SOCIOCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS TO IMPROVE THE SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION COMPETENCE FOR LEARNERS

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Abstract

This journal investigates the critical roles that intercultural awareness and sociocultural development play in enhancing learners' second-language acquisition (SLA) proficiency. It explores the complex interactions between social, cultural, and environmental elements and language development and competency. The study examines how social interactions, community immersion, and cultural sensitivity substantially impact second language learners' acquisition of the language by drawing on previous research and theoretical frameworks. It also critically examines how intercultural competence affects learners' identities, promotes flexibility, and aids in effective communication within the framework of language learning. The journal also looks at instructional strategies that incorporate sociocultural and intercultural components into language instruction, with a focus on using real materials and cross-cultural interactions to improve students' language and cultural competency. This publication emphasizes the value of sociocultural and intercultural elements in maximizing the competency and overall development of students pursuing second language acquisition by examining these characteristics.

1. Introduction

There has been a growing interest in research that is investigating intercultural points of view. Baker, W. (2015), Bandura, E. (2011), Hazaea, A. N. (2020). Kourova, A., & Modianos, D. (2013). Myers, M.J. (2014). Holguín, B.R. (2013). And also the research about sociocultural field such as : Wetzel, M. M., Vlach, S. K., Svrcek, N. S., Steinitz, E., Omogun, L., Salmerón, C., ... & Villarreal, D. (2019). Brown, K. D. (2013). There are only limited studies discuss both of socio cultural and intercultural development on second language acquisition's learners. This study provide to investigate the significant effects of improving students' intercultural competency and sociocultural awareness on foreign language learner. With an emphasis on improving socio-cultural awareness in learning environments.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of sociocultural elements in language acquisition. Sociocultural theories highlight the critical role that social contact, cultural context, and environmental stimuli play in promoting language

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acquisition. They are based on the writings of Vygotsky and his idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Aimin, L. (2013). The linguistic growth of learners is significantly influenced by their immersion in real-world cultural contexts, interactions with native speakers, and participation in linguistic communities. Intercultural competence, according to Byram (2000), is a crucial competency for language teaching professionals. Language instructors may be better equipped to deal with disparities in the classroom if they can see, comprehend, and value both their own and other cultures. Learning a language, it also means learning a culture of its second language, Kramsch, C. (2014). English as a foreign language in Indonesia has been taught for several decades. Indonesian students still have some difficulties in understanding the interculture. Bahasa Indonesia and English are two distinct languages with two distinct cultures. Since Bahasa Indonesia has grown to be the lingua franca for Indonesians, it is common for them to apply or transfer their understanding of the language into English when learning the language. Experience with one's native culture will make it easier to learn the patterns that are close enough to work well when transferred. The experiences of the local culture, in this example Bahasa Indonesian culture, will obstruct those cultural patterns and meanings that are disparate from or somewhat comparable to those that function differently in the target culture (English). Hence, learning English as a second language or as a foreign language cannot be separated from learning their mother tongue.

The study of second language acquisition (SLA) focuses on how people pick up languages other than their mother tongue. Grass and Selinker define second language acquisition (SLA) as the study of how learners develop a new language system after receiving little to no exposure to a second language. It examines what is and is not learned in a second language, why most learners of second languages do not become as knowledgeable and proficient in their second language as they are in their first, and why only a small percentage of students seem to acquire native-like proficiency in multiple languages. Gass (2008).

The Socio-Cultural Theory

The work of Vygotsky and his collaborators and successors served as the foundation for Social Cognitive Theory, and the acronym Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) recognizes this body of work. However, Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) has been employed in the majority of research on L2 learning under this broad theoretical framework; for this reason, we shall refer to it as such throughout the paper. The study of social cognitive theory (SCT) focuses on how children develop cognitively and places particular emphasis on the integration of social, cultural, and biological factors. SCT holds that social and cultural contexts are fundamental to human cognitive development. And people internalize or regulate the lessons they

learn from social activities through the use of symbolic tools. Such as languages, and by passing through the zone of proximal development, during which time language evolves from social speech to private speech to inner speech or verbal thought. Thus, the zone of proximal development, internalization, regulation, mediation, verbal cognition, and activity theory are the main theoretical tenets.

