

Original Paper

The Relation between English Language Cultural Exposure and EL Teachers' Competencies

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Received: October 20, 2020 Accepted: October 27, 2020 Online Published: November 3, 2020
doi:10.22158/assc.v2n4p83 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/assc.v2n4p83>

Abstract

English language learning is more than acquiring language skills, as the universality of the English language gives it an array of socio-cultural facets that need to be encompassed in English language teaching to non-native speakers.

This research explores the impact of personal exposure to western cultures on the professional abilities of novice female English language teachers in Qatar. Using a mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, findings from this research show that there is a statistically significant correlation using Pearson's test between the teacher's exposure to English language cultures and her competency as an EL Teacher. Furthermore, results show that when teachers are more confident with their grasp of the language especially because of familiarity, they are more able to focus on improving their teaching methods and educational strategies. Feedback also emphasized the importance of such exposure on improving accents and comprehension, which directly aided in the teachers' abilities to impart knowledge to their students.

The impact of these results is significant with high implications on higher education policies and curriculum design. The findings of this research provide valuable insight into the training of ELT in non-native contexts and recommends to policy makers to consider cultural emersion and exposure of student teachers to EL cultures in order to improve their competencies.

Keywords

Teacher competencies, English language teaching, novice teachers, ELT, EFL, student-teachers, culture

1. Introduction

The teaching of any language is considered an intercultural experience because of the nature of language itself (McAlinden, 2018). English language teaching is more so an intercultural experience as it is integrated in many overwhelming socio-economic global phenomena such as eating habits including fast food and fizzy drinks, clothing fashion such as jeans, seasonal celebrations for example, Christmas, and most importantly, the entertainment industry both music and films. Even non-English speaking Qataris use several English language words in their daily communication such as “love”, “bye” and “welcome”. Research shows that “intercultural competence is essential in English language teaching” (McAlinden, 2018). There is ample evidence in the literature on English language education of the impact of exposure on English language learning from the student’s perspective. For example, the academic discipline of learners’ anatomy has been present in the English Language education literature for the last 30 years (Borg, 2012). However, the impact of exposure to English-based culture on the abilities of English language teachers especially in the Arab context requires further exploration. This research adds value to the literature on English teaching as a second or foreign language because it provides insights on how exposure to such cultures aids in better preparing the teachers of English to do their jobs.

The English language has taken an unprecedented importance in today’s world not only as means of international communication but also of education and advancing research and technology (Crystal, 2003). In order to equip its citizens with English language skills, Qatar’s ministry of Higher Education has taken specific interest in training and qualifying English language teachers (Yamani, 2006; Zellman, 2009). However, the student teachers’ educational programs are relatively weak and focus on the professional and linguistic capacity building of the teachers and very little on the cultural aspects (Nasser, 2017). This is not unique to Qatar. There is in fact little research on the cultural preparation of ELTs whereby they are capable of not only providing their students with language tools but also with the experiences of English language cultures. Similarly, there is a gap in the literature regarding the cultural backgrounds of the ELT and their familiarity or exposure to English speaking cultures and how this familiarity—or lack thereof—impacts their ability or competence as ELT or non-native speakers especially in an Arab country.

The underlying hypothesis in this research is that a positive correlation exists between the teacher’s exposure to English language cultures and their competencies as ELTs. In the sense that the more the English language teacher is exposed to the English language culture on a personal level, the better she is as a teacher of English language.

This research draws on what Borg (2006) argues as the study of what teachers think, know and believe, which is commonly known as the field of language teacher cognition (Phipps & Borg, 2009), and how these personal attributes impact their abilities as teachers.

Findings from this research suggest that teachers who were immersed in the western culture during their youth and everyday lives are more capable as English language teachers not only because of increased fluency and confidence in the language, but more so because they are able to convey the experience of

English as a culture and not only as a language devoid of socio-cultural contexts. The qualitative data collected shows that when teachers are more confident with their grasp of the language especially because of familiarity, they are more able to focus on improving their teaching methods and educational strategies. Feedback also emphasized the importance of such exposure on improving accents and comprehension which directly aided in the teachers' abilities to impart knowledge to their students.

This research recommends the inclusion of cultural exposure experiences in the education of student-teachers of English language. Examples of this exposure are such as spending a term in an English-speaking country, taking part in foreign exchange activities, and engaging in cultural experiences of English-speaking western cultures. According to findings from this research, such measures boost the English language teacher's confidence in teaching the language and their ability to become better teachers of this language.

