social rules). In other words, successful communication takes more than skill-based proficiency; it also requires awareness of the target culture. This is the definition of what this article calls the mixed curriculum approach (MCA).

2. The Mixed Curriculum Approach (MCA)

The MCA argument is concurrent with the requirements of the 21st-century overhaul of EFL instructional techniques. It is grounded in the EFL cultural approach, thereby becoming a critical element in most EFL curricula nowadays, which is the essence of what is commonly dubbed “culture-spiced communicative competence”. It is from this standpoint that the idea of introducing cultural courses in EFL curricula has emerged, and has continued to gain momentum, especially during a reviving debate on the clash/cooperation between cultures and civilizations. The MCA stems from the need to raise learners’ awareness of the value of knowing about the target culture of the language they are learning, and of the evolving nature of cultural awareness among the learners involved. The MCA helps to develop learners’ critical thinking, evokes their emotions, and aids them in building up the structure of their knowledge. The urgent need for—and viability of—the MCA stem from the fact that culture is something we live with through our daily habits, our self-perception, and our perspective of the other as defined by T.S Eliot (1948, p. 120). The MCA is philosophically based on Peeters’s argument that “culture is everywhere” (2020, pp.1-14). Exposure to foreign cultures helps students learn to display a level of personal maturity by respecting others’ views, experiences, and dialects, as cultural awareness is a crucial facet of personal and academic maturity. Thus, the MCA in EFL instruction strengthens the process of transmitting language skills by facilitating EFL learners’ knowledge of a language’s corresponding cultural values (Peeters, 2016, pp. 139-142).

3. Previous Studies

However, the general question of integrating culture in EFL curricula is not new in the realm of applied linguistics. The issue has been debated by a panoply of pundits in the field, such as Si Thang Kiet Ho (2009) from Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, who talks about the “inseparability of language and culture, and the need to prepare language learners for intercultural communication in an increasingly multicultural world”. Si Thang Kiet Ho conducted a case study on the effect of intercultural language learning on EFL students in Vietnam. His sample comprised two traditional EFL textbook units currently used in a Vietnamese university, and his objective was to raise learners’ cultural awareness and engage “them cognitively, behaviorally and affectively in cultur[al] learning” (pp. 63-76). His findings emerged in the form of suggesting what cultural components “may be implemented in any language course and [which are] appropriate for the study of any target culture” (ibid).

Gabriella Kovacks, from the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, in her 2017 book *Culture in Language Teaching: A Course Design for Teacher Trainees*—which is a benchmark for the foundation of MCA—stresses Si Thang Kiet Ho’s inextricable link between EFL teaching and target culture awareness. Kovacks (2017) maintains that “the role and status of culture in language teaching has always been a challenging issue for teachers. Their conception and opinion may be very different regarding the meaning of culture and the possibilities of incorporating cultural content into the language teaching process” (p.73). Furthermore, Kovacs provides a teachers’ guide (for what this paper calls an MCA course design) on how to implement a culture-enriched curriculum that includes aspects such as teaching target language proverbs, role-playing, and simulations.

Moreover, Ralph W. Tyler, in his book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, also offers a guiding reference related to curriculum design, with a focus on the MCA’s significance in an increasingly globalized world. Peter S. Hlebowitsh, in writing about Tyler’s book, asserts that the “curriculum should be dynamic, a program under constant evaluation and revision. Curriculum has always been thought of as a static, set program” (Hlebowitsh, Forward in Tyler, 2013, pp. 1-3); hence the need to have curricula that keep abreast of socio-cultural changes in an ever more heated debate about culture clashes. Tyler also encourages “curriculum planning [to be] a continuous, cyclical process, an instrument of education that needs to be fine-tuned” (ibid). A curriculum that is “fine-tuned” from time to time is what “future language teachers should be trained to formulate...regarding the cultural content of the curriculum and [to] develop specific cultural activities according to their objectives” (Hlebowitsh, Forward in Tyler, 2013, pp-1-3).

However, the MCA should not be confused with what Alptekin (2002) and Chia-Lin Hsin (2008) advocate in terms of separating language from culture. For Alptekin, “teaching the target language culture may impede learners’ indulgence of language, as they have to manage with unknown vocabulary items, as well as cultural items which are alien to them” (Abahussain, 2020, pp. 119-132). Yet Alptekin could not address the paradox of the feasibility of separating language from culture, and how to reconcile the paradoxical argument that a foreign language for EFL learners is not alien, but that its corresponding culture is. The claim that EFL students cannot “get rid of their culture deliberately” (Alptekin, 2002, p.) is not very sound because teaching the target culture does not necessarily mean erasing one’s native culture. Both processes complete—instead of contradicting—each other, for it is not conceivable to teach a foreign language without referring to its corresponding culture (Brown, 1994ⁱⁱ; Kramsch, 2013).

In a comprehensive guide (published in 2016) on how to integrate cultural components into curriculum planning, Grace C. Offorma amply discusses the general convergence whereby “culture is an important factor in curriculum planning and drives the content of every curriculum” (Offorma, 2016, p. 1). Offorma bases her assertion on why curriculum planners ought to embed emerging cultures in their respective curricula on the assumption that since societies are becoming more

dynamic, “there are new cultures that should be included in the curriculum to make the learners *functional members of the society*” (*italics added*) (ibid).

Yet again, the MCA differs from the claim of “integrating” language and culture in EFL instruction. This is an outdated rationale because it dates back to the late 1950s and is no longer valid given the evolution of inter-cultural debate and the rise of populist theories on the clash of cultures and civilizations (Fukayama, 1989; Huntington, 1993; Lewis, 2002 & 2004). This critical moment in world history requires an immediate wake-up call to counter the culture clash argument by underscoring the value of exposing students to foreign cultures, especially EFL learners who need a deeper, broader view of the corresponding cultural facade of the foreign language they are learning. Therefore, simply “integrating” language and culture is no longer sufficient if we were to highlight the value of culture dialogue (instead of culture clashes). Introducing *independent* cultural topics in EFL curricula (which this article calls the MCA) with a substantial ratio is the only way to meet rapidly changing educational needs. For instance, EFL curricula cannot remain fixated on an archaic theory (that is more than 50 years old) of merely “integrating” or “embedding” cultural topics into reading material.

