

The Effect of Cultural Related Topics on Improving EFL Learners' Language Development: Focusing on Tabriz Culture and History as a Local Culture in Language Studies

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to investigate the effect of including materials related to local tourism as a cultural issue on improving English language learning. Most of the English language curriculum is about foreign culture and tourism, while the inclusion of content related to Iranian culture and tourism can increase students' general knowledge about their country and the interest in learning the language due to the attractiveness of studying about local tourism will be increased. In this study, 80 students who were studying general language at the Islamic Azad University of Tabriz were selected. There were 40 students in each group. For one group, non-tourist English materials were used, but for the other, English teaching materials from the researcher's own book, which is in the field of Tabriz tourism in English, were used. The result of the research showed that the group that used language teaching related to tourism surpassed the other group that used normal materials not related to Iranian tourism. This research is a method for the involvement of the private sector, especially the country's education sector, in promoting the development of local tourism and

increasing interest in teaching English with a focus on local tourism as cultural issues.

Keywords: Cultural and Historical Issues, English language Achievement, EFL language learning, local Tourism

Introduction

According to the Strategic Framework for Education and Training 2020 (European Commission, 2009 as cited in Sandorova, et al., 2020) one of the challenges that today's education has to address effectively in order to meet the needs of a 21st century society is “enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training” (Li et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2017). Based on various studies (e.g., Henriksen et al., 2017; Retna, 2016), design thinking (DT) “is a great tool for teaching 21st century skills, as participants must solve problems by finding and sorting through information, collaborating with others, and iterating their solutions based on real world, authentic experience and feedback” (Ray, 2012, p. 1). Based on these scientific issues, the researcher in this study tried to find a new way for teaching English in her classes based on embedding local tourism as cultural issues in the curriculum. All English books which are taught in Iran consist of just foreign culture. We study about other countries culture, history, Tourism Attraction in our books. However, there is no enough material about Iranian culture especially local culture in our studies. Paying attention to local tourism and embedding materials related

with our own culture may have better effect on learning English and it increases localization of learning English. Therefore, the researcher as the teacher in this study tried to use local Tourism issues in English to increase students' local knowledge and interest towards learning English. There hasn't been any studies related to this in Iranian context or I as the researcher couldn't find any. Since as a researcher I started to translate Tabriz history and the history related to Tabriz Monuments, foods, sweets, ceremonies, etc. into English. The researcher used this English book for teaching general English. The methodology and the ways for teaching local tourism in general English will be discussed in this study.

Methodology

Participants

80 students were chosen for this study. They were passing General English at Islamic Azad University-Tabriz Branch. They were divided as two groups of control and experimental. Students were chosen by a Modified PET test to be sure of their homogeneity at the beginning of the study. So 80 students out of 95 students who got 1 SD over or below the mean score were chosen for this study.

Instruments

The instruments which were used in these two classes were both two books written by the researcher as the teacher of both classes. "Tabriz Comprehensive Guide Book For Tourists" written by Sahebkhair (2019) was used for experimental group and the book "a guide towards writing essays and letters" written by Sahebkhair (2014) was used as a non-tourism based English teaching for the control group.

Procedure

In this study, two classes were chosen. Students were chosen by a modified PET test. Those students who could get 1 SD over or below the mean score were selected for this study. Therefore, 80 out of 95 students at Islamic Azad University-Tabriz Branch participated in this study that were passing general English with the researcher as their teacher. For further being sure of their homogeneity as a pre-test in the beginning of the study students have to translate one text from the books they studied in the treatment sessions. In the post-test they had the same text to translate. So students were divided into two groups as a control and an experimental with 40 students in each group. In the control group, students studied a non-tourism book for general English studies but in the experimental group, they had access to an English book related to Tourism studies. Some pages of books for both groups will be presented here.

Materials for the control group

Material for the experimental Group

Television, newspapers, magazines, and other media pay too much attention to the personal lives of famous people such as public figures and celebrities. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

I think the media pay too much attention to the private lives of famous people. Television, newspapers, magazines and web sites dig up all kinds of past bad actions. They say that these are true reflections of a person's character. This may be true if they occurred only a few years before, but some of these are things people did as teenagers. People in their forties are expected to explain something they did when they were fifteen. If they killed someone, obviously that's more than a youthful mistake. Literally though, these incidents involve experiments with drugs