The linguistic scenario in Qatar is characterized by multilingualism and diglossia as in many cases in Arabian nations. In Qatar, multilingualism is the main characteristic of the language. Multilingualism clearly manifest itself in the languages' diversity spoken by expatriate communities and Qatari citizens living the country. It is worth noting that the massive majority of learners in Qatari school systems come from households where Arabic is their first language. However, more recently, a growing number of financially stable Qatari households have begun enrolling their children in international learning institutions that might offer them with what has been viewed as higher proficiency of English language and better education.

Furthermore, the Qatari educational system does not outline policies concerned with the roles of foreign and national languages in learning. Also, it lacks adequate frameworks for the transitions between English and Arabic in schools. The two matters have raised concerns among concerned nationals, teachers, and linguists especially since there is an increasing gap between what Qatari children learn in English and their native Islamic and Arab cultural tradition.

It must be clarified that the notion of English-speaking culture implies western countries, in essence. This was done, despite the diversity of English-speaking cultures available in the world, for two reasons; The first reason is that the choice was based on English language being the single dominant language in that culture, and the other reason is based on the inter-cultural connections between Qatari/Arab populations and those countries. In the sense that in terms of the English speaking world, for the most part, Qataris have affiliations with either UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

2. Method

2.1 Research Scope

This research explores the influence of exposure to English-speaking cultures potentially has on the competency of newly graduated or novice female primary education teachers of English as a second language in Qatar.

Exposure to English-language/speaking cultures is understood in the context of this research as the

immersion and awareness of the English-speaking culture in terms of habits, entertainment, social norms, cultural practices and celebrations.

Exposure to English-Speaking culture is identified through a combination of factors from two categories: familiarity and interest. In order to measure familiarity, several questions were stipulated including time spent in a EL countries, personal connections with people from these countries, and inclusion of EL cultural practices in personal lifestyle including music, movies, celebrations.

The competency of the teachers is understood as the level of their ability as teachers of English language to non-English speaking students. This was measured by the systematic evaluation conducted by the higher education authorities in Qatar to assess the competency of the student-teachers during their practical training sessions throughout their academic training with the final score documented in their graduation records.

Using a mixed method approach including quantitative surveys and qualitative semi-structured interviews.

The surveys included four sections: The first section of the survey deals with four demographic variables which are name, education year, nationality, and overall usage of the Internet in a week (measured by hours), language and purpose of use. The use of internet is considered an indicator of global exposure.

The questions in the second and third sections relate to cultural exposure through familiarity and interest. Both cultural aspects of familiarity and interest are identified through several questions where the answers used a five-point Likert scale recoded in the statistical analysis to represent values from 0 to 4 showing a range for support of the statement in question.

The four familiarity questions were combined to provide an indication of familiarity and the three interest questions were combined to provide an indication of overall interest. Then each of these two indicators were correlated independently with competency as well as collectively through their means to arrive at the answer to this research.

2.2 Data Collection

The research population was all ELT who are graduates of the academic years between 2017 to 2020, the size of this population is around 300 student-teachers. The quantitative data is collected through an electronic online survey disseminated to all the research population through alumni networks.

Novice teachers were deliberately selected as the population for this research to control for other factors beyond the formal educational system that could affect the teachers' performance such as years of experience, continuous professional development, and on-the-job training.

In general, the population of EL teachers in Qatar is mostly female due to demographics of the primary education sector, in which as of 2017, less than 19% of the teachers were male and those were mostly posted in schools in rural communities, while the majority of the primary education teachers were female. Furthermore, of the Qatari nationals the percentage of females exceeded 98%. Therefore, in order to remove variance based on gender, the research sample was deliberately selected as completely female. Another defining criteria was that the research explores the personal cultures of ELT who studied

university in Qatar regardless of their nationality. It is worth pointing that of the total number of graduates of the English Language Department at the Education College of Qatar University in the last three academic years 100% are female.

Purposive sampling was identified as the best method because the research population was clearly identified and limited.

A response percentage of 22% was achieved as 68 teachers responded. Using the data collected from the questionnaires, the cultural exposure of these participants was correlated against their competencies as teachers measured by their formal evaluation scores.

A Likert scale, which is comprised of a combination of four or more Likert-type questions, was best suited to measure personality and character traits. When these questions are combined, they provide a quantitative measurement of the trait (Boone & Boone, 2012).