Hence the major focus of this work. This article envisions an MCA strategy in EFL teaching, and because the MCA neither “blends” nor “incorporates” cultural studies into EFL curricula, it seeks to fill the gap between the two approaches. This work explores the MCA’s viability and relevance by applying this new method to the case study of an English department whose curriculum is exclusively skill-based. This article contends that the best results from such a study could be achieved if EFL learners themselves were given the chance to express their own views on the proposed MCA.

4. Research Questions

This paper’s primary goal is to examine the validity of adopting the MCA approach in the EFL curriculum at the English Department, College of Education in Majmaah, Majmaah University, and addresses three main research questions:

- 1- To what extent are EFL learners at the department concerned familiar with basic culture concepts?
- 2- Are students interested in the MCA curriculum?
- 3- What is the degree of cultural awareness among intermediate and advanced EFL learners in the department involved?

5. Methodology

Although “there is no clear consensus on the criteria for qualitative research methodologies in applied linguistics” (Tojo et al., 2017, p. 37), this article adopts Benson’s framework of quantitative research and qualitative data analysis (Benson, 2012). Accordingly, this study opted for a questionnaire instead of the outdated technique of presupposing a question and then trying to look for corroborating evidence, because the latter is no longer valid for highly controversial topics in the post-modern 21st-century research methodology. This is in line with the ethnographic² qualitative approach (which is the more commonly used method in culturalist research), since it verifies the choice of a questionnaire for gathering data (Hammersley as cited in Reeves et Al., 2013,). The reasons behind opting for the ethnographic approach include its focus on scrutinizing the nature of a particular socio-cultural issue, rather than establishing hypotheses about it in advance. Moreover, unstructured data

² Ethnography is a method in qualitative research that does not presuppose any conclusions beforehand. It relies on observations first, then it opts for a panoply for empirical methods in data collection, such as interviews, questionnaires, and documentaries.

(versus a closed set of coded data) is another idiosyncratic feature of ethnographic studies, which applies to the central question of this article: whether mixing EFL curricula with distinctive cultural subjects is relevant in the context of the currently universal culture-clash mood. That is why this article does not hypothesize about the outcomes of the questionnaire. It starts with an unstructured set of data, which means that the surveyed students could randomly answer the questions themselves, without any influence or pressure.

5.1 *Setting and Participants*

The data were collected from 30 EFL learners, nearly one-fifth of all students enrolled in an 8-level/4-year undergraduate English program at Majmaah English Department, Majmaah University, Riyadh, KSA. All of them are males between 20 and 22 years old. The samples included 10 students from Level 4 (out of 19 students) and 20 students from levels 7 and 8 (out of 24 and 27, respectively). Levels 7 and 8 are taken together as one unit of measurement since they are graduating EFL learners who supposedly have a more mature cultural awareness and more advanced academic knowledge of cultural studies. Also, the sample from levels 7 and 8 is double that of Level 4 because this paper sought to investigate the views of as many graduating students as possible, given their intellectual maturity and academic advancement compared to their peers at Level 4.

5.2 *Research Design*

A survey was conducted in February and March of 2020 during the academic year 2019/2020 in the English Department mentioned above. The survey was administered in the form of a questionnaire targeting both intermediate and advanced students to provide a broader representation within the same department. The thesis could only be addressed by surveying the target audience (i.e., EFL learners) to obtain their opinions on the MCA's validity in the culture clash era. Since cultural awareness varies across students, from a pedagogical angle, it was practical to use a questionnaire so that we could examine EFL learners' respective knowledge of the target culture, which guided us on how to fill in the curriculum lacuna of the English Department at Majmaah University.

5.3 *Data Collection*

The questionnaire consisted of three sets of questions. The first, *Yes/No questions*, sought to fathom learners' basic knowledge of cultural studies and to survey their preferences regarding whether they may have been interested in seeing their curriculum include cultural subjects. Equally important, these questions revealed whether they thought cultural studies, as an inclusive discipline, was relevant to their academic future. The second set of questions involved a *choice question* aimed at finding out what kinds of cultural topics the students were most interested in. This category tried to mimic the university subject catalogs used in major Western universities where students choose the topics they would like to study, rather than having a curriculum-closed package imposed on them. The third set of questions, *reflective questions*, tried to discern EFL learners' (intermediate Level 4 and advanced levels 7 and 8 alike) comprehensive cultural awareness by asking them to reflect on culture and cultural hegemony in general.

The questionnaire was peer-reviewed and approved by Dr. Jack Shindler, Professor of Education and Director of the International Program at North Central College in Chicago, the US; Professor Mounir Triki, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Sfax in Tunisia; and Professor Ken Kashiwagui, Associate Professor at the University of Tsukuba in Japan. This paper sought to have the questionnaire reviewed by academic authorities from three different universities and from three different continents to make sure that the content and verbiage covered most of the pertinent questions

related to the thesis. The reviewers' revisions and remarks added a great deal to improve the questionnaire both in form and content.

5.4 Data Analysis

The “complexity and diversity of qualitative research” (Tojo et al., 2017, p. 37) make the task of “clarifying and categorizing types of qualitative research in language teaching and learning” rather challenging. Nevertheless, this study has adopted a content analysis approach (Benson, 2013 Nassaji 129-132, 2015) to “accommodate this complexity of language teaching and learning” (Tojo et al., 2017, p. 37), as the bulk of the data are thoroughly qualitative.

A four-step qualitative content analysis was applied to analyze the data gathered from the questionnaire (Chik et al., 2009, pp. 79–90). First, patterns were observed and interpreted. Second, the link between the research questions and data was obtained. Third—and most importantly—the students' responses were coded into or “Yes” and “No” for the Yes/No Questions Set, and into “right,” “wrong,” and “mixed” for the Reflective Questions Set according to Terry Eagleton's inclusive definition of culture “as the whole complex of a society's arts, manners, religion and ideas” (Eagleton, 2000, p. 107). Given its inclusive nature and comprehensive parameters, this paper employs Eagleton's definition of culture as a benchmark in evaluating and grading the students' responses. Fourth, patterns and connections between answers were identified in a way that should address the major research questions, specifically the MCA's validity and relevance in this case.

Once the data were compiled, an external examiner³ from an unrelated department was asked to grade the students' answers into “right,” “wrong,” or “mixed” to avoid bias and guarantee the validity of the findings. Next, the results were processed and quantified into graphs and analyzed through SPSS, which is “data accountable” and verifiable (Larson-Hall, 2017, p.266). The purpose is to build graphics that “help researchers improve the way they understand and analyze [the] data, and to build credibility in numerical statistical analyses and the conclusions that are drawn” (Larson-Hall, 2017, p.253).

