

## The Impact of Culture on Learning English as a Second Language

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**Abstract:** The present research aims mainly to identify the impact of culture on learning English language as a second language at the university level. A second aim is to investigate whether understanding culture engages students to create vigorous relationships with foreign people or not. It also aims to determine if the direct meaning of some expressions without referring to the cultural significations is sufficient for understanding or not. It further aims at identifying if learners of the English language can be proficient in the background, laws, customs, and way of life of native speakers by integrating culture into their process of learning. The sample population is fifty students from different universities in Kurdistan and Iraq. They data were collected after giving a designed questionnaire including 10 statements to be answered regarding the students' opinions about the impact of culture on learning English. The current research paper has found that English language learners care about foreign language culture because it has a great impact on the process of learning English as they use it as a basic element for improving their language skills. It has also been found that understanding the relationship between culture and language helps learners to decide the exact meaning of vague expressions in different contexts and that it reduces the obstacles facing students during the process of communication with foreign language speakers.

**Keywords:** Culture, Second Language, Impact, Phenomenon

### 1. Introduction

Culture is the core of any society. No society can exist without culture. It is culture that makes communities different from each other through food, clothes, traditions, behaviors, thinking, religion, and languages. By culture, people can protect all of these characteristics and inherent them from one generation to another. The culture of people related to all features of shared life in a community. It is the way of looking at things, doing things, what things you should value and what should avoid. According to Edward (1871: 1) Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Culture is important and influence lots of sections and among them is language. Culture and language are related to each other, and both affect each other. Nowadays culture plays essential role in the process of learning languages, and English as an international language is one of the most significant languages that people desire to learn. English makes

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our life easier to conduct business and also easy to connect with the world around us. Teachers of English language need to encourage and motivate students to learn English no matter what their achievement levels are.

English learners look for those ways which are interesting and stimulate them to understand and communicate language better, and culture is a good choice for this purpose. Learning English through culture will let learners know about English life, history, what they like, and what they dislike. This will provide an English environment for students; let them think in English, get more interest from learning, and obtaining more information that will help them to be closer with native speakers.

### **1.1 Problem of the Study**

Learning language by culture requires a long time, as it costs money especially when you take college courses or pay for private tutoring. Also, learners may have problems communicating with target native speakers because of the cultural differences, sometimes during learning; you may also learn bad habits of them. As well as it may not be available for all learners because it requires travelling abroad. As such, we will try in the present research to find answers to those issues.

### **1.2 Aims of the Study**

Culture and language are essential in our life as human beings. They influence every sector as two indivisible portions. Nowadays English learners are creative. They look for those important things that help them to improve their English language fluency and culture is one of those things that they care about to get language proficiency. There are many aims and reasons why learners use culture:

- Understanding culture engages students to create vigorous relationships with foreign people and help them to face less difficulty when they want to study abroad.
- Learning the meaning of words without culture is not sufficient for understanding because there are lots of words that belong to the culture and understanding those vocabulary hard if you do not know about their culture such as "idioms". But when students learn words and culture simultaneously that will help them to grasp the meaning precisely.
- Through an acquaintance of culture, students have an opportunity to find foreign language careers as a translator and work in organizations that belong to their own country and English countries as an intercultural translator.
- Learners of English language can be proficient about background, laws, customs, and way of life of native speakers by integrating culture into their process of learning.

### **1.3 Hypothesis**

The present research paper hypothesizes that learners of English at the university level have little interest in the cultural aspects of studying the language and they are also not familiar, to a certain extent, with the sociolinguistic, pragmatic and cognitive principles of the language which leads to some cultural gaps between the source language and the target language.

#### 1.4 Scope of the Study

The current research is limited to the study of the impact of culture on learning English as a second language. It is also limited to a sample of university students at the department of English in Erbil, Soran, Mosul, Duhok, Akre, Amedy, and Zakho cities respectively. The study is also limited to Kurdish and Arab learners who learn English as a second language in universities of Kurdistan and Iraq.