The final section in the survey required the respondents to provide their final performance evaluation score in terms of grade: A+ to F, and mark: of 100.

In addition to them being cost effective, and catering to respondents' convenience, online surveys were used in this research because they allowed access to research populations which are difficult to access (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). This was especially useful since during the time of carrying out this research it was difficult to access the sample through direct questionnaires due to COVID 19 pandemic constraints.

Statistical correlation data was analyzed through SPSS bivariate computational method identifying the Pearson test for significance of these relations and their strength and direction. In order to provide more understanding of the findings, descriptive-statistical analyses were additionally used to identify frequencies and percentages.

Additionally, triangulation of findings and provision of context to the quantitative results of the survey, was achieved through semi-structured interviews with five teachers. The teachers were selected to represent the various degrees of exposure to culture as concluded from the survey.

The qualitative interviews were used to give more depth to the findings, to explore how the personal exposure to English-language based cultures was perceived to have an influence over their abilities as teachers and whether this exposure—or lack thereof—was visible in their teaching styles.

The results from the surveys were shared with them and they were asked to explain the findings according to their experiences and from their points of view as the main target groups of this research, recommending by that future interventions in higher education policies of English Language Teachers' education.

Through the interviews, this research explored the teachers' commitment to the cultural aspects of English language teaching in the classroom. This includes the use of the social references and adaptation of the cultural aspects of English language and not just the language in the abstract sense. It was interesting to see the spectrum of responses to the findings from the interviewees. Even those who argued against the hypothesis of exposure's influence on competency, admitted that a degree of cultural

exposure could be useful for the EL teachers.

3. Literature Review

3.1 *Exposure, Creativity and Identity of EL Teachers*

English language teaching is intercultural in nature, and like all human activity, involves emotion and emotional understanding (McAlinden, 2018). To this end, there is empirical evidence attesting to the effect of multicultural experience on creative performance. For example, Leung and Chiu (2010) found that exposure to uncommon and unconventional ideas enhances receptiveness to ideas that perceived as foreign.

Other studies revealed that there is a positive association between creativity and exposure to other cultures through time spent living abroad (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). These empirical studies show that experiences of living in foreign cultures, which required adapting and keeping an open mind boosted creativity. Furthermore, there are also theoretical studies that researched influence of cultural values, cultural activities and norms, products on creativity in general (Shen & Yuan, 2015; Huang et al., 2018). Consequently, education as a profession entails a lot of creativity especially at the primary education levels. Teachers' creativity is influenced by their own identity. A teacher's identity is conventionally understood in terms of their professional qualifications, skills and characteristics (Sachs, 2001). Yet both practitioners and field experts emphasize that it takes more than acquiring qualifications to make a good teacher. Becoming an English language teacher is particularly complex due to the multicultural nature of language learning. Consequently, a teacher's professional identity, which changes over time (Chong & Low, 2009), is constructed by both their professional and personal experiences.

There are many takes on defining teachers' identity (see Gee, 2000; Clark, 2008). A more generic definition of identity could be based on Danielewicz (2001, p. 10) who defines it as "our understanding of who we are and who we think other people are."

In his research on English Language Teachers' identity's influence on their continued professional development, Trent (2012) describes the teachers' identity as both "identity-in-discourse" and "identity-in-practice". In other words, identity constructed through language and discourse and identity demonstrated through action and in social settings. While it could be argued that language is a manifestation of identity or one's sense of self and a way to give meaning to social reality (Weedon, 1997), how teacher's personal identity influences their use of language in education is yet to be fully understood.

What we do know is that the structural elements surrounding teachers during their teaching practice mediate their actions and dictate their performance (Lasky, 2005, p. 901). This indicates that the extent at which educational policies and structures encourage English language teachers to utilize their personal knowledge and creative multi-cultural experiences during their training as student-teachers and in professional practice afterwards, strongly influences their performance.

