Developing International Competence through Students' Cultural Stereotype in Drama and Novel Courses: A Study Conducted at the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Misurata University

Manal Ben-Ahmeida

Fatma Suliman   **Misurata University- Libya**

Samah Abugarsa

Abstract

Literature courses are introduced to educate the students in the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Misurata University about the culture of the target language, i.e. English culture. However, such an introduction does not guarantee that students would appreciate the cultural differences they encounter in literary material. Because of lacking intercultural knowledge, a conflict may suddenly arise between the values, customs and beliefs of the students' home culture and the target culture. This clash could lead the students to form stereotypical images exaggerating those differences. Consequently, they may miss the opportunity of understanding other perspectives that contribute to enhance their understanding of both

cultures. This study investigates the perspectives of the students studying Drama II and Novel II (hence students at English department, Faculty of Arts, Misurata University study two Drama courses and two Novel courses) as well as two teachers taught these courses. Utilizing triangulation method, 40 students aged 19 - 24 have responded to the questionnaire and 14 of them have been interviewed to validate the results of the questionnaire. The results have revealed that although students have stereotypical images which do not have any effect on their attitudes towards the English culture. Furthermore, students have positive attitudes towards cultural differences because they basically employ intercultural skills. The findings indicate that students have a basic ground for developing their intercultural competence and this insight could be enhanced by literature, promoting the intercultural dimension in their classes.

Key Words:

International Competence, cultural stereotypes, literature courses

مقدمة

يتم تقـديم المواد الادبيـة كجزء حيوي لتثقيف وتنوير الطلاب في قسـم اللغـة الانجليزية بكلية الآداب، جامعة مصـــراته، ليبيا حول فهم وأدراك الطلاب بالثقافة التي يدرسـونها ومناقشـة أوجه الفرق والتشـابه ما بين الثقافتين العربية والإنجليزية من خلال دراسـة مادتي الرواية والدراما. هده الدراسـة لا تضـــمن حتما بان كل الطلاب سـيقدرون الاختلافات الثقافية التي يدرسـونها في المواد الادبية، وفي حالة

الافتقار للوعي ما بين الثقافات قد ينشـــأ صـــراع فجأة بين قيمنا وعاداتنا ومعتقداتنا والثقافة المسـتهدفة. وقد يؤدي هدا الصـدام الي تكوين صـور نمطية لدى الطلاب تضـخم تلك الاختلافات مما يحرمهم من فرصـة اكتشـاف وفهم وجهات نظر أحرى من شـانها ان تسـاهم بشكل كبير في تعزيز فهمهم لذاتهم. ولهذا فان الدراسة الحالية تهدف الى معرفة كيف يمكن للاختلافات الثقافية التي اثارتها المواد الادبيـة ان تعزز الميول النمطيـة لدى الطلاب اللبيين وكيف يمكن ان تؤثر على موقفهم تجاه الثقافة المستهدفة. تبحث هده الدراسة في وجهات نظر طلاب مادة دراما 2 ورواية 2 باستخدام طريقة التثليث. اجاب 40 طالب تتراوح اعمارهم ما بين 19 و24 عاما على الاسـتبيان وتمت مقابلة 14 طالب و2 اعضـــاء هيئة تدريس للمادتين للتحقق من صحة نتائج الاستبيان. كشفت النتائج، بان معظم الطلاب لديهم اتجاهات ايجابية تجاه الاختلافات الثقافية لأنهم يسـتخدمون بشـكل اسـاسـي مهارات واسـتراتيجيات لفهم الثقافتين.

Introduction

Literature courses are introduced as a vital part to educate students in the English department about the culture of the target language. However, such an introduction does not inevitably guarantee that students would appreciate the cultural differences they encounter in literary materiel. Not having enough knowledge about the culture could cause students to face conflict between their values and believes of their home and target culture. This may lead to form stereotypical images and deprives students the opportunity of understanding other perspectives. "Cultural stereotype are mental images created as a result of cultural differences between the home culture and the student and the target" (Popovic, 2004, p.32).

Theses cultural differences found in literary materiel could play an essential role as a gap promoting students a sense of generalization about the culture of the second language they are learning. Different English language teachers handle stereotypes differently when teaching cultural content inside the second language classroom, and this is assumed to be obvious by the researchers of this study in the Libyan EFL classes. In the Libyan context, many teachers prefer to avoid presenting controversial topics and also ignore challenging students' existing stereotypes as they may believe that these topics may cause conflicts and problems. Moreover, teachers try to tackle stereotypes by going beyond the exhaustive teaching of cultural content and by raising the students' awareness of (self and other, see list of definitions, p.4) during teaching a second language. The awareness and the positive perception of (self and other) draws the importance of introducing and developing students' intercultural competence.

Aim of this Study

The researchers aim to develop intercultural competence through examining students' cultural stereotypes in a number of literature courses. Literary materials contain presentation of cultural elements, which may influence and reinforce students' cultural stereotypes. Moreover, another goal of this paper is to explore the strategies students adopt in the classroom including relying on teaching cultural facts to avoid tackling students' cultural stereotypes. Moreover, assuming that teachers do not promote intercultural competence in their classrooms, the current study

aims to find out whether the students have the opportunity to develop their intercultural awareness of self and other.

Statement of the Problem

It is not uncommon to observe the conflict that many students encounter when studying the values, customs and beliefs of the target culture in comparison to their home culture. This could lead to the lack of understanding other perspectives to enhance their understanding of both cultures.

Specifically, the research attempts to answer the following questions:

How do students react to cultural differences evoked through literary material? To what extent are students aware of their negative stereotypical tendencies?

What strategies do students employ in order to adjust to different values, customs and beliefs? How do students perceive self and other through literary materials?

What teaching strategies do teachers employ when encountering differences in customs, values and beliefs from the home culture in literary materials?

To what extent are teachers aware of their students' stereotypical tendencies? and how do teachers deal with students' cultural stereotypes?

Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that cultural differences found in literary materials evoke stereotypical images to the students. It is also hypothesized that some strategies adopted by teachers of literature courses such as relying heavily on teaching cultural facts and information and avoiding to tackle students' cultural stereotypes may result in forming negative stereotypical tendencies. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that the students do not possess intercultural competence due to the teachers' emphasis on the linguistic aspects while teaching literature.

Scope and Delimitation

This research includes the students from the sixth, seventh and eighth semesters enrolled in Novel II and Drama II courses in the Spring Semester of A. Y. 2021-2022. The sample members were Drama II and Novel II students who were randomly selected, taking into consideration their voluntary participation. Students between the ages of 19–24 studying at the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Misurata University participated in the questionnaire and the interview. Only two teachers were included in the study because it was vital to investigate their perspectives of the topic in discussion. The teachers of Novel II and Drama II were interviewed to comment on their students' experience with literature courses and to discuss their preferred strategies in dealing with cultural differences. Furthermore, the study investigates the cultural differences between the Libyan and the English cultures specifically.