#### 1.5 Procedure and Data Collections

The researcher asked (50) students to collect the data personally because they belong to different universities and cities in Kurdistan and Iraq. The researcher asked (10) students who were studying at Salahaldeen university in Erbil, (5) students were studying at Soran university, (20) were students at Duhok university (10) students from the college of education - Akre, (5) from the college of languages – Duhok, and (5) from the college of basic education – Amedy, (5) students were studying at Zakho university, and (10) students were studying at Mosul university. After asking students in different universities, the questionnaire collected from participants, and it took almost (8) minutes to answer the questions. Although some students did not understand the researchers' questionnaire and some of them were hesitated about choosing the answers but when they explained for them in an accurate and brief way the questions were clear for them, and they were capable to answer the questions.

##### 1.5.1 Methodology

This section includes the questionnaire, participants, data collection, and the way of calculating the percentages of the results.

##### 1.5.2 Participants

The participants in this study were (50) students (25 females and 25 males), their ages were between (17-24) years old, and they were students of English language departments in different universities. The participants' mother tongues were Kurdish and Arabic, see table (1).

Table 1: Demographic information of the participants

Categories		Age	No. of Students	Total
Gender	Male	17-24	25	50
	Female	17-24	25	
First Language	Kurdish	17-24	40	
	Arab	17-24	10	

### 1.5.3 Instrument

In this study, the researcher investigates which qualities and tools are more effective and important for students to use for learning English language and henceforth, culture. The first part of the instrument was the questionnaire which consists of (10) statements on the impact of culture on learning English as a second language, and the researcher asked the participants to choose one of the statements whether (agree, disagree, and do not know), and also asked them to select the best choice among the statements. The questionnaire appears in full in table (2).

Table 2: Full questionnaire

No.	Questions	Agree	Disagree	Do not know
1.	Does culture influence your English language learning?			
2.	Did you get benefit from culture to learn English language?			
3.	Does culture increase your English language skills?			
4.	Is culture good for learning English?			
5.	Is culture necessary to learn English language?			
6.	Is understanding culture essential to learn the English language?			
7.	Is learning the English language easy by culture?			
8.	Do students at university enjoy using culture in learning English?			
9.	Does learning English through culture help students to know about other countries' laws and traditions?			
10.	Do university teachers motivate students to use culture during the process of learning English?			

### 1.5.4 Statistical Method

The researcher used the percentile method to make the analysis of the data collected from the participants more understandable.

$$\text{The percentile weight} = \frac{\text{Total number in one category}}{\text{Total number in all categories}} \times 100$$

## **2. The Concept of Culture in Language Learning: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Explaining What culture is**

Everyday culture is more comprehensive and developed than before. This development influences learners to learn the English language through culture. It affects their language and makes learning more proficient and effective. For this reason, the researcher has debated and discussed lots of details about the impact of culture on learning languages viz. English. Through the study of other languages, students gain knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use that language and, in fact, cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occur. The following review of the literature confirms the role of culture in language learning, the benefits of using culture, and the role of teachers in using culture in the classrooms. Culture is a vital part for teaching and learning other languages. As far back as 2016, Mahroof stated that teaching a foreign language is not enough to educate students to think in that language without cultural interviews. Mastering a language requires learners' mastery of cultural contexts in which important social acts occur because it conveys warm feelings and solidarity among speakers and is categorized in the 'social' use of language. When studying other languages, students can increase their information and try to understand the cultures of that language, and they cannot master that language until they have also mastered the cultural context of the language (Mohammad, 2020: 26).

Learning language through culture is like a bridge that provides numberless opportunities for students to learn better. Studying culture help learners face the fewer difficulties that is related to the people of that country, encourages them to study foreign languages, desire to know and understand anything, understand their own culture better, improve intercultural communication, understand the exact meaning of language as the native speakers do, and have fun from cultural activities such as dancing, singing, skits, and role-playing (Kitao, 2000).