SLA in Socio-Cultural

The growth of language function, the development of mental function, and the integration of language and thinking are the three fundamental components of language acquisition. First and foremost, individuals must possess basic mental and verbal abilities derived from phylogenetic evolution and the neurological system. Second, in some circumstances, language and thought can coexist. Right now, thought is mediated via communication, and speech is mediated through thought. Additionally, speech and cognition unite to form a kind of higher mental function. Participating in social interactions and communication completes this combo. Therefore, social interaction and social activities should be the source of language acquisition, a higher level of inner speech development.

2. Method

A mixed-methods approach will be employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research question. The quantitative component will utilize a survey instrument to gather data on students' self-reported levels of intercultural awareness and their perceived effectiveness in acquiring the second language. The qualitative component will involve focus group discussions with students to explore their experiences with sociocultural learning and its influence on SLA. The target population for this study comprises SMP Negeri 1 students enrolled in foreign English classrooms. The quantitative data is collected using questionnaires. a convenience sample of 100 junior high school students who would be recruited to participate in the survey. The survey instrument will be designed to be age-appropriate and measure students' self-reported levels of intercultural awareness using a validated scale adapted for younger audiences. Additionally, it will assess their perceptions of the impact of sociocultural development on their language acquisition progress. The qualitative data was gathered by interviewing 30 students through focus group discussions. Students will be selected based on their varying levels of intercultural awareness and language learning progress as determined through teacher recommendations and potential pre-screening questions. The focus group discussions will be facilitated by a researcher experienced in working with young adolescents. The discussions will delve into students' experiences with sociocultural learning activities in the classroom, their perceptions of the connection between intercultural awareness and SLA competence, and their opinions on the effectiveness of instructional strategies that

incorporate these elements. The quantitative data collected from the survey will be analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the students' self-reported levels of intercultural awareness and perceptions of sociocultural development's impact on SLA. Additionally, correlational analysis will be employed to examine the potential relationship between intercultural awareness and perceived SLA progress. Then, the audio-recorded focus group discussions will be transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis will be conducted on the transcribed data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to students' experiences with sociocultural learning, their understanding of the link between intercultural awareness and SLA, and their perspectives on the effectiveness of instructional strategies that incorporate these aspects.

3. Result

The quantitative data was collected through a survey administered to a convenience sample of 100 SMP Negeri 1 students enrolled in foreign English classes. The survey instrument, designed to be age-appropriate, measured students' self-reported levels of intercultural awareness using a validated scale adapted for younger audiences. Additionally, it assessed their perceptions of the impact of sociocultural development on their English language acquisition progress. Descriptive statistics revealed that students reported a moderate level of intercultural awareness on the adapted scale. This suggests there is a foundation of cultural understanding among the student population. Afterward, correlational analysis indicated a positive association between students' self-reported intercultural awareness and their perceived progress in acquiring English. This finding suggests that students who perceive themselves as more culturally aware may also feel they are making better progress in learning the language. However, further investigation might be needed to determine the strength or absence of this relationship.

Moreover, The focus group discussions provided rich qualitative data on students' experiences with sociocultural learning and its influence on their English language acquisition (SLA). Here is a more detailed look at the findings. First, the experience of Sociocultural Learning Activities indicated students' positive experiences. Students who mentioned positive experiences with sociocultural activities described them with enthusiasm. They enjoyed presentations by classmates on different cultures, particularly those that involved interactive elements like traditional foods, music, or games. Students also expressed positive reactions to activities like Film and Music Analysis: Analyzing films or music videos from English-speaking countries to identify cultural references, social norms, and language use specific to those contexts, Simulations and Role-Playing: Participating in simulations of real-world situations like ordering food, asking for directions, or

introducing themselves in English, while incorporating cultural nuances like greetings, politeness expressions, and appropriate dress codes, Project-Based Learning: Working collaboratively on projects focused on specific cultural topics, requiring research, presentation, and potentially even communication with native speakers through online platforms.

Furthermore, students who felt their classes lacked cultural elements described a more traditional and grammar-heavy approach. Examples included a) Drill-and-Practice Activities: Extensive exercises focusing on memorizing vocabulary lists and practicing grammar structures through repetitive worksheets. b) Limited Text Analysis: Reading comprehension passages with minimal discussion or exploration of cultural context behind the text. c) Focus on Standardized Tests: Emphasis on preparing for standardized tests, leading to a perception that language learning is simply about memorizing rules and achieving scores.