6. Results

The questionnaire sought to achieve two key objectives: First, to quantify cultural studies awareness among two categories of EFL Learners (intermediate Level 4 and advanced levels 7 and 8) at a Saudi university, and to compare their basic cultural knowledge. The primary objective of testing the concerned students' responses was to determine if there was a pressing need to modify EFL curricula based on the MCA, which would address the rising challenges of today's discourse on education reform and development. The results are dealt with according to their respective categories—basic knowledge (*Yes/No*) questions, one choice question, and reflective opinions—instead of numerical order in the original questionnaire, which was designed to be a set of randomly organized varieties of questions for EFL students to help them be more comfortable expressing themselves and responding to questions as they chose.

6.1 Measuring Cultural Studies Awareness Among EFL Learners at the Intermediate Level 4:

1. Yes/No Questions

Question 3. Do you think that language is part of a culture?

³ The contact information of the external examiner is available upon request.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	9	90,0	90,0	90,0
	No	1	10,0	10,0	100,0
	Total	10	100,0	100,0	



Figure 3. Do you think that language is part of a culture?

Question 4. As a foreign language learner, would you like cultural studies to be included in your curriculum?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	6	60,0	60,0	60,0
	No	4	40,0	40,0	100,0
	Total	10	100,0	100,0	



Figure 4. As a foreign language learner, would you like cultural studies to be included in your curriculum?

Question 6. Can you name one of the influential figures in the field of cultural studies?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid wrong	10	100,0	100,0	100,0

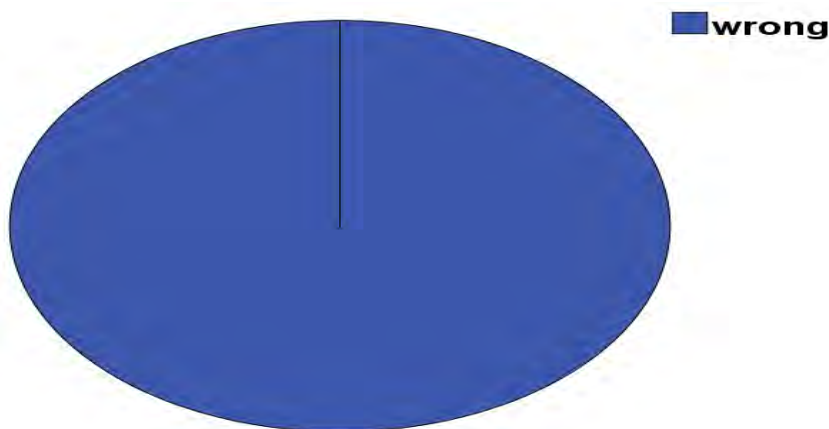


Figure 6. Can you name one of the influential figures in the field of cultural studies?

According to the results of Question 3, almost 90% of the students are aware that language is part and parcel of culture; paradoxically, their curriculum is exclusively skill-based. Although they have been exposed to cultural studies debates, for Level 4 EFL learners in the department involved (including the link between language and culture), cultural discussions are limited. They have a high awareness of cultural studies, seemingly relying on their general knowledge and casual interpretations.

The gap between the 90% (from Question 3) who believe that language is part of the culture and the 60% (from Question 4) who prefer that cultural studies topics be included in their curriculum can

be explained by the fact that the students surveyed are concerned that if unfamiliar cultural topics are abruptly included in their curriculum, this might create a serious challenge for them to earn an A grade in as many subjects as possible, which is understandably a major priority for students around the world.

For Question 6, the students were asked whether they could name an important figure in cultural studies. The striking outcome is that no student could come up with any prominent name in the field, thus reflecting a chronic knowledge deficit in a realm so deeply related to the foreign language they are learning. Ironically, 90% of them think that language is part of the culture and that the two are therefore inseparable, but none of them could name a cultural studies figure, which raises a hypothetical question: What if they were given the chance to gain exposure to cultural studies? If these motivated EFL students had had substantive cultural topics included in their curriculum, they would have excelled in a sphere that is inextricably tied to their academic speciality.

1. The Choice Question

Question 5. Choose one of your favorite subjects

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Social identity/social groups in the united states	1	10,0	10,0	10,0
The 1950s and the baby boomers	1	10,0	10,0	20,0
cinema and music	6	60,0	60,0	80,0
British life and culture	2	20,0	20,0	100,0
Total	10	100,0	100,0	

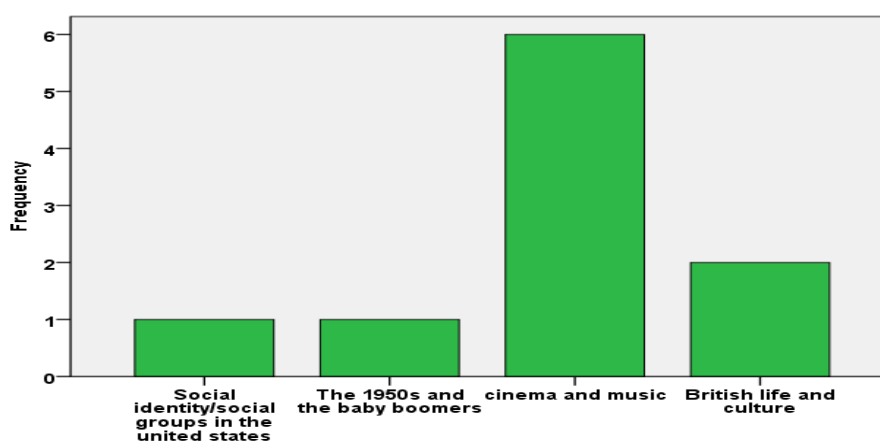


Figure 5. Choose one of your favorite subjects

Given the respondents' age range (20 to 22 years old), unsurprisingly, the majority of them chose *Cinema and Music* over other potential cultural topics to be included in their curriculum. We live in an open world where people in general—and EFL learners in particular—spend more time on social media, Netflix, and most important of all, popular TV channels like MBC 2 in the Middle East. Their

extensive exposure to these forms of entertainment explains why the students chose entertaining subjects over controversial, intellectual topics like *Social Identity in the United States*.