Foreign language teachers are the main center for bringing culture into the classrooms. As Wang (2008) argued that "Foreign language teaching is culture teaching, and foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers". English language instructors should link both language and culture together to help learners improve their thinking toward other cultures (cited in Ahmad, 2008). To become an arbitrator in culture teaching, language teachers need to have both experimental and academic training because teaching culture not only assists learners with the ability to use language but also changes attitudes and language behavior decisions (Singhal, 1998:5).

## **3. Results and Discussion**

This chapter includes the data collected from the participants and the researcher will analyze them in detail. These data aim to know the impact of culture on learning English as a second language from the participants' point of view.

### 3.1 Results

The answers of the questionnaire were collected from the students whom the researcher met and gave them the clear instructions to choose the right answers for their questions on the impact of culture in learning English as a second language.

#### 3.1.1 Result of Statement (1)

The result of this statement that the researcher has got from (50) students show that (42) students agreed that culture influence the process of learning the English language, (6) students disagreed, and (2) did not know. The result appears in figure (1).

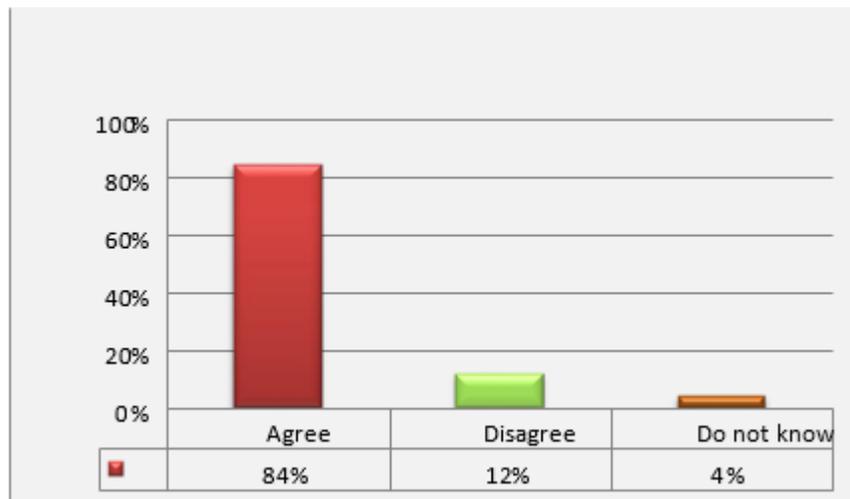


Figure 1: Does culture influence your English language learning?

#### 3.1.2 Result of Statement (2)

The answer to this statement is shown in figure (2) that among (50) students; (29) students agreed that language learners can get benefit from culture to learn the English language, (14) disagreed, and (7) did not know.

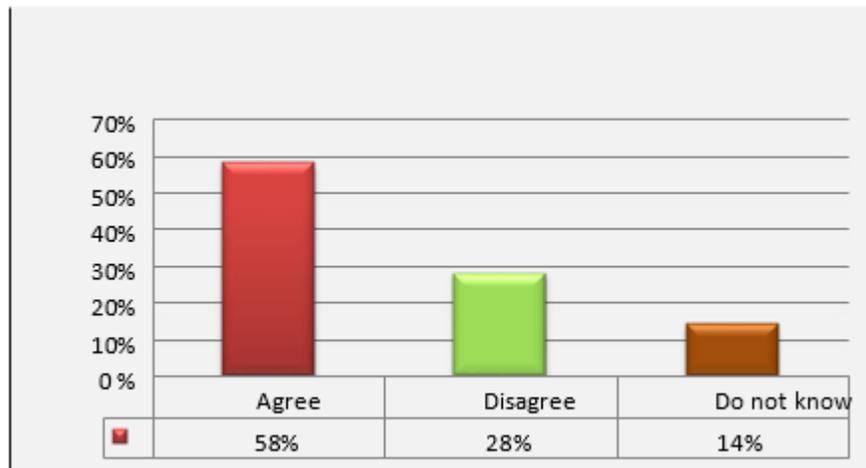


Figure 2: Do you get benefit from culture to learn the English language?