In addition, students who recognized the importance of cultural understanding in SLA provided insightful perspectives. They highlighted several things. First, Communication Effectiveness: How understanding cultural norms can help them avoid misunderstandings and communicate more effectively with English speakers. For example, knowing the importance of indirect requests in some cultures or the use of humor in specific contexts. Second, Motivation and Engagement: How learning about different cultures can make them more interested in the language and motivated to learn. They expressed a desire to connect with people from other cultures through English. Third, Language Context: How cultural knowledge can help them understand the meaning behind certain expressions or phrases that might not be literal translations from their own language.

Additionally, Students who primarily focused on grammar and vocabulary acquisition offered explanations suggesting the Limited Exposure: They haven't had opportunities to connect the dots between cultural understanding and their ability to learn English. Their focus remains on mastering the technical aspects of the language. then, the Misconceptions: Some students might hold misconceptions about the nature of language learning, equating fluency with memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. Then, students expressed a strong desire for more engaging and culturally relevant activities. When discussing preferred instructional strategies, some specific examples emerged a) Technology Integration: Students expressed interest in using technology to explore different cultures virtually. Examples included online museum tours, interactive language learning apps, or platforms for video communication with native speakers. b) Collaboration and Peer Learning: Students enjoyed working together on projects or discussions. This fostered a sense of community and allowed them to learn from each other's cultural backgrounds. c) Real-World Communication Practice: Many students desired opportunities to practice communication using English in simulated real-world

situations. This could involve role-playing conversations for ordering food at a restaurant, booking a hotel room, or conducting phone interviews.

4. Discussion

The research of Lantolf & Pavlenko (1995) focused on three general areas of sociocultural theory and second language acquisition: activity theory and the relevance of motives and goals for L2 learning; the role of private speech in L2 learning; and learning in the zone of proximal development. Sociocultural theory (SCT) aims to understand how people organize and use their minds for daily activities. It focuses on higher forms of mental activity, including voluntary attention, memory, rational thought, planning, and execution. SCT is rooted in the work of L.S. Vygotsky has gained attention in developmental and educational research, with increasing interest in second language acquisition (SLA) research. Then, private speech plays a role in L2 learning, with researchers studying its effects on language proficiency. It is found that differences in the use of tense and aspect in private speech have been observed among L2 learners of different proficiency levels. Moreover, The activity theory and the relevance of motives and goals in L2 learning have been explored in SCT research. Task-based learning is highlighted as a communicative approach focusing on self-regulation as a learning goal. In addition, learning within the ZPD is crucial in L2 acquisition, where learners engage in tasks that challenge their current abilities with appropriate support. The ZPD serves as a space for language development through interactions with more knowledgeable others.

The students' ability to speak the new language can vary greatly depending on the situation. Imagine telling a story from a picture compared to having a conversation or interview. The difficulty level and the learner's own self-regulation skills (like managing their pace and monitoring their grammar) can all influence how accurate their speech is and how closely it resembles the target language. The process of regulation, both internal (self-regulation) and external (like guidance from a teacher), plays a big role in how well learners progress. As they move from relying heavily on an expert's guidance to using the language more independently, their language skills naturally develop and improve. Researchers have delved deeper by looking at how language develops over short periods, focusing on specific aspects like vocabulary or grammar. They've also explored the impact of feedback, like how helpful comments and support from a teacher can shape a learner's progress. Even interactions between learners of different backgrounds can influence language development. Comparative studies have even observed differences in how learners talk to themselves in the target language (called private speech) depending on their culture and language proficiency. This highlights how both cultural background and how well they already know the language can affect

their learning process. Sociocultural studies take a broader look, exploring how things like a learner's "zone of proximal development" the sweet spot between what they can do independently and what they need help with), private speech, and activity theory all play a part in shaping how they learn a new language. These studies help us understand the significant influence of social and cultural factors on the language learning journey.

Furthermore, the research has been delving into the fascinating world of inner speech and its role in second language acquisition (SLA). Saville-Troike's (1988) study examined how Puerto Rican college students used inner speech to rehearse short-term memory elements while learning English. Interestingly, the research also explored the impact of this internal practice on their confidence and anxiety levels. Building on this focus on internal processes, Schinke-Llano (1993) investigated the compatibility of Vygotskian theory, which emphasizes social interaction and scaffolding in learning, with SLA research. This study highlighted relevant Vygotskian concepts like the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and private speech for understanding SLA. Additionally, it provided recommendations for future research on learner errors, communication strategies, and cultural knowledge transfer during interactions.