Furthermore, since teachers draw on their personal biases as per their identities in their professional

practice (Alsup, 2006), they are likely to interest their pupils in what they are interested in. Therefore, teachers who are more interested in the English language culture, are more likely to interest their students in the cultural aspects of the language and keep them engaged. Hargreaves (1998) explains that emotions hold center stage in the teaching experience, whether positive emotions or negative. This is specifically true in language teaching in today's global and multicultural world as emotions are intimately linked with the teacher's identity and values system (Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

Majority of researchers outlined the important perceptions of teachers, students, and other stakeholders of the interconnections of culture, language, and identity. These scholars viewed languages as the principle means that people carry out their social lives. Language is bound up with culture in complex and multiple ways when it is utilized in communication contexts. Some practitioners and researchers believe that English language cultural exposure and EL teachers' competencies would harm Arabic image as national culture and identity symbol. Ellili-Cherif and Romanowski (2013) claimed that accompanied by a comparatively American pop culture, emphasis on and rampant spread of English and imported education are starting to sideline Arabic culture leading to the cultural and linguist loss of people who identify with it.

3.2 The Lack of Socio-Cultural Preparation of Teachers

Most educational programs aimed at producing English language teachers are based on narrow understandings of what teachers should know and be able to do (Freeman, 2016). According to Karakas (2012), English as foreign language programs for teachers' education include three main elements: pedagogic competence, linguistic competence and general teachers' training practices. Cultural awareness and aspects of English as a socio-cultural context is often missing.

Due to the scarcity in empirical research on effectiveness of second language teacher's training, one is forced to draw on the larger field of teacher's education. Evidently, existing research indicates that in fact, the training teachers receive during their preparation years is proven to be distant from their needs as practitioners (Grossman, 2018). In a sense, one of the main weaknesses in teacher education is the disconnect between theory and practice (Agudo & de Dios, 2017).

English language cultural exposure and EL teachers' competencies are of course interrelated. In order to engage their students in the subjects being taught, teachers are required to use innovative teaching and learning techniques and approaches and new teaching styles. Consequently, educators are required to be creative and convey information to their students beyond the pedagogic and linguistic knowledge. This requires ease with the English language and a high level of familiarity with the language and its socio-cultural contexts.

Additionally, classroom training studies underline the efficiency of certain instructional practices related to English language cultural exposure and EL teachers' competencies. These approaches favor learner-based learning that entail assessments of content needs and linguistic needs of students and the provisions of class activities that assist to meet these needs. These methods also support applications of cooperative learning that enable learners with diverse levels to accomplish specific tasks.

Manifestations of the inclusive learner-based learning approach include adjusting the teachers speech patterns, their teaching styles, production or selection of instructional techniques and materials, specification of contents and language goals.

3.3 Exposure and Internet Use

In addition to exploring the personal exposure to English language cultures, this research investigates the use of internet as part and parcel of the overall personal cultural experience of the ELT. Internet use has already been explored in the English Language Teachers' literature, including that of Arab countries (Alhabahba & Mahfoodh, 2016). However, this research in hand differs from previously researched aspects of using ICT in the classrooms as an educational tool. Rather, it focuses on the personal use of internet by the teachers themselves as part of their awareness and familiarity of the English language cultures.

By January 2020, Internet penetration in Qatar has reached 99% and all of those users were also users of social media platforms (Kemp, 2020). Tsui and Tollefson (2017) coined English and Technology as "two inseparable meditational tools." Consequently, this study examines the use of internet by the ELT and whether or not the language of use and communication channels have an impact on their familiarity and interest in English-speaking cultures.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 68 novice female teachers who graduated between 2017 and 2020 responded to the survey. In addition to simple statistical analysis such as percentages and frequencies, the data was analyzed using SPSS software for statistical regression analysis.

In terms of internet use, 63% of the respondents stated that they use the internet for more than 20 hours per week. Furthermore, 63% also said that the dominant language used online is English as more than 80% of their browsing and communication online is in English. Only one respondent said she hardly used English in her online activity. The graph below shows the various reasons for using English online, indicating strong immersion of the language in most of the respondents' everyday lives.