### 3.1.3 Result of Statement (3)

The findings reveal that (26) students agreed among (50) students that learners can increase their English skills through culture and (21) students disagreed while (3) did not know. The results are shown in figure (3).

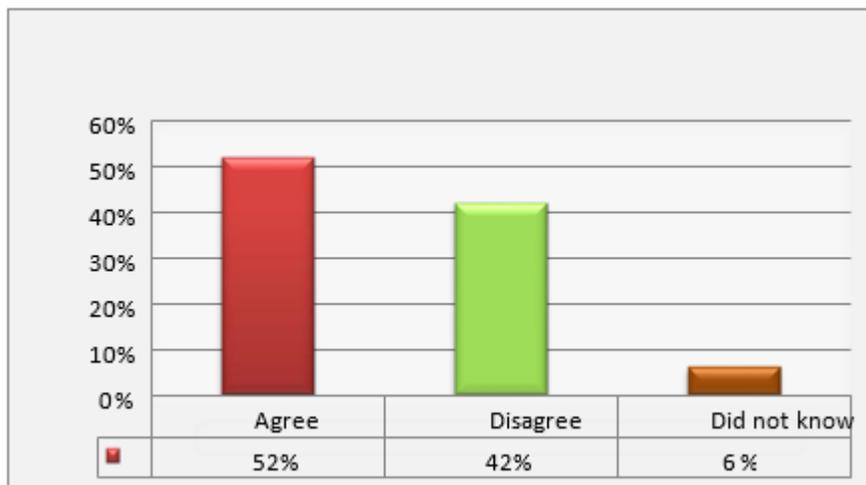


Figure 3: Does culture increase your English language skills?

### 3.1.4 Result of Statement (4)

The answer of this statement reveals that among (50) students; (31) students agreed that culture is good for learning English, (8) students disagreed, and (11) did not know. The result of this statement appears in figure (4).

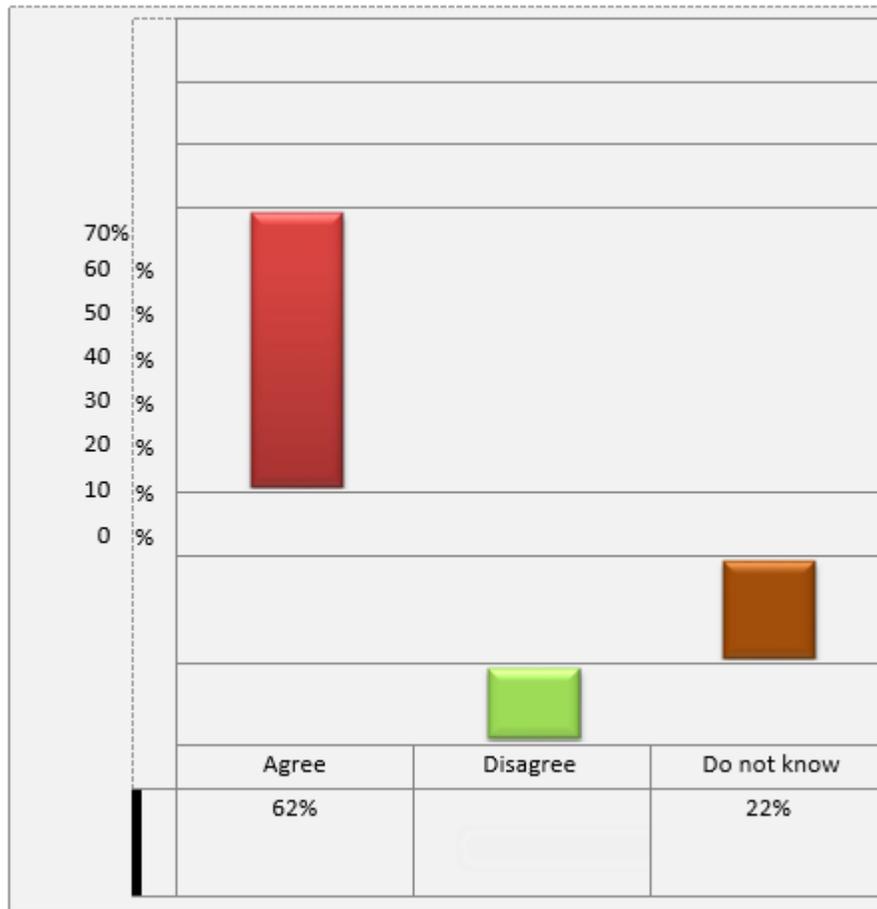


Figure 4: Is culture good for learning English?