Other foreign cultures are not within the ambit of the current study. Additionally, certain variables which are often studied with stereotypes

such as prejudice and prototype are outside the scope of this research. The research focuses only on the stereotypical images created and enhanced through literary materials.

Other sources of stereotypical thinking such as those images acquired through commercials, television or those acquired by the general perception of the Libyan society are not elicited.

List of destinations

Literary materiel: Literary texts such as a drama or novel used as teaching materiel in literature courses.

Other: The target culture: people and their customs, believes and values.

Self: An aspect of a person's personality which includes their view of their own identity and characteristics

Target culture: The culture of the second language learner (English specifically).

Native culture: the culture of the second language learner (the Libyan culture specifically).

International Competence: a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes successfully applied in intercultural situations.

Cultural stereotype: when all members of group are categorized as having the same characteristics.

Literature courses: a study of literature in the form of novel, drama, poetry, creative writing short story.

Review of Related Literature Second Language Learning and Culture

Language and culture are interdependent. "A language is a part of culture and culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture" (Brown, 1994, p.165). Some recent studies like (Genc & Bada, 2005) focus on the integration of culture and language since it is argued that second language learning is second culture learning. Learning a second language goes beyond the acquisition of grammar rules and vocabulary. Bada (2000) emphasizes that the need to develop cultural competency in addition to linguistic competency is required for learners to communicate with members of the target language. Sysoyev and Donelson (2002) explain that culture is incorporated as an interdisciplinary core in language curricula and textbooks (as cited in Genc & Bada, 2005). Culture is defined by Tylor (1871) as that complex structure that constitutes values, knowledge and habits acquired as norms by members of the society (as cited in Choudhury, 2014). Kramsch (1993) proposes that the learners' native culture and the target culture are recommended to be present in the classroom to achieve better results in understanding a foreign culture (as cited in Choudhury, 2014). Stereotypes poses an obstacle to the communication across cultures although students have stereotypical images.

Stereotypes in Psychology

Stereotypes were studied by social psychologists, who borrowed the term from Walter Lippmann (1922) in his book PublicOpinion. He defines stereotypes as pictures in our head enable people make simplifications of the complexities of the world. These pictures are not driven by direct experience. They are evaluative and irrational, but they are not necessarily false (Lipmann, 1922). This definition is developed by Alport (1954) who explains stereotypes as "an exaggerated belief associated with a category" (as cited in Houghton, 2010, p. 182).

Typology of Stereotypes

Kurcz (1989) notes that stereotypes are not a single entity. They comprise two aspects: descriptive and attitudinal. The descriptive aspect refers to the characteristics of the stereotyped object or without any evaluation of its content e.g., referring to the English as courteous and reserved. On the other hand, the attitudinal aspect means that the stereotyped object is being evaluated as good or bad or on a scale of + or - e.g., being courteous is a good quality, whereas being reserved is a bad one (cited in Popovic, 2004).

Language and Stereotypes

According to Popovic (2004), a language can transmit stereotypes about foreign cultures through phrases, proverbs and idiomatic expressions. Although many scholars criticize this claim, these linguistic expressions remain part of everyday usage. "It has been ascertained that language has considerable power in stabilizing and disseminating stereotypes" (Popovic ,2004, p.7). When learners are confronted with pieces of a second language, they do not normally receive cultural knowledge and passively. They enter a conflict between their own worldview and the members of the foreign language (Kramsch, 1993 as cited in Popovic, 2004), a conflict between their own self and the new identity of the second language they are supposed to acquire (Popovic, 2004). Those cultural differences urge the students to find a mediator in bridging this gap by relying on stereotypes.

Pedagogical Challenges of Stereotypes

It is worth considering how stereotypes should be handled in the classroom. Different views have been proposed to handle stereotypes in English Language Teaching (Popovic, 2004). They can be summarized as follows: First is avoiding stereotypes which involve the idea that teachers avoid dealing with students' stereotypes. Topics of a controversial nature that cause conflicts should be avoided (Popovic, 2004). According to Harmer (1998), avoiding stereotypes could be made by making sure that the textbooks teachers use should contain no reference to national stereotypes (as cited in Popovic, 2004). Second is teaching culture that comprises the assumption that teaching the target culture would lead to the

development of positive attitudes towards other cultures. Therefore, tackling the problem of stereotyping, teachers would supply their classroom with culture-based topics (Popovic, 2004). Byram and Morgan (1994) argue that knowledge about other cultures does not correlate with attitudes.

They explain that "an unsystematic approach providing information leaves pupils precisely with unstructured information rather than knowledge and is without effect on pupils' understanding of others" (as cited in Popovic, 2004, p. 55). In the Libyan context, English language textbooks are crowded with references to the target culture since the literary materials taught present explicitly the beliefs and customs of the English culture. Such presentation may prompt Libyan students into questioning the reasons behind learning about a culture they do not have any contact with. The last is tackling stereotypes, mainly comprises a different view on the teaching of culture. It goes beyond the exhaustive acquisition of foreign cultural content, but rather of promoting the understanding of self and other (Kramsch, 1993, as cited in Popovic, 2004). This point is further explained by Byram and Risager (1999) arguing that the process of understanding the other includes tackling cultural differences and the obstacles to communication such as the stereotype (as cited in Popovic, 2004). In addition, Kramsch (1993) emphasizes the need for understanding cultural boundaries, not just acknowledging that they exist, but also knowing how to find a stance among those cultural diversities. She explains the total goal of this perspective is not to transform the learner into a different self-adopting a new culture, but rather the learner would come to adopt a third perspective;

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adopting the perspective of an insider and an outsider of their native culture and the target culture (as cited in Popovic, 2004). By examining the Libyan students' case, it is observed that most teachers are concerned with giving the students a large sum of cultural knowledge, but there seems little opportunity for the students to compare their own values and customs with those of the target culture. This deprives the students from adopting a third perspective during the process of learning a second language. Baider (2013) argues that intercultural competence is developed when learners become aware of their cultural stereotypes. The learner is then able to make comparisons of the two cultures and to evaluate and explain the cultural differences and that what makes him or her an intercultural competent learner (as cited in Sokolova, 2015).

The Significance of Intercultural Language Learning

Liddicoat (2011) explains two orientations to teaching culture inside the classroom. The first is cultural orientation where the learner receives knowledge about the target culture which is not intended to encourage the learner to transform his or her perspectives, attitudes and identity. This passive knowledge remains external to the learner. Beacco (2002) indicates that it is the one that is adopted in teaching language material (as cited in Liddicoat, 2011); whereas, Guest (2002) argues that such an approach would lead learners into forming cultural stereotypes (cited in Clouet, 2006). Intercultural orientation is the second approach to teaching culture which has gained attention over the past two decades. It is based on the idea that language teaching is an experience that prepares learners

for communication outside their cultural context and to prompt them to bridge the gap with other languages and cultures (Liddicoat, 2011).