5. What is the estimated percentage of your use of English online?

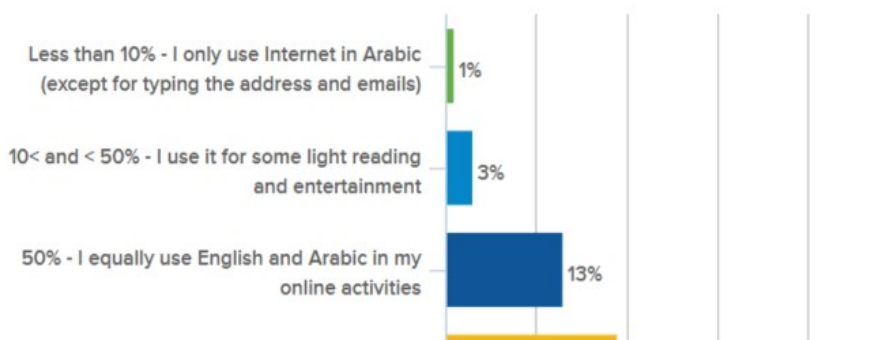


Figure 1. Language Used in Internet Activity

Statistical correlation shows a strong positive association between using English online and the competency of the ELTs in their formal evaluation using Pearson Correlation test with statistical significance $r= 0.435$ with correlation coefficient very highly significantly different from zero ($P < 0.001$):

Table 2. English Online Usage Correlated with Teacher’s Evaluation

	5. What is the estimated percentage of your use of English online?	15. What was your final grade in percentage? (for example 82)
5. What is the estimated percentage of your use of English online?	Pearson Correlation	.435**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	68
15. What was your final grade in percentage? (for example 82)	Pearson Correlation	.435**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	68

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In terms of the familiarity of the English language culture, the survey included four questions: time lived abroad in English speaking countries, family connections in such countries, familiarity with English language music, and familiarity with English language movies/entertainment.

It was interesting to find that although most of the respondents did not have direct exposure by either living or having personal connections in English speaking cultures, they compensated for this by immersing themselves in the English language based entertainment industry both music and films. Specifically speaking, only 26% lived for three or more years abroad and only 39% of the respondents have immediate family member living or from in English speaking countries.

Consequently, 61% have strong familiarity with music and 65% with movies based on English speaking context. Therefore, the familiarity of these respondents was mostly second hand. Furthermore, the participants who have high familiarity with the English language culture either directly or indirectly had in general higher marks than those who did not. For example, those who lived abroad for three or more years had an average of 90% in their evaluation.

On this note, an interviewee who was born and brought up in a western English language speaking country stated that having both parents fluent in English made the language part of her personality and personal life especially since she spent the first seven years of her life there. "Therefore, I don't have a problem in English language itself at all unlike my friends who are also English language teachers and who have some pronunciation, reading, and writing difficulties," she said. Having this ease with the language and its culture covered, she said that all she has to focus on now is the teaching strategies not the language itself unlike others.

This agrees with the literature, which indicates a strong relation between multicultural experience on creative performance, which teaching as a process is undoubtedly has to be if it were to be successful.

On the other extreme, an interviewee who argued against this importance of exposure said that although some aspects of English teaching could have been easier with more exposure, however, she believes that it's not a major effect. She explained this as she said: "I view foreign languages as a subject purely (subjects that need to be taught to enhance the students' quality education and future opportunities)." She also explained that her choice to become an English language teacher was not because of her interest in English but more in wanting to become a teacher in general.

This attitude towards the English language was not expected from an English teacher herself, however, it is not uncommon. According to Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb (2015), English language cultural exposure constituted threats to Qatar's Arab identity because English assisted widespread western values and cultures that are contradict the local cultures and appeared to diminish the Arabic in its speakers' eyes. Many scholars, school administrators, and parents in Qatar view decisions to utilize English to design new curriculum as westernization in the Arab and Islamic world pushing in the directions of Less Islam and More English and as an indicator of western interferences.

Statistical analysis confirmed as there was a strong correlation between familiarity as a combination of the four mentioned above indicators and teacher's capacity. Pearson Correlation test with statistical significance was $r= 0.513$ with correlation coefficient very highly significantly different from zero ($P < 0.001$):

Table 2. Correlation between Familiarity and Teachers' Evaluation

		15. What was your final grade in percentage? (for example 82)	Familiarity
15.What was your final grade in percentage? (for example 82)	Pearson Correlation	1	.513**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	68	68
Familiarity	Pearson Correlation	.513**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	68	68

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This relation was confirmed by most of the interviewees who said that teaching English is different from teacher other subjects and therefore a degree of familiarity of the English language culture can be very useful for the teachers. One interviewee said: “teaching English is not like others because it is a foreign language. Students only hear and speak English in class. We are lucky as English language teachers because we have new, creative and plenty of resources that we can just print and use straight away. Not like other subjects in Arabic, resources are not that much.”

Familiarity with the culture was also said by the interviewees to aid in explaining the contexts of what they are teaching to their students such as topics on food, styles and behaviors.