### 3.1.5 Result of Statement (5)

As this statement shows in figure (5) among (50) students; (29) students agreed that culture is necessary to learn the English language, (14) students disagreed, and (7) did not know.

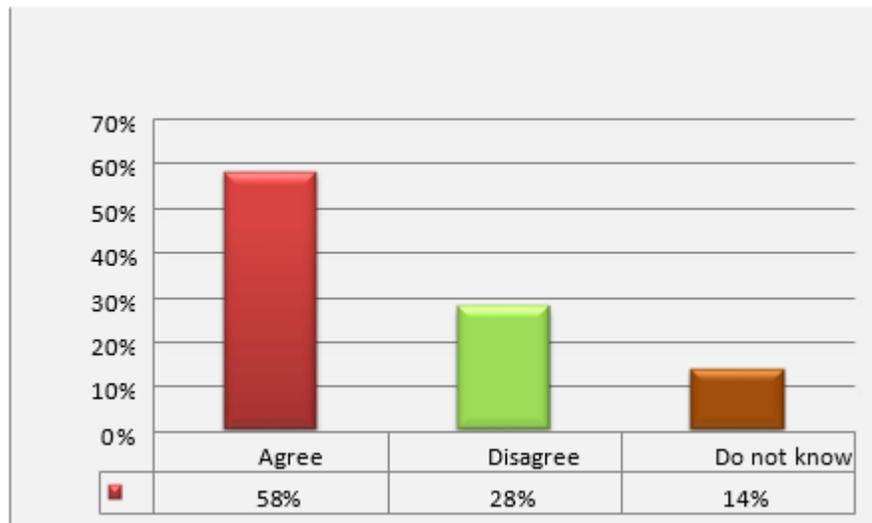


Figure 5: Is culture necessary to learn the English language?

### 3.1.6 Result of Statement (6)

As it appears in figure (6) among (50) students; (36) students agreed that understanding culture is important to learning the English language and (8) students disagreed while (6) students did not know.

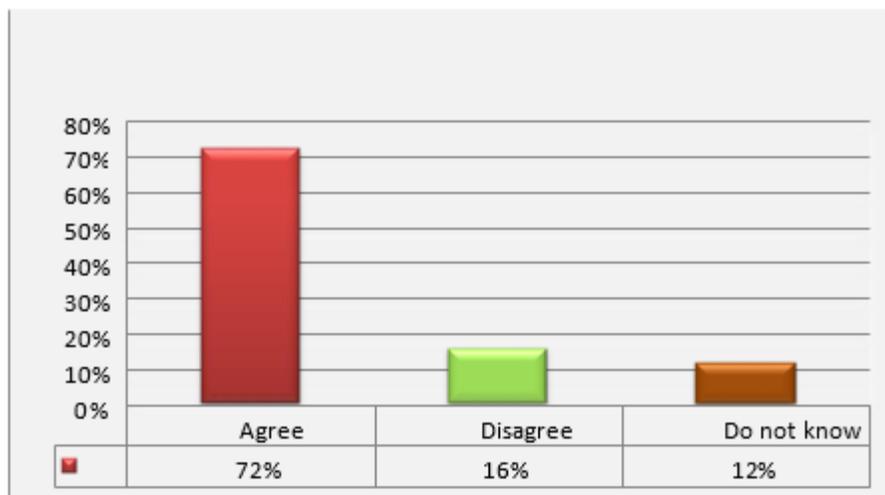


Figure 6: Is understanding culture essential to learn the English language?