Components of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence has been developed by Byram (1997) who classifies it into a number of points. Attitudes: The student exhibits a readiness to develop knowledge about the target culture. Moreover, the student is ready to discard disbelief about the target culture. The student exhibits a curiosity to know more about the target culture (Byram, 1997). Knowledge: The student exhibits an understanding of cultural differences. They exhibit an awareness of their own beliefs and how it is different from the target culture (Byram, 1997). Skills of interpreting and relating: This aspect has a relation with working with texts inside the classroom. The student compares foreign cultural documents with documents from their own culture. In simpler words, it is the students' ability to interpret other cultural beliefs and relating them to their own cultural practice (Byram, 1997). Skills of discovery and interaction: It involves acquiring knowledge about the target culture and putting this knowledge into action (Byram, 1997). Critical cultural awareness: Students should be able to evaluate their cultural practice with the practice of the target culture (Byram, 1997). It is worth noting that acquiring intercultural competence does not mean abandoning one's cultural identity and beliefs of another culture. It rather means being open to have insights towards knowing other cultural customs. Intercultural competence once developed would give the students

the opportunity to know their culture and the ability to critically evaluate their values (Huber & Reynolds, 2014).

Literature and Intercultural Competence

It has been justified that the introduction of literature courses is to enhance students' knowledge about the target culture (Elgar, 2011). Although students have stereotypical images, literary texts could contribute to students' knowledge of other cultures. Literary texts are suitable for developing students' intercultural competence (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001). Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) point out that cultural awareness would be developed through either a direct experience i.e., visiting that culture, or an indirect experience i.e., films, music or literature (as cited in Rodríguez and Puyal, 2012). O'Dowd (2004) emphasizes the role of literature and drama of being very beneficial for raising students' awareness of other cultural worldviews (as cited in Choudhury, 2014). A technique that could be adopted to teach cultural differences is the comparative approach proposed by Byram. Planet and Byram (1999) state that the comparative approach would "provide a double perspective to see which is better" (cited in Choudhury, 2014, p. 11). Accordingly, the students reflect on the cultural differences between their culture and the target culture with the teacher working as a mediator (Choudhury, 2014). Therefore, giving the students this opportunity would contribute to developing their intercultural competence.

Related Studies

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Popovic (2004) conducted research entitled "National Stereotypes in Teaching English as a Foreign Language" where the main focus was to propose a theoretical and practical framework for dealing with national stereotypes in the classroom. In the practical part, the researcher endeavored to linguistically analyze English phrases, proverbs and idioms and to find how lexical items containing nationality words are capable of creating stereotypical images about the target culture and other nationalities. The linguistic analysis reveals that those lexical items are capable of evoking connotations about others which creates an obstacle to the students' motivation. The researcher proposes a pedagogical model for dealing with such stereotypes that focused on the perception of self in relation to other to raise students' critical cultural awareness.

The current study pursues on the findings of Popovic's study that language is capable of reinforcing stereotypes. This study focuses on literary materials, whereas Popovic's study focuses on proverbs, idioms and phrases. Popovic's study focuses on the national stereotypes evoked through nationality words, whereas the present study focuses on cultural stereotypes created from cultural differences. This study links cultural stereotypes with the development of students' intercultural competence which is not covered in Popovic's study. The current study does not adopt a linguistic analysis of language but sheds light on students' perspectives.

Horáková (2007) analyzed three editions of Headway Coursebook used in the Czech Republic to compare how stereotypes are handled in the three editions of Headway Intermediate. The researcher found out that there are certain features in the course books reliable to evoke negative

stereotypical images because of cultural presentation of ethnic groups, occupations, age, social class and gender. Based on these findings, the researcher suggests intercultural activities for teaching Headway to raise students' intercultural competence in the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. The outcome of the observations proved that these activities were effective in raising the students' awareness of their stereotypical tendencies. The present study is similar in that they both study stereotypes in relation to intercultural competence. However, Horáková's study focuses on both stereotypes and prejudice, whereas the current study focuses only on cultural stereotypes. This study focuses on literature courses to identify how cultural differences evoke cultural stereotypes, whereas the related study focuses on Headway coursebook to elicit the stereotypes it conveys towards other ethnic groups, gender, ages, and these differences are outside the scope of the present study. Unlike Horáková's study, the researchers of the current study utilized a questionnaire and interviews to get insights from the students' experience when encountering cultural differences in literary materials.

Methods Research Design

The current study adopts mixed method design to investigate students' perception towards cultural differences and their stereotypical tendencies to develop their intercultural competence in Drama II and Novel II courses in the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Misurata University. A mixed method design is a procedure where both quantitative and qualitative data are gathered, analyzed and integrated in a particular research study. The

triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative data in the same study would provide a better understanding for a particular research problem (Creswell, 2012). To answer the research questions, quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire, whereas qualitative data was obtained from both students and teachers during an interview.

Participants, Setting and Instruments

The participants were the students and the teachers of Drama II and Novel II in the Spring semester of the academic year 2021–2022. Forty students (20 students in Drama II and 20 students in Novel II) ranging between the ages of 19 and 24 from the sixth, seventh and eighth semesters responded to the questionnaire created by the researchers. The number of respondents was determined on the basis of simple random sampling. On the other hand, 14 students volunteered for the interview which was conducted with the two teachers (1 male and 1 female) of Drama II and Novel II courses. The study was conducted in the English Department of the Faculty of Arts, Misurata University, Libya. The researchers designed two instruments to collect the required data. A questionnaire was designed to collect the quantitative data and the interview questions were designed to obtain qualitative data. Furthermore, tape-recordings for the interviews were utilized to ensure validity for the qualitative analysis.

Numerical questionnaire.

The researchers designed the questionnaire on the basis of 5–point (Likert Scale) with the responses of strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, agree, strongly agree. The questionnaire consists of 8 items asking the students about their reaction towards cultural differences and their learning experience in literature courses. The 8 items were suggested to provide answers to the basic research questions: the first two items (1& 2) measure students' awareness of their own cultural practices in relation to English cultural practices to identify their self and other perceptions. The second two items (3&4) measure students' attitude towards cultural differences in literary materials. Items (5) measure students' stereotypical tendencies when encountering beliefs different from their own. Items (6) investigate students' strategies for dealing with the target culture in the classroom. The items (7,8) seek to get answers from the students' perspective about the teaching strategies used by the teachers in the classroom (see Appendix A). To increase the validity of the questionnaire, the researchers conducted a pilot study before the instrument was administered with a number of 8 students who are studying Drama II and Novel II. The researchers received feedback from the small sample about the structure and order of statements and necessary modifications were done based on the feedback.

Textual interviews.

The interview was employed to obtain more insights from the experience of the students and the teachers in literature courses. Structured interviews were designed for the both the students and the teachers. The students' interview consisted of 4 questions to provide a better

understanding of the research problem and to validate the results of the questionnaire. The interview guide consists of a mixture of (closed-ended) and (open-ended) questions to obtain a balance of short and long answers given by the students (see Appendix B).

The interviews with the teachers were conducted after the students' interview to get more insights from another perspective. Six questions were asked to the two teachers of Drama II and Novel II about their awareness of their students' stereotypical tendencies and their strategies for teaching cultural differences (see Appendix C). The interviews of both the students and the teachers were recorded to be transcribed for later analysis.

