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Learning Culture or Language: an examination of Iranian EFL Students' conceptions of learning different cultures in high school English courses

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Abstract

In Iran's high schools, when students start to study in grade 7, they start English language as a required course and student start to learn this language by using books compiled and published by Iran's ministry of education. This study examines to what extent students are interested in improving their linguistic, linguistic and cultural, and cultural knowledge. 267 high school students (162 females, 105 males) who were living and studying in shiraz, participated in this study. (55.8%) of them were studying in science, (24.7%) of them in Math, and (19.4%) in Humanities. In order to investigate what type of knowledge (Linguistic, Cultural, Linguistic and cultural) students are interested to learn in EFL classrooms, a questionnaire which was based on Mackey and Gass (2005), Dorneyi (2003), and Shedivy's (2004) survey, was conducted and distributed among learners. The results of the study showed that students were more likely to acquire and improve their linguistic knowledge rather than cultural information. Moreover, they declared that gaining cultural knowledge can have impact on improving their reading skills such as vocabulary knowledge, text comprehension and to have information about different topics. Additionally, they declared that cultural understanding has major impact on students' communication skills and ability. Further consequences and discussions are explained in the study.

Keywords: English language acquisition, Linguistic knowledge, Cultural information, Linguistic and cultural knowledge, English language curriculum