1. Opinion Questions

Question 1. Could you define culture?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid right	4	40,0	40,0	40,0
wrong	6	60,0	60,0	100,0
Total	10	100,0	100,0	

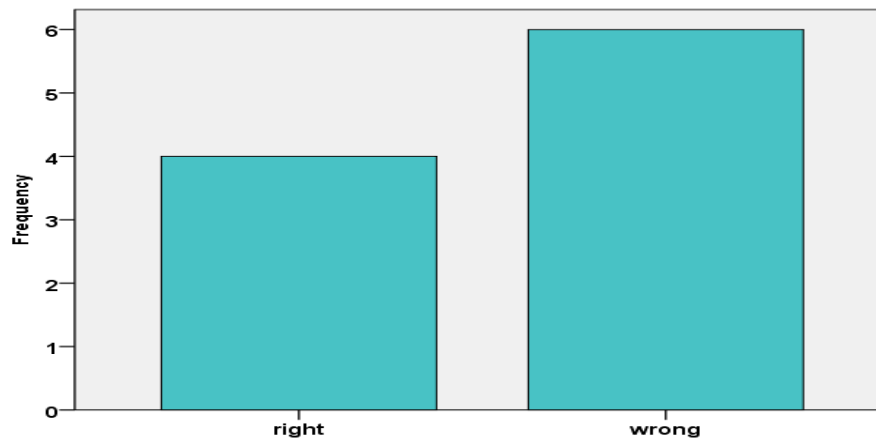


Figure 1. Could you define culture?

Question 2. Would you like to know about others' cultures? Why?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	9	90,0	90,0	90,0
No	1	10,0	10,0	100,0
Total	10	100,0	100,0	

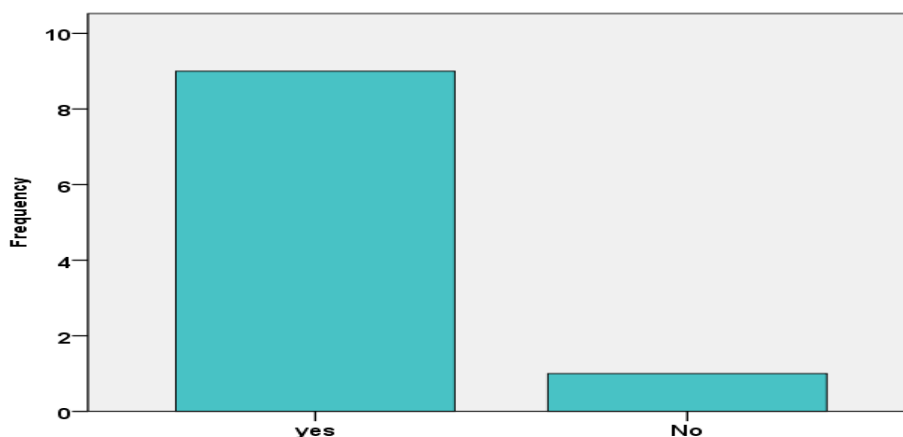


Figure 2. Would you like to know about others' cultures? Why?

Question 7. What is cultural hegemony?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid right	2	20,0	20,0	20,0
wrong	5	50,0	50,0	70,0
mixed answer	3	30,0	30,0	100,0
Total	10	100,0	100,0	

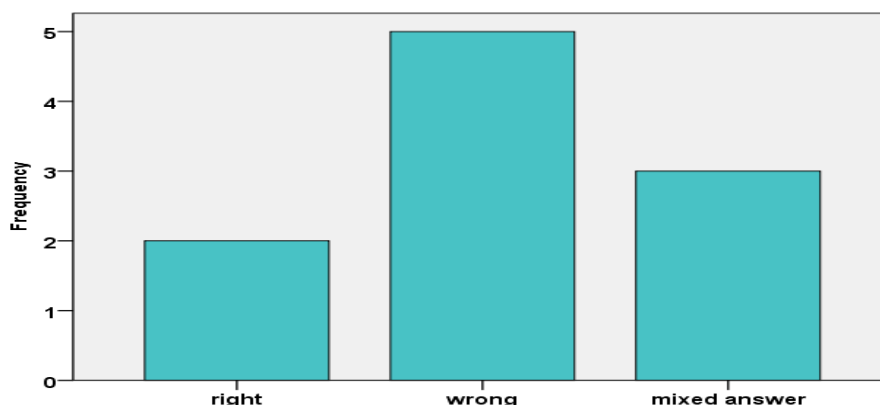


Figure 7. What is cultural hegemony?

The outcome for Question 1 (a question of basic knowledge) is that the majority of the students surveyed could not define a standard term in cultural studies, such as “culture.” The controversy around cultural studies stems from the polemical nature of the word “culture,” but not to the point of the students being incapable of giving a satisfactory definition of it. A sample of the hard copy of the students’ responses to some key questions in the questionnaire will be shared in the Appendices; it demonstrates the extent of the knowledge gap among EFL learners about simple cultural concepts. The author of this study believes that this foundational knowledge deficit is due to many factors, especially

an exclusively skill-based curriculum that focuses on teaching basic language skills, in addition to several advanced linguistics subjects later on. This one-sided curriculum is no longer suitable in the rapidly changing context of educational reform and the revision of outdated curricula that separate language from culture.

The 90% “Yes” response to Question 2 further shows that students are aware of their knowledge deficit regarding cultural studies. Fortunately, most of them have expressed interest in learning more about foreign cultures. Such awareness was deconstructed and discussed in the previous section, given the 100% failure (for Question 6) to name any well-known figure in the field.

In the Yes/No section, we saw the findings for Question 4, where almost 60% of the students would like to see their curriculum diversified to reflect their academic interests and future study plans. Here is another noticeable paradox between the results of questions 2 and 4. Between the 90% who expressed interest in learning more about foreign cultures, and the smaller share of 60% who preferred the MCA, a gap reveals the students’ reluctance to engage in new cultural studies topics that they may fail, given their unfamiliarity with the nature and requirements of such courses.

The most challenging query was Question 7, which asked the students to define “cultural hegemony,” a highly controversial idea in light of the re-emerging debate over a purported conflict between cultures, in a heated context where each side claims culture superiority. Only a few of the students grasped this polemical notion, which is not surprising given EFL learners’ lack of exposure to heavy cultural concepts. It is time to revisit EFL curricula and to adopt an MCA that would broaden the learners’ horizons, opening up new paths of knowledge and research prospects. Since “Cultural Studies is not one thing...[and] it has never been one thing” (Stuart Hall, Quoted in Hua Hsu, *The New Yorker*, 2017), it is not a single source of knowledge given its multi-disciplinarity character. Given the chance to learn more about timely cultural issues, EFL learners would have a better chance to become “functional members of society” in Offorma’s words (2016, p.74) with opinions of their own.