Procedure: Data collection

The researchers asked permission from the Head of the English Department before conducting the study. The questionnaire was the initial tool administered in order to obtain numerical data. The questionnaires were distributed to the students face-to-face by the researchers themselves at the end of the lectures of Drama II and Novel II. It was emphasized to the students, who were given enough time to answer the questionnaire, that their participation is voluntary. The second tool employed in the study was the interview. The researchers obtained permission from the participants to tape-record their voices to analyze the data. The first phase of the interview was conducted voluntarily with 14 students who had previously taken part in the questionnaire. The second phase was conducted with the teachers of Drama II and Novel II.

Ethical Consideration

Before administering the questionnaire, the participants were informed about their anonymity and confidentiality. They were also informed that their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time. A letter was attached to the questionnaire informing the respondents that their participation will not in any way affect their grades or performance in the selected courses. Furthermore, permission was taken from the students regarding mentioning their first names and recording their voices during the interview.

Data analysis.

After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data using appropriate techniques.

Numerical questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed on the basis of having a number of categories which can be seen as follows: the first two items (1& 2) are related to students' consciousness of their own cultural applies in relation to English cultural practices. The second two items (3&4) enlighten students' attitude towards cultural differences in the two literary courses

mentioned. Item (5) measures students' stereotypical propensities when encountering beliefs different from their own. Item (6) examines students' approaches for dealing with the target culture in the classroom. The items (7,8) are designed to get answers from the students' perspective about the teaching strategies used by the teachers in the classroom (see Appendix A).

The Likert responses of the questionnaire were coded into a sequence of 1 to 5 where strongly disagree is (1), disagree (2), not sure (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). The coded responses of the students were classified into a table in accordance with the questionnaire items. This technique was employed for the ease of counting the frequency of each response to each questionnaire item. After identifying the percentages to every response, the data were transformed into a pie chart. Percentage distribution was adopted to represent the numerical data for each questionnaire item.

Textual interviews.

The researchers transcribed each interview for analyzing the textual data effectively. As the research employs two interviews, the analysis section was divided into two parts. The first consists of a detailed analysis of the students' interview and the second consists of a thorough examination of the teachers' perspectives on their teaching experience. The questions of each interview were transformed into separate themes. Most of the teachers' responses to the interview questions were quoted, whereas most of the students' responses were paraphrased. However, some
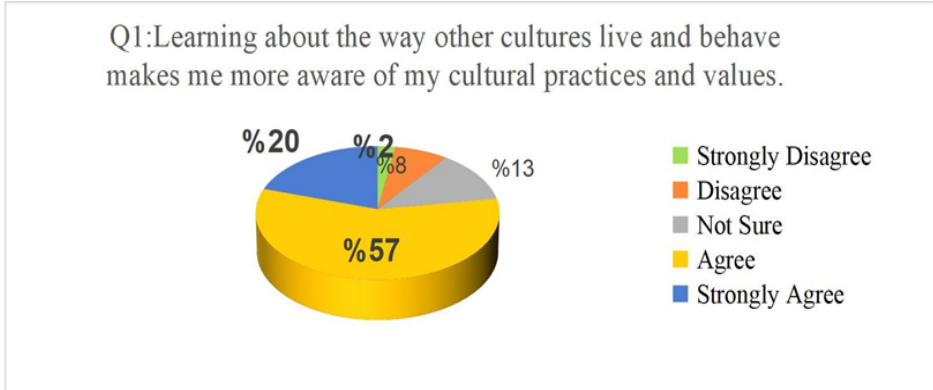
responses of the students were quoted when a vital emotion or reaction was important to be reported as it was expressed.
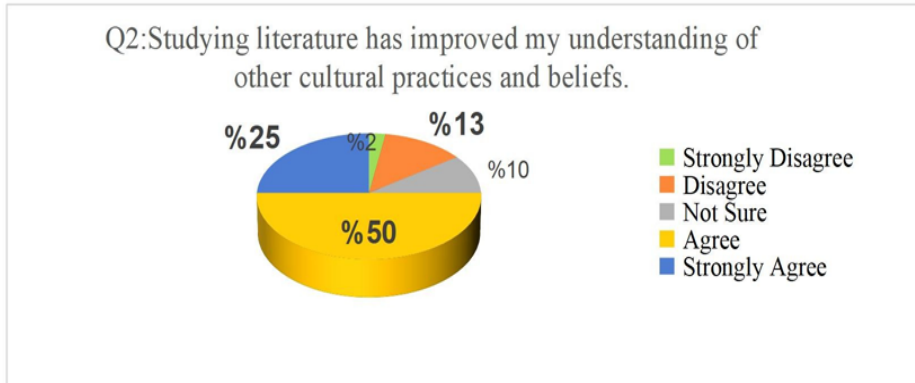
Results and Discussion

The analysis is divided into two parts, the questionnaire analysis section followed by the interview analysis section. For a clear representation of the questionnaire data, pie charts are utilized for each questionnaire item. The interviews data are presented thematically to provide a coherent and organized textual data.

Questionnaire Analysis

The terms used while analyzing the questionnaire items can be found within the list of definitions on page (4)

Q1:Learning about the way other cultures live and behave makes me more aware of my cultural practices and values.

%20   %2   %8   %13   %57

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

This pie chart illustrates the percentages of the students expressing their opinion regarding their awareness of their own cultural practices through literature. There was a significant agreement with 58 percent of the students agreed and 20 per cent of the students strongly agreed that the experience of learning about other cultures makes them more aware of their own cultural practices. However, only 13 percent of students expressed their uncertainty. Small percentages were scored in the disagreement responses as 7 percent disagreed and 2 percent of respondents strongly disagreed.

Q2:Studying literature has improved my understanding of other cultural practices and beliefs.

%25   %2   %13   %10   %50

- Strongly Disagree
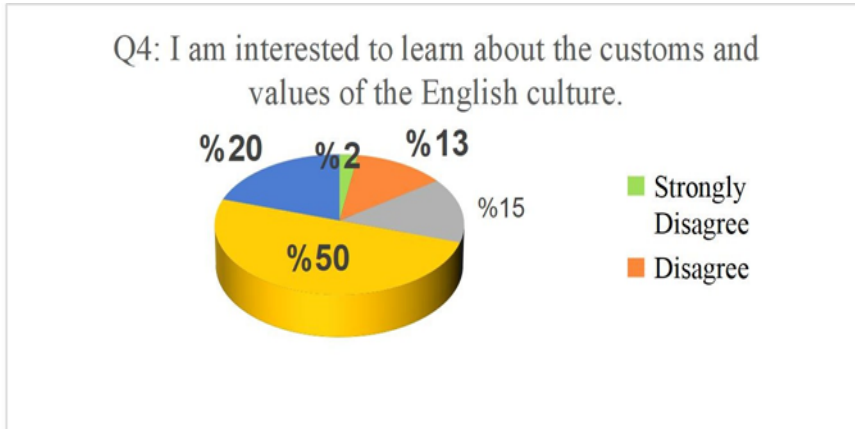- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