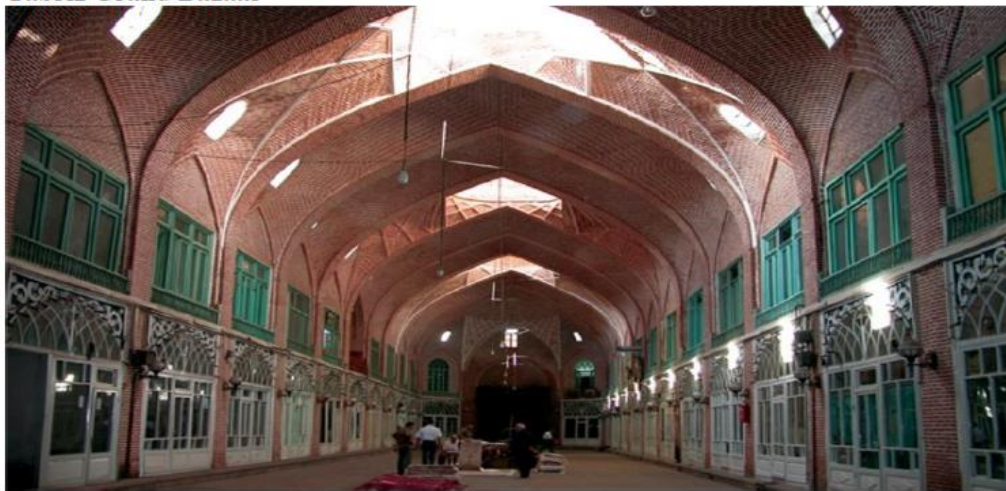


Photo by: Parstoday.com

El Goli park (El-Göltü, formerly known as Shah Goli) which was built during Ak Koyunlu dynasty. This pool and palace are definitely worth a stop, be there for lunch, dinner, afternoon tea or just a stroll. One of the country's largest outdoor pools, the park is a cherished weekend

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Tabriz Grand Bazaar



Listed as World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2010, Tabriz Grand Bazaar is also the oldest and largest covered Bazaar in the world, and the economic heart of the city and all northwestern Iran. Suggestive string of covered domes, brick walls and endless meandering passageways, Tabriz bazaar sells just about everything you can think of, from a whole selection of nuts, one of

Through these materials not only students got familiar with the history of the monuments in their city but also they have to visit these

places and prepare a report of their visit. It was both learning English at the same time it was advertising Tourism industry in the area.

Abghora Ashi/Ashe Abghure



Umaj Ashi



Describing Tabriz food as a way of speaking about Tabriz Foods and asking students to write about these foods recipe to get familiar about the way they are cooked. It is a way for

improving English by writing about food recipe and increasing knowledge about local foods.

Maka/Zorrat Zoghali



Lablabi/Labu



Getting familiar with Tabriz Street Foods and writing and preparing reports about

these foods, encourages cultural knowledge and improves English learning.

Pusta Halvasi/Halvaye Pesteiee



Badam Halvasi/Halva Badam



Tabriz Baglavasi/Baghlavaye Tabriz



Ghorabia



Getting familiar with Tabrizian sweets and asking students to write about the way of preparing and making these foods can be a

technique for both improving English and increasing cultural knowledge related with Tourism Industry.

Shampayla in Tasua



Photo by: Ali Hamed Haghdooost

This ceremony starts after Noon Praying in Tasua. People of Tabriz scatter 41 candles in 41 mosques. Those people whose dreams come true, they do this action by bare feet.

Speaking and preparing reports about the ceremonies which are hold in Tabriz can improve both English knowledge and cultural knowledge. So the book that experimental group faced with had different sections related with the monuments and their histories, foods, sweets, ceremonies, etc. of Tabriz.

Design

For assessing the scores in this study independent sample T-test was used through SPSS.

Results

For being sure of the homogeneity of two groups at the beginning of the study a PET test was used and assessed through an independent T-test.

Table 1: Independent sample t-test for comparing PET test Scores

group	N	mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig(2- tailed)	F	t	df
PET control	40	60.55	.06950	.02338	.860	1.283	-.254	78
experimental	40	61.61	.08774	.03772	.860		-.254	77.267

As Table 1 shows, scores in the control group are ($M = 60.55$, $SD = .069$) and experimental group ($M = 61.61$, $SD = .087$), $t(38) = -.254$, $P > .05$. The mean score shows that these two groups in the beginning of the study were the same.

Table 2. Independent sample t-test for Comparing scores in the Pre-Test and the post-test

group	N	mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig(2- tailed)	F	t	df
Pre control	40	12.45	.03150	.02035	.820	1.733	-.254	78
experimental	40	11.61	.07624	.04777	.820		-.254	77.217
Post control	40	17.84	.24583	.01218	.000	25.925	-	78
experimental	40	19.19	.21576	.03025	.000		-	76.669
							1.259	

As Table 1 shows, scores in the pre-test for the control group are ($M = 12.45$, $SD = .031$) and experimental group ($M = 11.61$, $SD = .076$), $t(38) = -.254$, $P > .05$. The mean score shows that two groups in the pre-test were the same.

In the post-test, scores for the control group is ($M = 17.84$, $SD = .24$) and the experimental group ($M = 19.19$, $SD = .21$), $t(38) = -1.259$, $P = .000$. The results show that there is a significant difference between two groups in the post-test. In the post-test, the experimental group outperforms the control group. It shows that Teaching English through focusing tourism studies can improve language achievement since it encourages motivation through using locally familiar information about tourism and cultural issues.

Conclusion

Nowadays finding an innovative way for teaching English can be effective for improving language learning. One of these innovative methods for teaching English is tested by the researcher of this article as the teacher of two classes. In this study two groups were chosen that were passing general English at Islamic Azad University-Tabriz

Branch. The teacher of the both groups was the researcher of the study. She used different books for teaching general English in her classes. In the control group non-tourism based book was used and in the experimental group tourism based textbook was used that included information about the city of Tabriz, its monuments, food, sweets, ceremonies. The results of students in final exam showed that in the final exam students in the experimental group outperformed the control group. This can be explained through the effect of embedding tourism related curriculum on improving English learning which has increased students' motivation for learning English. It can be included that teachers should use innovative methods for improving learning English. In this study using tourism based curriculum has both increased learning English and knowing about local tourism and getting familiar with local tourism and cultural issues.

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