6.1. Measuring Cultural Studies Awareness Among EFL Learners at the Advanced Levels of 7 and 8:

As expected, the results of the more advanced levels differed from those of the lower levels within the same department. This is due to the higher intellectual awareness and academic maturity of these advanced EFL learners. However, this does not distort the finding of nearly the same knowledge deficit regarding cultural studies, as observed among their peers at Level 4 via the questionnaire.

1. The Yes/No Questions

Question 3. Do you think that language is part of a culture?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid right	17	85,0	85,0	85,0
wrong	2	10,0	10,0	95,0
mixed response	1	5,0	5,0	100,0
Total	20	100,0	100,0	

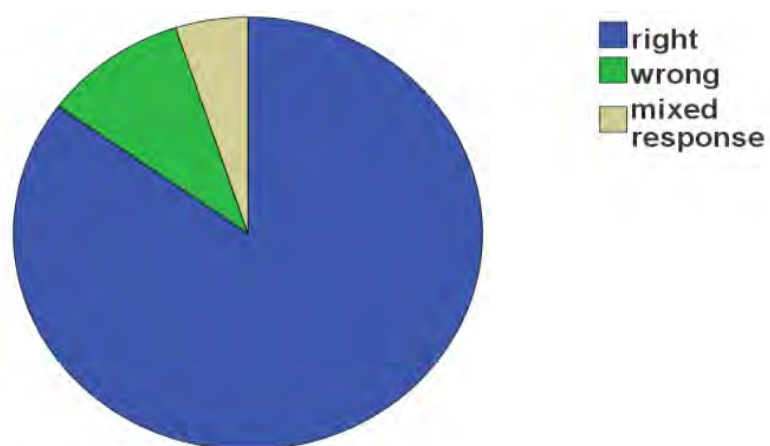


Figure 3. Do you think that language is part of a culture?

Question 4. As a foreign language learner, would you like cultural studies to be included in your curriculum?
Why?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid right	11	55,0	55,0	55,0
wrong	4	20,0	20,0	75,0
mixed response	5	25,0	25,0	100,0
Total	20	100,0	100,0	

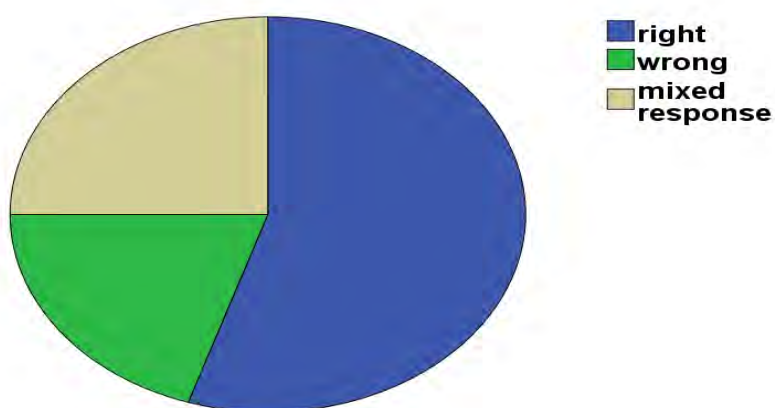


Figure 4. As a foreign language learner, would you like cultural studies to be included in your curriculum?
Why?

Question 6. Can you name one of the influential figures in the field of cultural studies?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid wrong	20	100,0	100,0	100,0

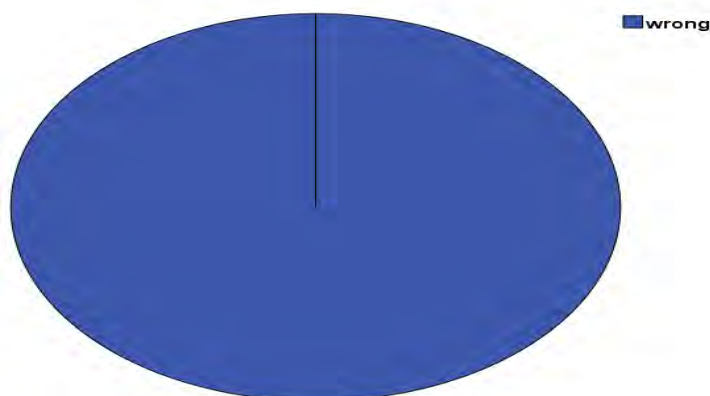


Figure 6. Can you name one of the influential figures in the field of cultural studies?

According to the outcomes for Question 3, almost 70% of the students believe that language and culture are deeply intertwined, 20% have the opposite view, and 10% did not answer the question. The 70% majority substantiates the major point this study is trying to make about the inextricable link between teaching a foreign language and its corresponding culture. It simply does not make sense to teach English to EFL learners separately from the language's cultural context(s).

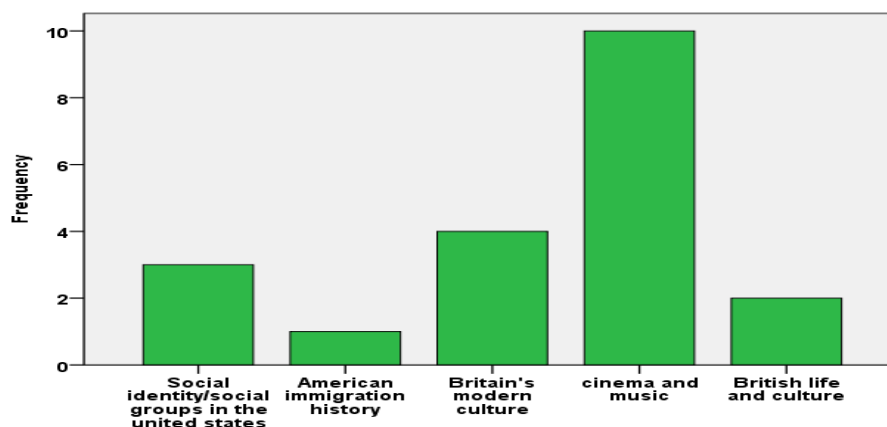
The results of Question 4 support the analysis of the findings for Question 3 (mentioned above), the smaller majority notwithstanding. Most of the students would approve of having the MCA teaching approach by including independent cultural topics in their curriculum. However, we see the same gap, as is the case with Level 4, between the 70% majority, who believe that language is part of the culture (for Question 3), and the smaller proportion of around 55% (for Question 4), who would like to see cultural topics in their prospective curriculum. This is almost the same explanation of such a gap, which is that EFL learners who have had very little exposure to cultural studies subjects are afraid that including them might add obstacles in terms of passing their exams and earning high grades during their graduation path, simply because they are not familiar with taking cultural studies exams.