The pie chart shows the students' opinion about the role literature plays in enhancing students' knowledge about other cultural beliefs. As illustrated in the chart, half the respondents agreed and 25 percent strongly agreed that studying literature has enhanced their knowledge about the other. On the contrary, 13 percent disagreed and 2 percent strongly disagreed. At a small rate, 10 percent of the

students were unsure of whether literature has raised their understanding of other.
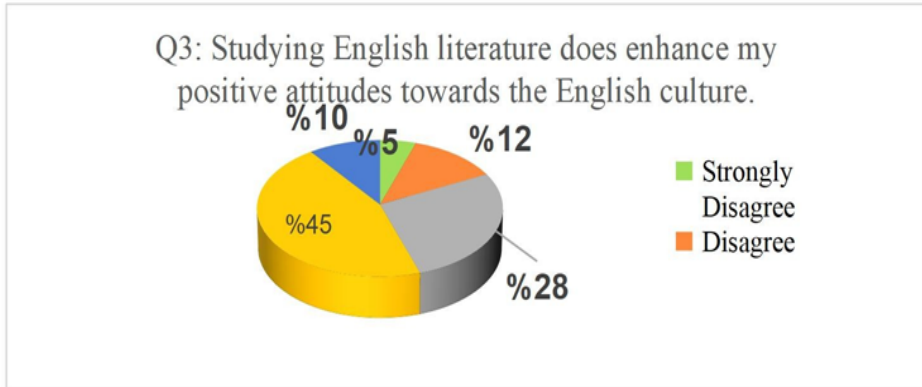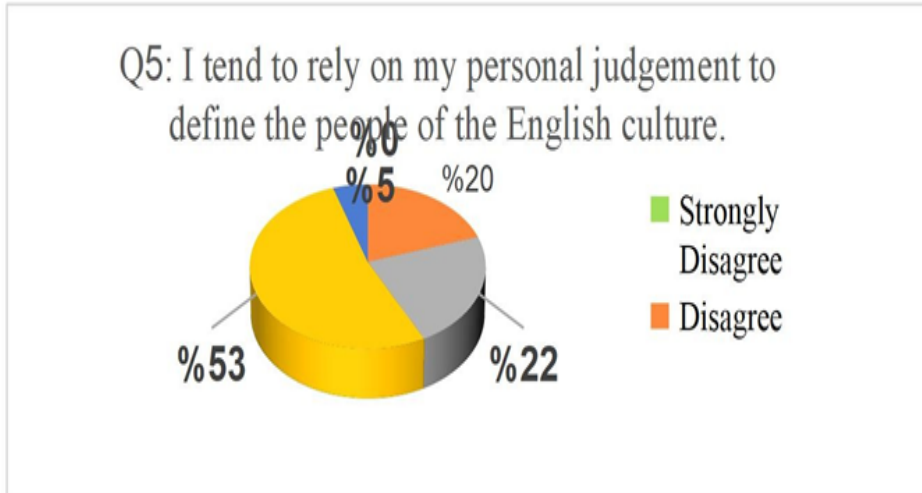
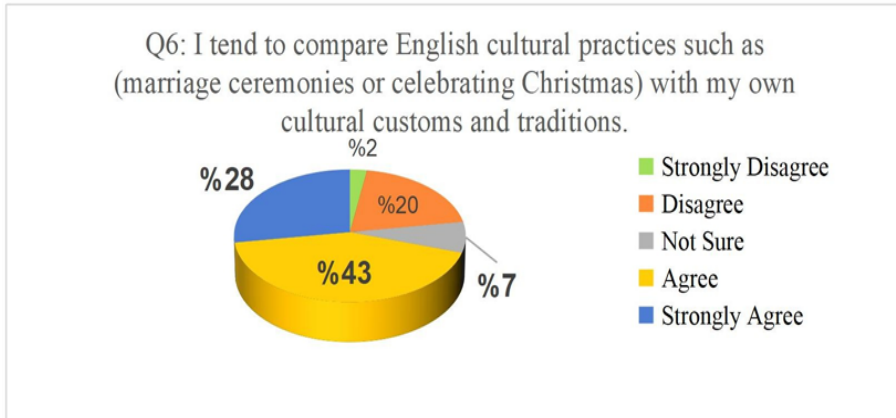Pie chart 3 depicts how students perceive the role of literature in enhancing their positive attitudes towards the English culture. 45 percent of the students agreed with the statement and 10 percent strongly agreed. However, 28 percent were uncertain of whether literature increases their positive attitudes about the English culture or not. Quite small percentages of students disagreed with the statement.

Q4: I am interested to learn about the customs and values of the English culture.

The pie chart shows how students feel about the experience of learning about the customs and values of the English culture through literature. There were higher percentages in the agreement as half the students agreed and a fifth strongly agreed that they are interested to learn about the values of the English culture in literature. However, 13 percent of the students disagreed with the statement and another small proportion of 2 percent strongly disagreed. Fifteen percent of the students were uncertain of their interest in learning about other cultural practices.

Q5: I tend to rely on my personal judgement to define the people of the English culture.

%0
%5   %20
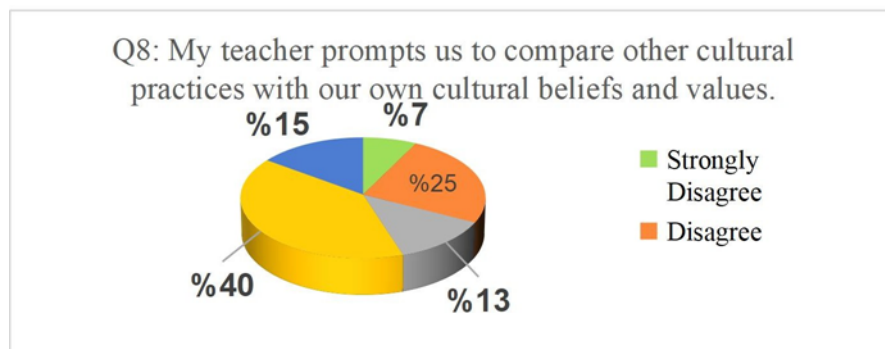■ Strongly Disagree
■ Disagree
%53   %22

According to the data presented in this chart, more than half agreed that they tend to rely on their personal judgment to define the people of the English culture. 5 percent of the students strongly agreed while 20 percent of the students disagreed and none of the students strongly disagreed.

Q6: I tend to compare English cultural practices such as (marriage ceremonies or celebrating Christmas) with my own cultural customs and traditions.

%2
%28
%20
%43
%7

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

This displays the percentages of the students' views regarding the employment of comparison as a strategy for tackling cultural differences. The highest percentage of 43 represents the students who agree that they compare between their own cultural practices and those of the English culture whenever they encounter cultural differences in literary materials. Complementary to this, 28 percent of the students expressed their strong agreement about employing this strategy. Meanwhile, 20 percent of the participants disagreed and a small figure of 2 percent strongly disagreed.