### 3.1.7 Result of Statement (7)

As this statement shows among (50) students; (25) students agreed that using culture help them to learn the English language easily, (12) students disagreed, and (13) students did not know. The result appears in figure (7).

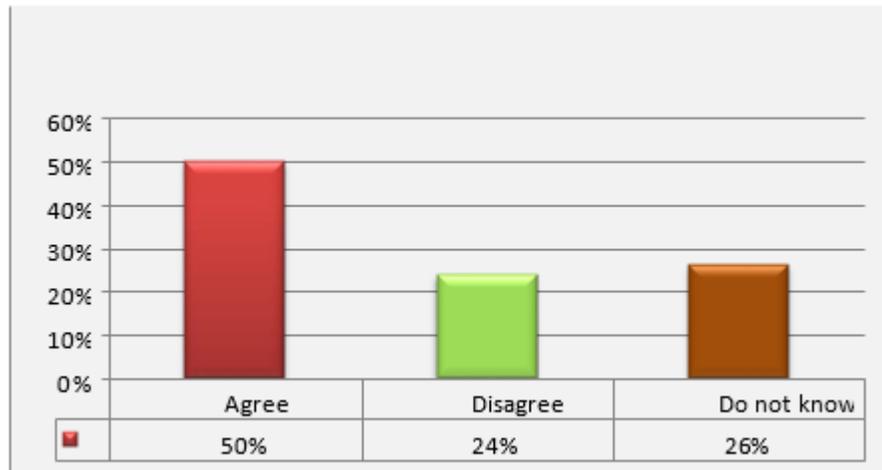


Figure 7: Is learning the English language easy by using culture?

### 3.1.8 Result of Statement (8)

Among (50) students; (32) students agreed that university students enjoy while they use culture to learn English, (8) students disagreed, and (10) students did not know. The result is revealed in figure (8).

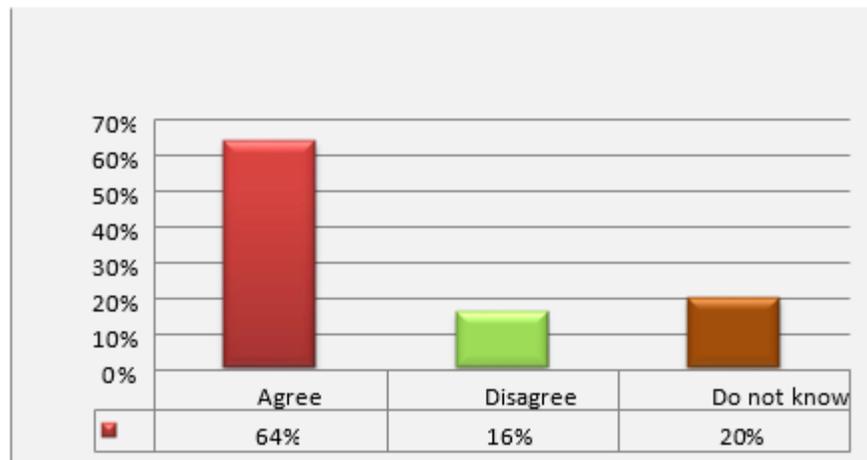


Figure 8: Do students at university enjoy using culture in learning English?

### 3.1.9 Result of Statement (9)

The result of this statement as shown in figure (9) that (33) students agreed among (50) students that culture helps us to be familiar with the laws and traditions of other countries during the process of learning English, (9) disagreed, and (8) did not know.