When it came to interest, the survey included three questions to measure the participants' interest in the English language culture through interest in making English speaking friends, their interest in social practices and habits of English speaking cultures, and their belief towards the relevance of exposure to EL culture would make them better teachers. Statistical regression analysis using Pearson Correlation test with statistical significance was $r = 0.460$ with correlation coefficient very highly significantly different from zero ($P < 0.001$) indicating a strong association between interest in English language culture and the teachers' capacity.

The interviews also showcased the relation between interest in the culture and the teachers' ability. For example, one interviewee said that her interest was derived from her exposure at a young age to the language and its culture. And this exposure helped her overcome the language barriers and focus on improving the teaching skills rather than focusing on learning and improving the language. “Additionally, if I am teaching for example the weather, I know what is really look like; snow, fall... ,etc. If I want to teach songs, I understand the vocabulary more easily than some teachers who haven't been to other western countries,” she said.

This finding also agrees with the literature especially that concerning personal bias of the teachers and their identities in their professional practice (Alsup, 2006). As teachers are likely to better engage the students if they themselves were engaged in the subject matter.

Descriptive statistics shed more light on this relation. The findings showed that majority of the respondents do not in fact have close friends based in English speaking cultures. The diagram below shows the distribution of their answers:

8. Do you have any close family members who are from a western English-speak

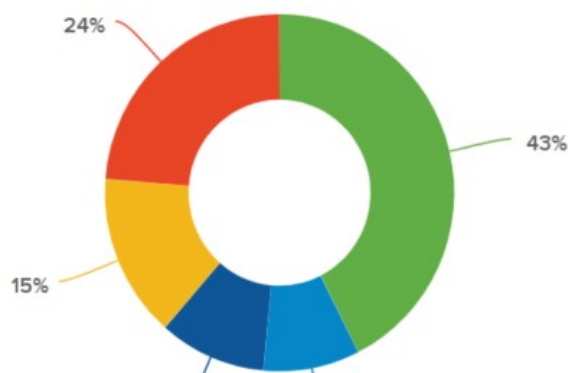


Figure 2. Relations with People in English Language Countries

Furthermore, interviews showed that connecting online with native speakers of English is an often go-to method for English language teachers to improve their skills, but it does not come easily considering the distance.

For example, an interviewee who has never lived abroad neither has close relatives there, resorts to social media to find and connect with friends. “I decided to enhance my English language by talking to English people. This is how I made friends,” she said. The teachers who did not have the opportunity to firsthand experience the English language western culture work hard at compensating through reading about that culture, watching some of their programs, news and learning about their lives.

Using the internet to find native English speakers was emphasized on by most of the interviewees. In addition to social media as mentioned above, some interviewees attended online courses related to teaching English such as TESOL conferences to make new friends.

This also agrees with the notion that internet use is closely linked to exposure of other cultures, as explained in the literature review section.

Similarly, the level of awareness of the social practices of western English speaking cultures also varied as described in the table below:

12. Are you aware of western culture and social practices in English-speaking countries?

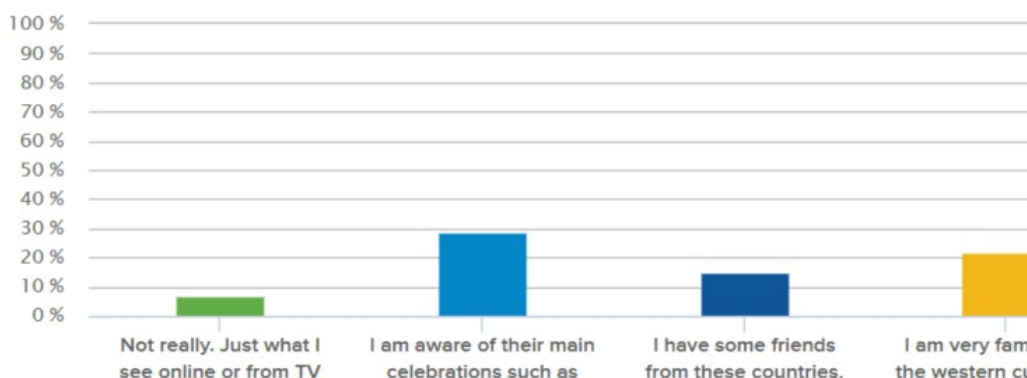


Figure 3. Familiarity with Western English Speaking Countries Social Practices

However, very strikingly, a majority of 73% strongly agreed that having direct exposure will have a positive impact on the EL teachers' abilities with 54% stating that "having firsthand familiarity to the English-speaking culture should be a prerequisite for teachers of English to non-native speakers. There should be provision for an immersion experience in the preparation of teachers of English before they teach."