Q7: My teacher in the classroom encourages us to observe cultural differences and to reflect on them.
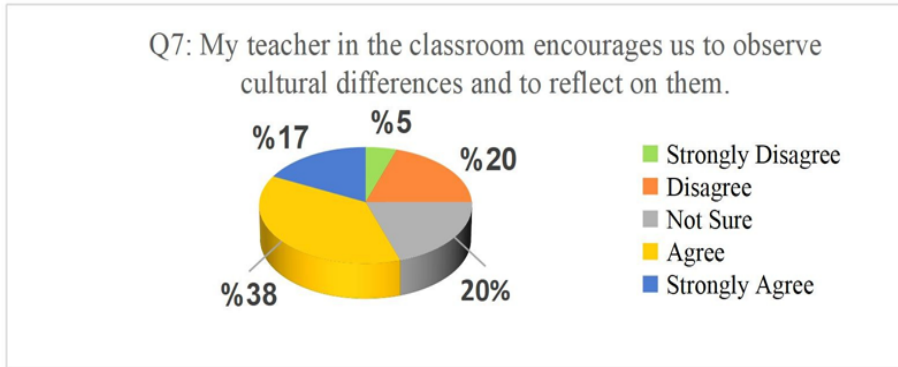
The above pie chart clarifies the students' views about their teachers' employment of the reflection strategy in the classroom. According to the chart, 20 percent of the students disagreed and another 5 percent strongly disagreed that their teachers apply this strategy. This is in contrast to the higher percentages of the students who agreed with the statement. Specifically, 37 percent agreed and 18 percent strongly agreed that their teachers encourage them to reflect on the cultural differences in the classroom.

Q8: My teacher prompts us to compare other cultural practices with our own cultural beliefs and values.

Pie chart 8 illustrates another strategy that teachers employ in the classroom to deal with cultural differences. Forty percent of the students agreed with this point and 15 percent strongly agreed that their teachers prompt them to compare the cultural practices of their own culture with those of the target culture. Only 13 percent of the participants were unsure about this. On the other hand, 25 percent of the students disagreed and 7 percent strongly disagreed with the statement.

Students' Interview Analysis: perception of self and other in literature.

This section highlights how the interviewees perceive different customs, values and beliefs in literature and how they relate them to their own culture. Every student in the interview provided

examples of some cultural differences and similarities and they were classified as the following themes: Marriage, most of the interviewees

were able to perceive that marriage customs portrayed in the literary material differed from those of their culture. Nevertheless, some students stated that they were able to perceive similarities as the piece of literature that they are studying belonged to a relatively old period of time. Specifically, the way the English culture views marriage is different from their Libyan culture. An interviewee was astonished by the fact that the main character in the drama the Merchant of Venice whose name is Portia is sought by 7 suitors coming from different countries. She added that those suitors should choose the right casket to win her hand in marriage and this is definitely something which could not happen in the Libyan culture. Another one observed that the father of Portia has written a will forcing his daughter to never choose a husband, and yet the right husband should choose the correct casket. One said that in the English culture, the woman is supposed to pay the dowry to the man and this is the opposite of what is happening in the" Libyan culture". Moreover, another added "I found this sostrange and I kept wondering why they are doing it and I am still wondering if they do it until now (paying the dowry), but when I read it, it was so strange". However, a number of the interviewees noticed similarities between their own culture and the target culture in the novel and the drama they are studying. She said that "in the Merchant of Venice, the beautiful woman waits for a husband to come and propose for her which is similar to our culture". She further mentioned that this drama was written a long time ago and consequently she is able to notice similarities. A Drama II student, exemplified by saying that the main character in the drama, Portia, could not choose a husband because of her father's will. Her choice of her husband depended on the person who would choose the right casket. She added that this is similar to the Libyan culture in the way that

the girls' choice of a husband depends to a large degree on her family's approval. In the same way, a student, studying Novel II, explained that the novel was written a long time ago and thus it is similar to what is happening now in Libya. She said that she did not find differences in the novel, she found similarities on the contrary. "You can see similarities on marriage, how the cousin has to marry someone they know and how marriage was designed those days is similar a little bit to how we marry these days". Additionally, another student, stated that both cultures are concentrating on wealth and beauty while intending to get a wife or choosing a husband, especially in the past. Moreover, she mentioned another important point about the topic of marriage by providing another similarity. She noticed that in both cultures, men do not like educated women as future wives. She explained that men feel that those women are not suitable to start a family.

They rather prefer the woman to stay at home and learn how to manage their houses. The second is society, this is another theme which emerged from the students' answers regarding the perception of self and other. Some students noticed that the two societies have differences. An interviewee, indicated that the English and the Libyan societies are totally different. She explained that the English society is open where people can dance, meet and converse with each other easily, whereas the Libyan culture is completely the opposite. On the other hand, a Novel II student, said that she noticed how both societies, the English one in the past and the Libyan culture now, look negatively at the woman who passed the suitable age for marriage. Another aspect of culture is elopement, that some of the interviewees mentioned was the matter of elopement. On the contrary, another student, who is studying Drama II, proposed a different

perspective regarding the elopement: When Jessica eloped with Lorenzo, I guess her father was serious like any father even here in Libya, but I think what was kind of noticeable is that he was serious because she ran away with a Christian more than that she ran away in general. In addition, she, expanded her point by saying that the Jewish man in the drama was furious because his daughter eloped with a Christian and has taken all his money with her. Then, she related this to her culture by stating "in the Libyan society, even if the girl eloped with a Muslim that is known of his perfect qualities and all of this, family will still feel ashamed of the girl, so this was a noticeable difference". Forth is religion, two interviewees pointed out they noticed some religious differences expressed through literature. One, who is studying Drama II and Novel II, mentioned that in the English culture there is a belief that the god of love "Cupid" would throw an arrow on the couple who are well-matched so that they will get married. However, she stressed that this kind of belief does not exist in the Islamic Libyan culture. Another student stated that during her experience in Drama II, she noticed that Christians do not respect the Jews and they humiliate and insult each other. She added that Muslims respect all religions.

And finally, is inheritance, some Novel II students could notice that inheritance was different in both the Libyan and the English culture. One interviewee said " girls are forbidden from inheritance and their fathers' properties. When I read it, I was shocked. I thought they are supposed to be an open society". She added that in the Islamic culture, the girl has the right to inherit her family. Furthermore, a Novel II student, expressed the same idea saying that when the man does not have boys, all his property goes to someone else in his family but not to his daughters. She related this

aspect of culture to the Libyan society by saying that the Islamic religion gives the right to the girl to inherit her family. She also added "Pride and Prejudice was written in the 18th century, so I do not know if they are still the same". Consequently, it could be concluded that students were able to perceive cultural differences in the literary material as wellas similarities. This proves that students are aware of both self and other through literature and are able to critically compare different customs, values and beliefs.

Students' awareness of their stereotypical tendencies.