As for Question 6, strangely enough, there was a 100% failure rate among the two levels (7 and 8), like their peers at Level 4. Not a single student could name an influential figure in the realm of cultural studies, even those who are supposed to be well-known such as Samuel Huntington, Bernard Lewis, and Francis Fukayama, given the ongoing debate they have elicited about the clash of cultures and civilizations since the mid-1990s. This is worrisome from the perspective of this paper, as graduates of English are completely unaware of such timely and dangerous discourse on the clash of civilizations. These would-be graduates may find themselves during such a dispute when/if they enroll in a Master's or a Ph.D. program in an English-speaking country.

1. *The Choice Question*

Question 5. Choose one of your favorite subjects

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Social identity/social groups in the united states	3	15,0	15,0	15,0
	American immigration history	1	5,0	5,0	20,0
	Britain's modern culture	4	20,0	20,0	40,0
	cinema and music	10	50,0	50,0	90,0
	British life and culture	2	10,0	10,0	100,0
	Total	20	100,0	100,0	

**Figure 5.** Choose one of your favorite subjects

As the outcomes of Question 5 show, the findings illustrate that students at Levels 7 and 8 are not unlike their Level 4 peers. Most of the learners surveyed prefer *Cinema and Music* as their favorite cultural topic in a prospective MCA teaching approach. Again, given their same age range as their peers at Level 4, they almost have similar preferences for entertainment topics (versus intellectual ones). This is not surprising, as it is natural for youngsters to prefer entertainment over debatable intellectual issues, such as the melting pot controversy in American society. However, a few students chose controversial matters, such as the theme of *Social identity in the United States* and *British life and culture*, which is an encouraging sign of their readiness to engage in the MCA.

These findings support the main argument of this study. Cultural studies are necessary for curriculum design because it is a multi-disciplinary field that includes highly advanced intellectual topics and at the same time entertainment subjects that would motivate EFL learners in terms of coming to grips with today's educational reality: that learning about foreign cultures is as important as learning their corresponding foreign languages. In other words, "the way language is used affects the way we think about and perceive the world. In other words, worldviews and cultural influences are largely embedded within the language we use" (Khan Academy, 2018).

The responses to Question 5 do support the results of Questions 3 and 4, which underscore a strong belief among the students that learning foreign languages and cultures should not be separate because they complete (rather than contradict) each other.

2. The Opinion Questions

Question 1. Could you define culture?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid right	3	15,0	15,0	15,0
wrong	8	40,0	40,0	55,0
mixed response	9	45,0	45,0	100,0
Total	20	100,0	100,0	

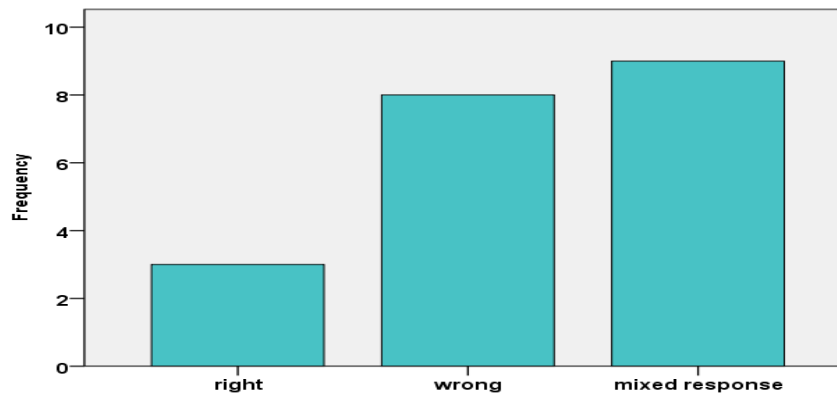


Figure 1. Could you define culture?

Question 2. Would you like to know about others' cultures? Why?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	16	80,0	80,0	80,0
No	2	10,0	10,0	90,0
NA	2	10,0	10,0	100,0
Total	20	100,0	100,0	

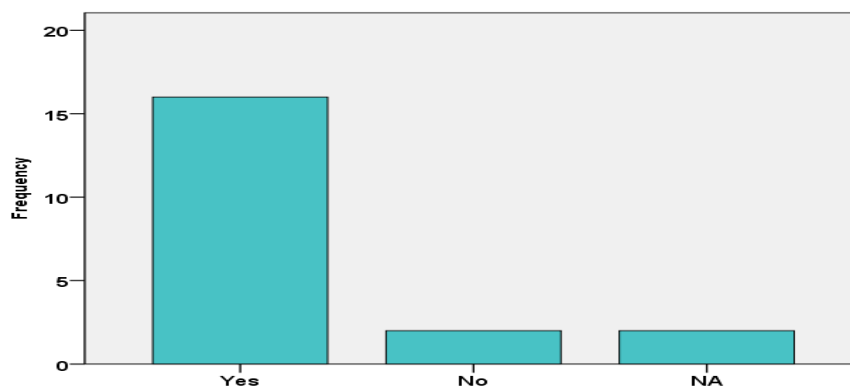
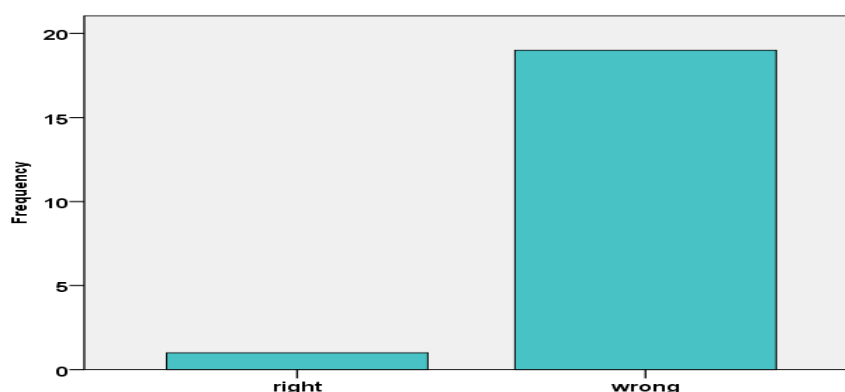


Figure 2. Would you like to know about others' cultures? Why?