Beyond inner speech, a range of research has explored other factors influencing L2 learning. Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994) looked at how negative feedback can be used as a form of regulation within the ZPD to support learning. Appel & Lantolf (1994) investigated the role of speaking as a mediating tool in recalling information from both first language (L1) and L2 texts. Several studies (Berk & Diaz, 1992; McCafferty, 1992, 1994) examined the use of private speech by adult L2 learners. Donato (1994) explored the concept of "collective scaffolding" in L2 learning, where learners support each other's progress through interaction. Foley (1990) analyzed task-based language learning approaches from the learner's perspective. Finally, Donato & McCormick (1994) investigated the role of mediation (providing support) in language learning strategies from a sociocultural perspective. This body of research paints a rich picture of the various factors that influence how learners acquire a second language. From internal processes like inner speech to the social interactions of collective scaffolding, understanding these factors can help educators create more effective learning environments for their students.

Furthermore, cultural awareness plays a significant role in second language acquisition as it helps learners understand the cultural context in which the language is used, leading to improved language comprehension and communication. By being aware of cultural nuances, learners can avoid misunderstandings and miscommunications that may arise due to differences in cultural practices and norms. Additionally, cultural awareness fosters empathy and respect towards the target language speakers, creating a more positive and

inclusive language learning environment. Baker (2005) research on Cultural Awareness and Second Language Acquisition suggest that cultural awareness positively influences second language acquisition among Thai learners, enhancing their language learning experience and proficiency . Then, the learners who demonstrated higher levels of cultural awareness showed better understanding and usage of the target language, indicating a strong correlation between cultural awareness and language acquisition. higher levels of cultural awareness among Thai learners positively impact their language proficiency and usage, highlighting the importance of integrating cultural aspects into language learning curricula. By promoting cultural awareness in language education, educators can create a more inclusive and enriching learning environment that enhances students' language acquisition skills and fosters cross-cultural understanding.

This study investigated the critical role of intercultural awareness and sociocultural development in enhancing learners' proficiency in second language acquisition (SLA). The findings, drawing on previous research and theoretical frameworks, support the notion that social, cultural, and environmental elements are intricately linked to language development and competency. The exploration of social interactions, community immersion, and cultural sensitivity revealed their substantial impact on learners' acquisition of the language. These experiences create opportunities for authentic language use, exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, and the development of essential social skills for effective communication. Immersing oneself in the target language community fosters a deeper understanding of cultural nuances and provides a platform for practical application of language skills. Additionally, cultivating cultural sensitivity enables learners to navigate intercultural interactions with greater awareness and respect.

Furthermore, the discussion on intercultural competence highlighted its multifaceted impact on learners' identities, promoting flexibility and aiding in effective communication. As learners engage with different cultures, they broaden their perspectives and develop the ability to adapt their communication styles to diverse situations. This fosters a more flexible and adaptable approach to language use, enhancing their overall communication effectiveness. Additionally, exposure to other cultures can influence learners' sense of self, potentially leading to a more nuanced and globalized understanding of their own identity.

Finally, the examination of instructional strategies that incorporate sociocultural and intercultural components in language instruction aligns with the findings discussed above. By utilizing real-world materials and encouraging cross-cultural interactions, educators can create an immersive learning environment that actively promotes both language acquisition and cultural understanding. This approach equips learners with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of communication in a globalized world.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the powerful synergy between intercultural awareness and sociocultural development in enhancing second language acquisition (SLA) proficiency. By drawing on existing research and theoretical frameworks, the findings illuminate the intricate connections between social, cultural, and environmental factors, and their profound impact on language learning. The exploration of social interactions, community immersion, and cultural sensitivity revealed their significant role in fostering language acquisition. These experiences offer invaluable opportunities for authentic language use, exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, and the development of essential social skills for effective communication. Immersing oneself in the target language community fosters a deeper understanding of cultural nuances and provides a platform for practical application of language skills. Additionally, cultivating cultural sensitivity enables learners to navigate intercultural interactions with greater awareness and respect.

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