Generalization is a tendency based on indirect information not considered as facts. When students talked about cultural differences in the first question, they tended to generalize some examples of culture based on the literary material. In the second question, the interviewees were asked directly whether they generalize or not, and their answers would show their awareness of their stereotypical tendencies.

Most of the students tended to generalize some aspects of culture in the literary materials and they were aware of this tendency. To elaborate, one student generalized that the English culture believes in Cupid as the controller of the destiny of soul mates. She agreed that she tends to generalize the typical behaviour of a certain character as representative of the whole culture because "the writers want to transfer their culture to the characters". Furthermore, one of the interviewee students stereotyped that woman in both cultures, particularly the English culture in the past, stay at home and wait for a man to come and propose. She agreed strongly that she could form cultural images of what she reads in literature. Then

another agreed that she tended to generalize because some of the characters reflect the culture of the real life, supporting her generalization by saying that even when a Libyan person performs something bad in another society, the foreign culture will also generalize that Libyan people are all the same. Furthermore, a student, generalized that the English culture in the past was concentrating on wealth and beauty in marriage based on the literary material she is currently studying. Another student tended to generalize that in the English culture, fathers keep a will for their daughter to guide her in choosing a husband. However, when she was asked about her tendency, she responded that she does not tend to generalize because the members of the English culture are not all the same. She also negated her tendency to generalize because she does not believe of stereotyped ideas, stating that she may form typical images to obtain some understanding of other cultures. She also stressed that she does not only limit her knowledge on what she reads in literature.

Furthermore, another student did not show any stereotypical tendencies when she talked about cultural differences and similarities. She also stressed that she does not generalize, explaining that she cannot say that all women are like Portia in the Merchant of Venice because she was ready to give Bassanio, the right suitor, everything and trusted him immediately. As a result, most students generalize being aware of their stereotypical tendencies. However, those who tend to show stereotypical tendencies are aware that generalization and stereotypes are negative. Additionally, generalization does not seem to affect their attitude towards learning about the English culture.

Teachers' strategies for dealing with cultural knowledge.

It was fundamental to get insights into teachers' strategies for dealing with cultural content in literature according to students' perspectives. The students provided useful information that allowed to form a fuller picture of what is happening inside literature courses. For example, a Novel II teacher constantly compares cultural content to the students' home culture and she added that her teacher has a good idea about what is happening in the Libyan culture and the English culture because he provides examples and clarifies any differences they encounter in literature. Nevertheless, one student noticed that the Novel II teacher compares between the Libyan and the English culture, but she thought that he is doing it inefficiently because he, as a foreigner from Japan, does not have enough knowledge about the Libyan and the English culture. She also added that even when the teacher relates the two cultures, he compares simple things like education. He avoids discussing controversial topics such as religion and politics. Similarly, one of the participants pointed out that the Novel II teacher tries to compare the two cultures to some extent, and yet he lacks adequate knowledge of the students' culture as Libyans and Muslims. In addition, one of the students stressed that her teacher confronts cultural differences and the teacher likes to compare the two cultures. She further indicated that her teacher likes to talk about his own culture when teaching the novel Pride and Prejudice "three cultures in one class, the similarities and differences in India, England and Libya". On the other hand, a teacher in the English department, commented that in Drama II she does confront cultural differences to some extent and relates them to the students' own

culture. One student further added that her teacher does not ignore relating them to her Libyan culture, but does not allow them to argue, think about those cultural differences. Conversely, few students did not notice that their teachers compare the English culture in literature to their home culture. Accordingly, it could be summarized that the teachers of Drama II and Novel II do compare and relate the cultural information presented in literature to the students' home culture. They also confront some cultural differences when needed although they do not belong to the Libyan culture.

Influential factors on students' attitude towards cultural differences.

To start with, the students who were not affected by their teacher provided some explanations that would indicate how they form their attitude towards cultural differences in literary materials. One student indicated that her attitude is affected by her teacher in a positive way explaining that the teacher is very generous in giving them stories and insights about other cultures. Furthermore, she is affected by her teacher because she he is more knowledgeable about other cultures. She accepts cultural differences because every culture has its own religion and practices that characterize them as unique. On the other hand, one student's attitude towards cultural differences is affected in a negative way since she despises other cultures when the teacher praises customs of other cultures. In one lecture, one student argued that priests are not supposed to get married. The teacher then said it depends on their religious part, Catholics or Protestants. Catholics are not allowed to marry, but Protestants are.

Then he said they used to have conflicts with each other in the past and now they live happily together not like Sunnis and Shia.

Additionally, she stated that she is eager to know about other cultures through literature as her attitude is not affected by anyone and she rather relies on his judgment. Complementary to this, another student stressed that the teacher does not affect her attitude towards cultural differences. She related an incident that happened in Drama II lecture, when the teacher sympathized with the evil character Shylock when he presented an emotional speech. She confirmed that her attitude towards the Jewish man was not affected by the teacher's sympathizing position and she was not convinced with the teacher's point about the Jew. On the other hand, another student indicated that her attitude is not easily affected. She also talked about the character of Shylock in the Merchant of Venice as a greedy, selfish and all the bad men in one. She explained that as an Arab, she had a negative attitude towards Jews and the drama enhanced the typical image she had of Jews. It can be concluded that the students' attitude towards cultural differences is generally formed according to their own observations. It can be described that the students generally have positive attitudes towards cultural differences, but they have some negative perceptions towards those practices that are different from their own religion.

Teachers' Interview Analysis: view of teaching culture.

The intercultural dimension has recently been emphasized over the linguistic dimension to give the students the opportunity to develop other

skills and perspectives in the process of learning a second language. Nevertheless, Lázár (2007) comments that teachers in many parts of the world still focus on the lexical and grammatical aspects of a second language. Teacher 1 started his answer stressing that he does not teach cultural knowledge to the students because this is not the purpose of literature. "Literature can be used for a variety of reasons. One can use a literary work for learning the language because it exposes one for the use of language". He also added that literature is important in familiarizing the students with the universal themes the authors convey. The teacher's response indicates a traditional view for the role of literature in contributing to the students' lexical and grammatical competence. On the other hand, teacher 2 did not ignore the fact that she is teaching knowledge about the English culture through literature. She added that "I also make very clear to the students that you are doing an English language. You are only learning the language from them. By doing this novel or drama, I am not asking you to learn their culture". The responses indicate that teachers focus on the role of language while teaching literature and a little emphasis is given to the intercultural orientation in the Libyan context.

Teachers' experience of teaching culture through literature

The two teachers reflected on their experience of teaching information about the English culture through the literary materials employed in the classroom. They were asked whether their experience was challenging and they expanded their answers to give reasons. Teacher 1 expressed that his experience was neither rewarding nor challenging. "I don't say rewarding

in the sense that students should know a certain part of the culture to understand the central theme of the literary work". This point meant that the teacher was required to explain some cultural aspects of the other to make the students comprehend the central theme of the literary work. He also added that his job becomes challenging when a certain cultural content happens to be a different religious matter because students are highly sensitive to it.