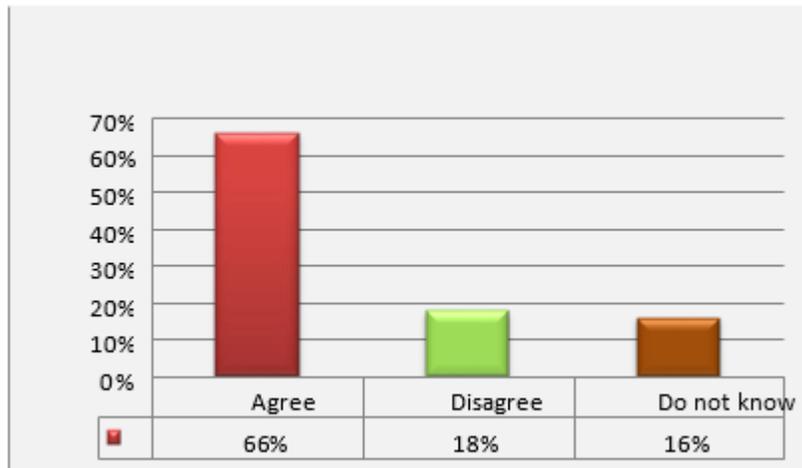


Figure 9: Does learn English through culture help us to know about other countries' laws and traditions?

### 3.1.10 Result of Statement (10)

The answer of this statement reveals that among (50) students; (30) students agreed that university teachers motivate their students to use culture for the process of learning the English language, and (14) disagreed while (6) did not know. The result is in figure (10).

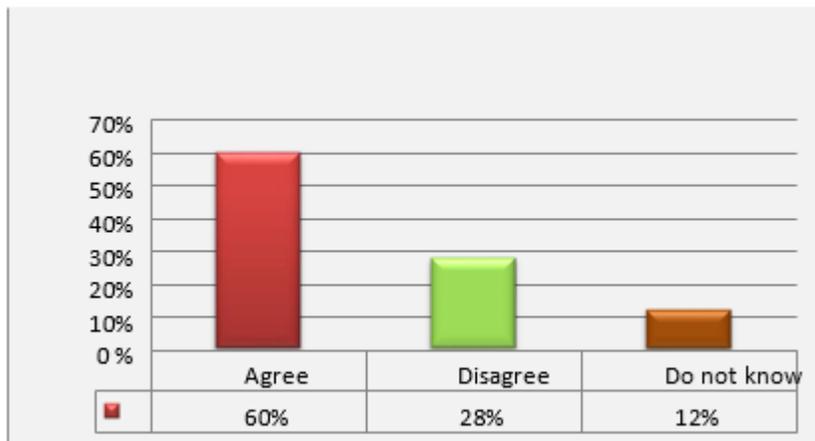


Figure 10: Do university teachers motivate students to use culture during the process of learning English?

Table 3: Results of questions

No.	Agree	Disagree	Do not know
1	42	6	2
2	29	14	7
3	26	21	3
4	31	8	11
5	29	14	7
6	36	8	7
7	25	12	13
8	32	8	10
9	33	9	8
10	30	14	6

Table 4: Results of questions by percentage

Total	Agree	Disagree	Do not know
50	84	12	4
50	58	28	14
50	52	42	6
50	62	16	22
50	58	28	14
50	72	16	12
50	50	24	26
50	64	16	20
50	66	18	16
50	60	28	12

### 3.2 Discussion of Findings

#### 3.2.1 The Discussion of the Results of Statement (1)

In this question, it seems that culture influences the process of learning English, so (42) i.e., 84% of students agreed, (6) i.e., 12% disagreed, and (2) i.e., 4% did not know. As Bilal and Erdogan (2005: 75) argue that culture classes have a humanizing and a motivating effect on the language learners and learning process. They help learners observe similarities and differences among various cultural groups.

#### 3.2.2 The Discussion of the Results of Statement (2)

The aim of this statement is that whether the use of culture is beneficial for learners of English language, from the result the researcher knew that (29) i.e., 58% of the students agreed, (14) i.e. 28% of them

disagreed, (7) i.e., 14% of them did not know. As Kitao (2000: 298) states that we can understand the target language better, enhance international understanding, communicate better with people of different cultures, understand our own culture better by studying other cultures.

### **3.2.3 The Discussion of The Results of statement (3)**

The results indicate that using culture helps students to increase their language skills, so that (26) i.e., 52% of them agreed, and (21) i.e., 42% disagreed, while (3) i.e., 6% did not know.