Of the aspects thought to improve with such exposure as identified in the qualitative interviews is the accent. According to one interview, she hoped that such exposure will have a great impact on her accent. The issue of accent was repeated by all interviewees. Not only for the teacher herself, but also using English language entertainment to help the students improve their conversational skills and accents. "watching movies provides students with real life situations where they can hear the language and improve their accents."

This outcome falls in line with the literature on content needs of English Language education whereby teachers are required to be familiar with the accents, speech patterns and cultural contexts of English not only as a language but as a cultural phenomenon.

Even the interviewees who were not very enthusiastic regarding the impact of exposure on teachers' competency said confirmed this. One interviewee who argued that teaching English is just like teaching any other subject answered the question on whether having the chance to experience the English culture first hand, like living for a few months/years in the USA or UK would reflect on her teaching of English as a Foreign Language, saying: "It'd effect my fluency for sure and thus it'd have a direct impact on my teaching. It'd also give me a closer look on the small important pieces of culture we need to understand as English teachers (to avoid bringing something that is culture related but having no idea about it.)"

Another interviewee who was more enthusiastic regarding the impact of exposure said that there are aspects of the English language teaching that could have been easier if she had more exposure to the

western English culture such as explaining the songs, reading texts and some of the culture aspects that can't be explained to Arab students.

One interviewee said that in order to prepare better English language teachers for their job, focus should be made on speaking English and conversational skills before working on teaching skills. "I myself have a problem with writing and sometime with reading and comprehension, why the university doesn't teach us English first and then how to teach it to others second?" she questioned.