Question 7. What is cultural hegemony?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid right	1	5,0	5,0	5,0
wrong	19	95,0	95,0	100,0
Total	20	100,0	100,0	

**Figure 7.** What is cultural hegemony?

In the advanced EFL learners' responses to Question 1, the overall majority of wrong responses is striking; it shows the pell-mell situation of cultural studies, and its academic and scientific ramifications among the students surveyed. It is understandable that "culture" is one of the three most inclusive words in English because it encompasses symbolic and material domains, incorporating the intellectual and the spiritual (including symbolic behavior in a community's everyday life). Yet the term's complexity does not spare EFL learners from the burden of having to fill in their basic knowledge deficit about culture as a structural part of the foreign language they are learning.

As is the case with their peers at Level 4, for Question 2, most of the EFL learners (almost 80%) would like to learn more about foreign cultures. Their enthusiasm for learning about foreign cultures seems to emanate from their conviction that language is part of the culture, and the two are thus inseparable. Hence, the thesis of this article is supported: There is a timely need for an MCA teaching strategy in a world of cultural turmoil (and unfortunately a debate on the clash of civilizations) where all sides are claiming cultural superiority instead of emphasizing the world's cultural complementarity. Based on the results of the questionnaire, this study asserts that EFL learners need to be given the chance to take cultural studies courses in a mixed curriculum teaching approach that addresses their need to acquire a foreign language, and that satisfies their curiosity about foreign cultures, as demonstrated by the findings of the questionnaire.

Surprisingly, for Question 7, only one individual out of the 20-student sample could define "cultural hegemony" in a satisfactory manner, which is a serious failure on the part of would-be graduates who are supposed to at least be familiar with the term, let alone its definition. As mentioned before, hegemony in cultural studies is one of the most familiar concepts given today's heated global context of different sides claiming cultural superiority versus cultural inferiority.

3. Discussion

This article has revealed a great deal about the extent of the basic knowledge deficit among EFL learners regarding culture studies, but the data paradoxically show how much they are curious about foreign cultures, especially the culture of the foreign language in which they are specializing.

Most data analyses have pointed out the general failure on the part of the students surveyed (concerning all levels) to answer even basic Yes/No questions about culture and culture studies. In response to Question 6, for example, no *single* student from either of the two groups could name a single prominent figure in culture studies. Had these graduates been exposed to basic concepts in cultural studies through an EFL MCA, this paper argues, they would have been able to define key cultural studies ideas and would have thus been able to differentiate between cultural hegemony and cultural complementarity, for example. To avoid cultural stereotyping and racial profiling in cross-cultural interactions, the MCA approach to teaching EFL would be very helpful.

This remarkable deficit can only testify to a major point this study is trying to make: Communicative competence is not a panoply of isolated grammatical, semantic rules of the target language. Rather, it is an inclusive package that should incorporate language as well cultural content, which this work calls the MCA, and which aims to attain what Alptekin calls “intercultural communicative competence” (2002). The MCA's bottom line is a culturally enriched communicative capacity that serves both purposes: mastering a foreign language and producing a culturally aware EFL graduate who can distinguish between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation.

The majority of the students lack general knowledge of what “culture” means in all its aspects. The weak responses to Question 1 may explain the striking results for Question 2, for which is around 85% (L4: 90%; L7/8: 80%) answered “Yes” as to whether they would like to know about other cultures; this reflects EFL learners’ curiosity about foreign cultures. This thirst for more exposure to foreign cultures validates the main thesis of this study, which argues for a timely MCA in curriculum design for EFL learners. This can only account for the fact that if given the chance, EFL learners would perform well in cultural studies, taking the discussion back to the primary thesis of this article, which encourages using the MCA with students of foreign languages.

Moreover, the analysis of the results underscores the paradox between the overall 80% majority (L4: 90%; L7/8: 70%) who believes that language is part of the culture (for Question 3), and also the average majority of around 57% (for Question 4) (L4: 60%; L7/8: 55%), who would prefer to see cultural topics included in their prospective curriculum, as they believe cultural studies is relevant to their future academic plans. Accounting for such a gap shows that EFL learners who have had very little exposure to cultural studies subjects are afraid that including them might induce a further burden in terms of passing their exams and earning high grades to graduate, merely because they are not familiar with taking cultural studies exams. Their concern can be alleviated by dealing with its source through adopting an MCA to dissipate such a familiarity deficit. Cross-disciplinary instruction is now the most efficient teaching and research method, which has been gaining momentum as the debate on the clash of civilizations returns to the arena of academic (and even popular) circles.

Finally, the results have demonstrated that this is a time of global cultural interconnectivity, which EFL curricula should reflect. Skill-focused curricula no longer fit the needs of today’s EFL learners, who are exposed to all facets of foreign cultural manifestations outside their universities’ context. Yet at the same time, they are confined to a curriculum composed of basic language skills and a variety of linguistics subjects (both theoretical and applied). This study has also shown that prospective curriculum designers should take profound world changes into account by expanding the prospects for EFL learners to diversify their learning resources and be prepared to become real “functional members” of their respective societies.

4. Conclusion

Contrary to the perspective that EFL learners need to only acquire language skills (in addition to some linguistics and semantics subjects), the findings of this study emphasize the opposite stance: that EFL curricula need to be updated and become more inclusive. The results reveal a paradox that curriculum designers in EFL instruction need to address. On the one hand, the questionnaire's outcomes show a clear knowledge deficit regarding cultural studies, such that most of the students could not define basic terms (e.g., "culture") and could not name a figure in the field of cultural studies. On the other hand, the students have a deep interest and intellectual curiosity in terms of wanting to know more about foreign cultures (in this case, English).

EFL curricula should build upon the intellectual interest of EFL students in learning about other cultures by adopting the MCA strategy in teaching EFL. The MCA would engage them by addressing their interest in foreign cultures at a time when the world is witnessing a resurrection of the universal debate about the purported clash of cultures. Moreover, the MCA would help EFL learners not only learn English through culture but also develop their views on a litany of cultural issues related to their society or foreign cultures; that is what "functional members of society" do, in Offorma's words.