On the contrary, Teacher 2 stated that she finds teaching culture as a teacher of literature as both rewarding and challenging. She explained that she finds it rewarding in the sense that she is "able to enlighten the students about other cultures", and challenging when she deals with students' existing stereotypes and when they come across things which are totally different from their own culture.

Students' reaction towards cultural differences.

The two teachers provided a picture of what is happening inside literature classes. Teacher 1 said in a definite tone "I haven't seen any disapproval so far" stating that the reaction of the students depends on their teachers' attitude. " It depends on the attitude that the teacher has. If the teacher himself has a negative attitude, he will be evoking negative responses from the students". Teacher 1 stressed that the teacher should present cultural content to the students in the context of the literary material within the context to ensure the teacher transfers positive attitudes to his students. On the other hand, Teacher 2 indicated that her students balance between two reactions as they sometimes show interest and surprise and sometimes disapproval of certain things. " They sometimes

show their disapproval… some of them raise their eyebrows in surprise". They are aware of everybody's culture and tradition. It is nothing new to them. If you would ask me way back before internet and social media, I could have said that it would have been very strange and real news to them.

Teachers' strategies for dealing with cultural differences.

The two teachers provided an answer for the strategies they employ to teach cultural contents which are different from the students' home culture. Teacher 1 focused on the religious part of the students' culture expressing himself by saying "many times, it becomes a restriction to talk when I am in the Islamic culture … because I have to become aware that I am in a country where they have a restrictive thinking about themselves … I create a context …when a student encounters a custom or a belief". He elaborated on this strategy by saying that "everything has its particular context". The teacher should create the context to make the students digest the elements of the target culture in literary materials. " If you look at Shakespeare's plays, in some of the plays, you know which does not exist anymore, certain customs exist, particularly the way women's dressed or the way the women were looked at… But if I put it in the right context and say this is the past, this is how it was at a particular time, the students understand and that becomes a piece of information to the students." On the other hand, Teacher 2 might ignore exploring some complicated issues that cause controversial discussions "certain things which are going to be a big issue, I try to avoid". She might tackle any cultural differences by "being

diplomatic" in presenting them to the students. The last strategy is to talk to the students about different customs and beliefs ".

Teachers' awareness of students' stereotypical tendencies.

The two teachers showed variations in their responses and have given reasons for it. Teacher 1 stated "I haven't seen any" providing examples from his teaching experience "we are dealing with Pride and Prejudice. There is a lot of dancing scenes. No one has laughed at it. So, they do not show any disapproval. They accept it as part of the novel". On the other hand, Teacher 2 was aware of how students tend to react and agreed that students show some stereotypical tendencies. "They publically say oh this is wrong and they say forbidden and all that stuff". She mentioned that the students' disapproval in many cases is normal when confronted with customs portrayed in literature.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study attempted to investigate how cultural differences could reinforce the stereotypical tendencies of Libyan students in Drama II and Novel II in the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Misurata University. The research stared that those stereotypical tendencies could hinder the students' positive attitude towards the other and deprive them the opportunity to develop their intercultural competence. By examining the perspective of both the students and the teachers, it was found that the

students feel interested in learning about different customs which has contributed to their positive attitudes towards the other. Nevertheless, the results revealed that the majority of the students have stereotypical tendencies which most of them are negative.

Additionally, the students revealed that they do not rely solely on memorization but employ intercultural strategies to adjust to different values in literature, such as comparison between the English and the Libyan culture with their teachers and peers. More importantly, students proved to be aware of both self and other through literature perceiving cultural differences as well as similarities. Some reasons for the students' positive attitudes could be because of the employment of intercultural skills and such as reflection to tackle cultural differences. On the contrary, both teachers do not substantially emphasize the role of culture during their literature teaching with little considerations to the promotion of intercultural competence . The students observed that their teachers encourage them to observe the cultural differences in literature . Furthermore, teachers try to avoid those relating to religious beliefs in order to avoid controversial discussions. To provide more findings to the above, the teacher who is aware of her students' cultural stereotypes tries to challenge those stereotypes in the classroom, whereas the teacher who is not aware avoids discussing them with the students. Regarding the research hypotheses, the first hypothesis is achieved since the cultural differences evoke stereotypical images to the students. However, it was found that the students have stereotypical tendencies, even though it did not affect their attitude towards cultural differences. The teachers applied

intercultural strategies such as comparison and reflection which did not remove students' cultural stereotypes .

More importantly, the Libyan students have a ground for developing their intercultural competence through literature courses as they possess the five saviors proposed by Byram (1997) i.e., intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness.

The findings could play a vital role in introducing another dimension in second language teaching in the English Department, Faculty of Arts showing the importance of intercultural competence in literature courses

Based on the findings obtained , the following points are recommended:

1.   As the current research shed light on the students' attitude and perceptions towards cultural awareness , another study could apply some intercultural lessons to assist students' intercultural competence in literature courses.

2.   Instead of dedicating to promote students' linguistic competence, the teachers could pay more considerations to the importance of the intercultural orientation by adopting reflection and comparison to raise their students' intercultural competence.

3.   For a better experience , the students could adopt some critical strategies for tackling cultural differences to discover other perspectives and to aid the development of their intercultural competence.

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Appendix A

Semester……………….   Age……………

 Please tick the course you're currently studying:

Drama II ( )   Novel II ( )

Statements   Strongly Disagree - Disagree- Not Sure- Agree- Strongly Agree 1.Learning about the way other cultures live and behave makes me more aware of my cultural practices and values.

2.Studying literature has improved my understanding of other cultural practices and beliefs.

3.Studying English literature does enhance my positive attitudes towards the English culture.

4.I am interested to learn about the customs and values of the English

Culture.

5.I tend to rely on my personal judgment   to define the people of the English culture.

6..My teacher in the classroom encourages us to observe cultural differences and to reflect on them.

7.My teacher prompts us to compare other cultural Practices with our own cultural beliefs and values.

8.My teacher relies heavily on presenting information about other cultures without relating them to our own culture.

Appendix B

Students Interview Guide

1-When cultural differences can you observe in the literary material you are currently studying? How do you view different customs and beliefs in comparison to your own culture?

2-Do you tend to generalize the typical behaviour of an individual character as the behaviour of the whole culture?

3-How does your literature teacher deal with the cultural knowledge in the classroom?

4-Do you feel that your literature teacher affects your attitude towards other cultural practices and behaviours?

Appendix C

Teachers' Interview Guide

1-Do you find teaching knowledge about the English culture to your Libyan students, a rewarding or a challenging experience ?

2-How do students generally react when confronted with customs and beliefs which are totally different from theirs ?

3- What strategies of adjustments do you employ when a student encounters a custom or a belief different from their own ?

4-Do students express some stereotypes about foreign cultures publicly when encountering a custom or practice which is totally distinct from their own culture ?

5-How do you react as an EL teacher, when a student show disapproval of a certain cultural content in the literary material employed in the classroom?

6-Do you prefer dealing and challenging students' stereotypes or do you prefer somehow to ignore dealing with them? Why?