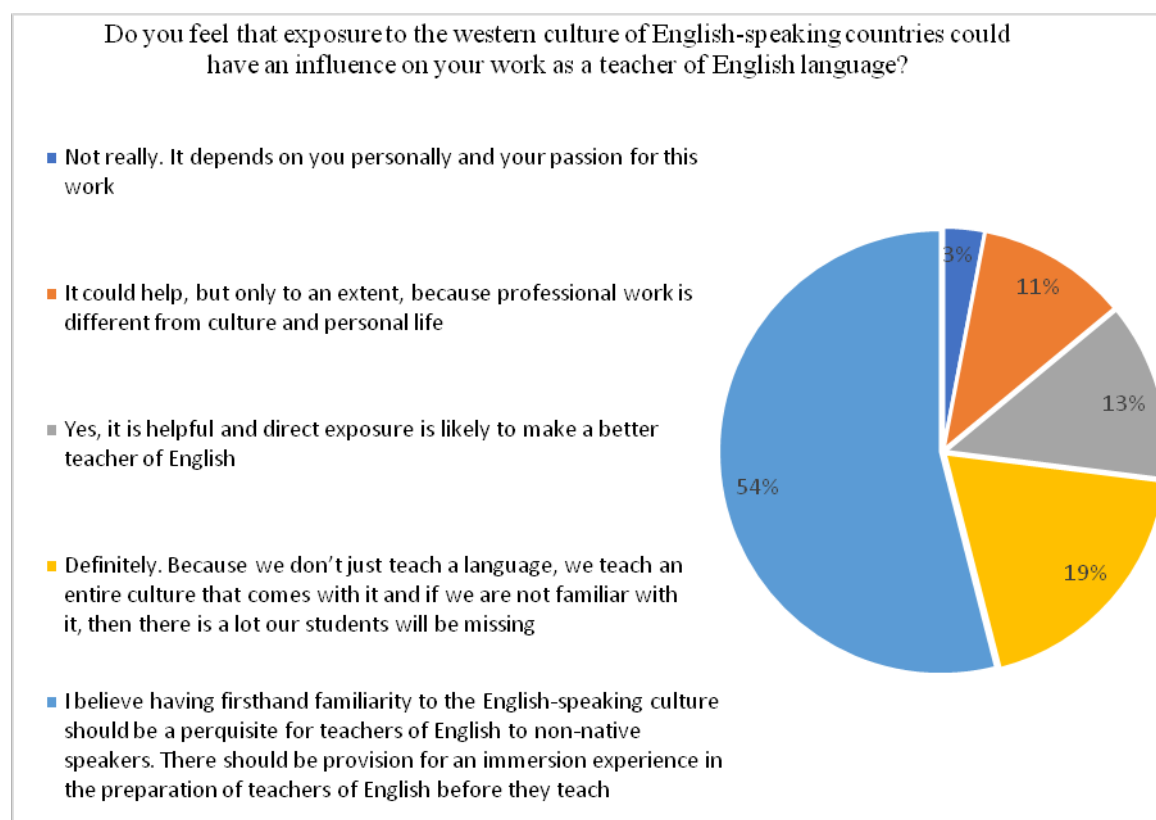


Figure 4. Does Exposure Influence Competency of ELTs

Findings from the qualitative data agreed with this recommendation indicating that the English language as a culture needs to be taught to the potential teachers of English and not just the language devoid of context. "How can a teacher give her students what she doesn't have?" exclaimed one interviewee.

Paradoxically, an interview with a teacher who did not agree with the significance of this relation commented that "Teaching is teaching." She explained that a good teacher has to have the knowledge of teaching strategies and assessment even if they are not exposed to western culture.

This teacher explained that what is important is to be exposed to the teaching concepts and know how to deal with students. In terms of the need for direct exposure she said that this is not a necessity. "I improve my language through watching movies, reading and listening to songs. I don't have to go there to learn. I can learn while I am in my country any language, it is easier now with the internet connection," she said. Nevertheless, she too said that if she had the chance to get exposure it might reflect on her teaching in a

positive way. “Their culture [western] is not like us at all. The teachers there are different when they teach. We focus more on memorization while there they focus more on how the students think. I would be different teacher if I can see for myself the real situation.” As to how long is an ideal time for such exposure to be effective, she said it depends on the person, but she suggests one year. Another interviewee said no less than four!

Finally, when combining all these factors of familiarity and interest into one variable described as exposure, statistical regression analysis showed using Pearson Correlation test with statistical significance was $r = 0.530$ with correlation coefficient very highly significantly different from zero ($P < 0.001$):

Table 3. Correlation between Exposure to the English Language Culture and Teachers’ Evaluation

		15. What was your final grade in percentage? (for example 82)		Exposure
15. What was your final grade in percentage? (for example 82)	Pearson Correlation	1		.530**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000
	N	68		68
Exposure	Pearson Correlation	.530**		1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	68		68

. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This finding agrees with the literature on English language teaching as intercultural process by nature, involving emotion and requiring interest and familiarity (McAlinden, 2018). The findings of this research agree with the existing empirical evidence on the effect of multicultural experience on creative performance.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Quantitative and qualitative findings from this research both indicate that without a doubt there is a strong influence of the personal exposure to the English language cultures and the competency of a teacher of English as a second or foreign language, at least in the case of Qatar. The impact of these results is significant with high implications on higher education policies and curriculum design.

The results confirm theoretical indications in the ELT literature that English language teachers do not only provide their students with linguistic and pedagogic skills, but there is a large part of the experience that is purely cultural. This means that providing teachers with immersion experiences and exposure to

English language cultures enables them to become better teachers.

The interviewees stated that having exchange programs is a good way to start. Educational emersion programs could range from a semester to several years. The interviewees agreed that an English language teacher has a double task: mastering the language itself and mastering the skills of teaching. All interviewees said that it would be easier if there was a way to help the student teachers become more comfortable with the language before they are required to teach it.

Recommendations from this research, through the voices of the respondents themselves, calls for an inclusion of direct exposure elements in the qualification of student teachers through a semester abroad in an English speaking country or at least to make it optional and students are willing to bear some of the costs incurred in the process. Further research could be made into the best educational policies in order to better prepare the English language teachers for their careers and therefore improve the quality of English language teaching in the country as a whole.

This research focuses on the influence of English language culture of western countries such as USA and UK. While acknowledging that there are other countries where English is considered a main language alongside other native languages, the nuances between the influence of such cultures on the English language student-teachers is not considered in this study and could perhaps present scope for future academic work based on findings of this research in hand.

Another potential follow-up to this research would be to identify the differences in the personal exposure to western English-speaking cultures among male and female ELTs in Qatar of secondary education. Also, to revisit this research question while expanding the research population to those who have been teaching for several years and identify correlations of personal culture with experience.

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