Although this study employed a verifiable ethnographic method—a questionnaire that was peer-reviewed by elites with academic authority in their fields of expertise—the author had to limit the sample to a single university. Other constraints included the author's inability to make the study as exhaustive and extensive as it should be. This is due to COVID-19 restrictions, which have impacted all aspects of life, including the students' willingness to respond to the variety of sets of questions on time. Furthermore, the study could not cover all relevant issues related to EFL teaching methods, nor curriculum design complexities. Curriculum design is an independent area and cannot be sufficiently discussed in this article, whose sole focus is the validity of the MCA teaching strategy in the novel context of rapid global change.

5. Declaration of Interest

The authors wish to declare that they are not aware of any facts that may be considered as potential conflicts of interest, and there has been no financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome. We do confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication.

6. Acknowledgment

The Author would like to thank Deanship of Scientific Research at Majmaah University for supporting this work under Project Number R-2021-235.

References

- Kovács, G. (2017). Culture in Language Teaching: A course design for teacher trainees. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*, 9(3), 73–86. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ausp-2017-0030>
- Murcia, M. C. (2007). Rethinking the role of communicative competence in language teaching. In E. Alcón Soler and M.P. Safont Jordà (Eds.), *Intercultural language use and language learning* (pp 41-57). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-5639-0_3

- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics Journal*, 1(1). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/31260438>
- Kramsch, C. (2013, January). Culture in foreign language teaching. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 1(1), 57-78. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1127430.pdf>
- Council of Europe. (2018). *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): learning, teaching, assessment*. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe. Council of Europe. (2018, May 16-17). <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>
- Eliot, T. S. (1948). *Notes towards the definition of culture*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Peeters, B. (2020). 'Culture is Everywhere!', in Bert Peeters, Kerry Mullan and Lauren Sadow (ed.), *Studies in Ethnopragnmatics, Cultural Semantics, and Intercultural Communication: Meaning and Culture*, Springer, Singapore, pp. 1-14.
- Peeters, B. (2020). “APPLIED ETHNOLINGUISTICS is cultural linguistics, but is it CULTURAL LINGUISTICS?”. *International Journal of Language and Culture*, 3(2), 2016, 137–160.
- Tyler, R. W. (1971). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hlebowitsh, P. S. (2013). Forward. In R. W. Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Alptekin, C. (2002). Toward intercultural communicative competence in ELT. *ELT Journal*, 56(1), 57-64. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/216638038>
- Hsin, C.-L. (2008, September 3). *Language and culture in foreign language teaching*. British Educational Research Association New Researchers/Student Conference, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/178899.pdf>
- Abahussain, M. O. (2020). The position of “culture” in modern foreign language (MFL) teaching (a comparative study between KSA and the UK MFL curricula) (2nd ed.). *Journal of Administrative and Human Sciences*, 19, 119-132.
- Brown, H. D. (2006). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Education. http://angol.uni-miskolc.hu/wp-content/media/2016/10/Principles_of_language_learning.pdf
- Offorma, G. C. (2016). Integrating components of culture in curriculum planning. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 8(1), 1-8. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1207325.pdf>
- Fukayama, F. (2006, March 1). *The end of history and the last man*. Free Press: Reissue Edition.
- Huntington, S. P. (1994). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. Simon & Schuster.
- Lewis, B. (1992, March 26). *Muslims, Christians, and Jews: The dream of coexistence*. New York Book Review.
- Tojo, H., & Takagi, A. (2017, January). Shitsuteki-kenkyu oyobi kongo-kenkyu no doko to keiko [Trends and tendencies in qualitative research and mixed-method research]. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijelt.v4n1p37>

- Reeves, S., Peller, J., Goldman, J., & Kitto, S. (2013). Ethnography in qualitative educational research: AMEE Guide No. 80. *Medical Teacher*, 35(8), pp. 1365-1379. <https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2013.804977>
- Benson, P. (2013). Qualitative methods: Overview. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics* (pp. 4773–4783). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell
- Nassaji, H. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data types versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(2), 129–132. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1362168815572747>.
- Benson, P., Chik, A., Gao, X., Huang, J., & Wang, W. (2009). Qualitative research in language teaching and learning journals, 1997–2006. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93(1), 79–90. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230281290>.
- Eagleton, T. (2000). *The idea of culture*. Blackwell Publishing. ISBN: 978–0–631–21966–8.
- Larson-Hall, Jenifer. (2017). Moving Beyond the Bar Plot and the Line Graph to Create Informative and Attractive Graphics. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(1), Spring 2017, 244-270.
- Hsu, Hua. (2017). “Stuart Hall and the Rise of Cultural Studies”. *The New Yorker*, 2017. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/stuart-hall-and-the-rise-of-cultural-studies>.
- Khan Academy. (2018). *Cultural relativism article*. <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/mcat/society-and-culture/culture/a/cultural-relativism-article>.

AUTHOR BIODATA

Dr. Jalel ben Haj Rehaiem is an assistant professor of English, Ph.D in English, former Fulbrighter, English department, College of Education, University of Majmaah, Riyadh, KSA. Previous publications: “Teaching as an Act of Persuasion (TAP) and Attitudinal Responses of English Language Teachers: Saudi Schools as a Case Study”: (<https://journals.scholarpublishing.org/index.php/ASSRJ/issue/view/106>)>Vol 3 No 7 (2016): Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal).

Dr. Majed Abahussain. Ph. D in English, Dean of College of Education, University of Majmaah, KSA. Previous publications: “The position of “culture” in modern foreign language (MFL) teaching (a comparative study between KSA and the UK MFL curricula)”. *Journal of Administrative and Human Sciences*, 2020, (2nd ed.). 19, 119-132.

Appendices

Appendix I:

Questionnaire

The Relevance of the Mixed Curriculum Approach (MCA) to Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL):

The English Department, Majmaah University, as a Case Study

- 1- Would you like to know about others' Cultures?
- 2- Do you think that Language is part of Culture?
- 3- As a Foreign Language Learner, would you like Cultural Studies to be included in your Curriculum? Why?
- 4- Choose one of your favorite subjects from the list below:
 - Social identity/social groups in the United States
 - American immigration history

- The 1950s and the baby boomers
- American social geography
- Britain's modern culture
- Cinema and Music
- British life and culture
- American society: a Melting pot OR a piece of mosaic?
- Ethnicity and cultural tolerance in Britain

5- Can you name one of the influential figures in the field of Cultural Studies?

6- What is Cultural Hegemony?

Appendix II:

Samples of Students' hard-copy responses

Level4:

1- Could you define Culture?



1.pdf



5.pdf



17.pdf

Level 7:



7.pdf



9.pdf



19.pdf

Level 8:



11.pdf



13.pdf



15.pdf