### **3.2.4 The Discussion of the Results of Statement (4)**

This result shows that (31) i.e., 62% of the students agreed that culture is good for learning English language, (8) i.e., 16% disagreed, and (11) i.e., 22% did not know. Studying culture gives learners a linking for the native speakers of the target language, also plays a useful role in general education, and we could learn about the geography, history, etc. of the target culture (Cooke, 1970).

### **3.2.5 The Discussion of the Results of Statement (5)**

Among (50) students (29) i.e., 58% agreed, (14) i.e., 28% disagreed, and (7) i.e., 14% did not know, so that the use of culture during learning other languages is necessary. As Fenny et al. (2021: 33) point out that learning culture is necessary to avoid misunderstandings during the communication process between speakers and listeners.

### **3.2.6 The Discussion of the Results of Statement (6)**

Only (8) i.e., 16% of the students disagreed, and (6) i.e., 12% did not know, but (36) i.e., 58% agreed, that understanding culture is essential to learn English language.

### **3.2.7 The Discussion of the Results of Statement (7)**

(25) i.e., 50% of the learners agreed that studying English by using culture helps them to learn easier and faster, (12) i.e., 24% disagreed, and (13) i.e., 26% did not know.

### **3.2.8 The Discussion of the Results of Statement (8)**

It is crucial for the students to enjoy the use of culture in learning English so that (32) i.e., 64% agreed, (8) i.e., 16% disagreed, and (10) i.e., 20% did not know. According to Wallach (1973) that there was a high correlation between the foreign languages which students were studying and their choice of foreign countries to visit or live in. The study of culture increase students' curiosity about interest in the target countries, their people, and their culture. Also, Kenji (1991: 299) points out that studying culture increases students' interest. Students like activities based on culture, including singing, dancing, role playing, skits, doing research on countries and people.

### **3.2.9 The Discussion of the Results of Statement (9)**

In this question, it seems that learning English through culture help students to be familiar with laws and traditions of that country, so (33) i.e., 66% of students agreed, (9) i.e., 18% disagreed, (10) i.e., 20% did not know. As Tucker and Lambert (1973: 246) believe that the ability to communicate fully in a second language depends on the degree of non-ethnocentrism of the learners. The successful learners must develop “an awareness of the sensitivity toward the values and traditions of the people whose language is being studied”.

### **3.2.10 The Discussion of the Results of Statement (10)**

From the result of this statement, yes, I can say that teachers at universities encourage students to use culture for learning English. Motivation is crucial for learning a second language; teachers should aim to make their language instruction as much interesting and contextually relevant as possible. Also paying attention to the varieties of culture, identify key cultural items in every aspect when they design a language curriculum, and apply appropriate teaching strategies to learning activities in order to help students to bridge and overpass the culture gaps (Mohammad, 2020: 21-26). And (Wang2008) mentions that "foreign language teaching is culture teaching, and foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers”.

## **4. General Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **4.1. General Conclusions:**

1. The current research paper has concluded with the following points:
2. Culture plays a pilot role in the process of learning English as a second language.
3. Foreign language students care about culture nowadays because it has numerous impacts on the process of learning the English language, and they use it as a basic element for improving their language skills.
4. Understanding the relationship between culture and language helps learners to decide the exact meaning of vague expressions in different contexts.
5. Culture reduces those obstacles that students face during the process of communication with foreign-language speakers.

### **4.2 Recommendations**

After finishing this research, I would like to recommend the following points for those learners and teachers who want to use culture as a way for learning and teaching the English language:

1. Teachers should motivate their students to use culture as an active part for learning the English language.
2. Teachers should remind students about the importance of culture for increasing their information about the laws, traditions, behavior, and the way of communication with natives.
3. Learners should be aware of choosing the way for learning the English language.
4. English speakers should encourage and motivate learners for learning English language by using culture.

5. Learners have to be aware of using their language in different cultures.
6. Learners should be aware and ready for the process of learning by culture because it affects their whole life not just language.
7. Learners must consider their time in the process of learning the English language and culture.

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