

**RAISING CULTURAL AWARENESS AS PART OF EFL TEACHING IN JAPAN**

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**BY**

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## STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any degree to any other university or institution. The sources of information used and the extent to which the work of others has been utilized have been indicated in this thesis in the manner conventionally approved in the research field in which the thesis fits. The approval from Ethics Committee has been obtained

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# **RAISING CULTURAL AWARENESS AS PART OF EFL TEACHING IN JAPAN**

## **ABSTRACT**

The complex, cause and effect relationship between language and culture has been an important area of inquiry in Applied and Socio Linguistics, ever since it was originally proposed within the theory of Linguistic Relativity (1929) and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (1940). These theories stated that the basic components of any language are indivisible from the perspectives of the users and therefore affect the way a certain language group views the world. Present research investigating this relationship is more concerned with how cultural differences influence the language learning process. Considering recent trends focusing on English as a Global Language and the diversity of learners and contexts, attention has shifted to developing cultural awareness and competence as an essential component of second language acquisition. With the steady increase of international travel, global economy, communication technology and the prospect that most people will have frequent and sustained contact and experience with other cultures in the future, it is no longer adequate that language learners merely have a command or a level of competence in a language. What is required, for full participation in an increasingly integrated world, is a deeper understanding and a comprehensive arsenal of meta-skills which will assist learners with acquisition and navigation of the finer nuances and sub levels of communication and interaction. Apart from language, what other skills do learners require? What are common problems that all people have when engaging with a new culture or in a new environment? How can these be taught or

acquired out of context? What is the role of the teacher in facilitating cultural awareness? In seeking answers to these questions, this dissertation will critically review relevant research, analyze various contexts and methodologies and attempt to determine what type of approach is best suited to the needs and environments of today's EFL learners in Japan. In conclusion, some ideas will be proposed which may provide insight into the nature, and feasibility of a cross culturally appropriate pedagogy.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES AND APPENDICES.....	Viii
FOREWORD: RAISING CULTURAL AWARENESS .....	1
CHAPTER ONE: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL AWARENESS.....	3
Defining Competence.....	3
From Theory to Practice.....	18
Pedagogical Considerations.....	36
Rationale.....	38
CHAPTER TWO: TEACHERS ROLES AND PERSPECTIVES IN RAISING CULTURAL AWARENESS.....	42
Perspectives in Practice; A Survey of Teacher’s Needs.....	57
Method and Procedure.....	57
Subjects and Context.....	58
Perspectives and Practices.....	59
Results and Discussion.....	60
Differences in Teaching Experience.....	63
Differences in Teaching Context Diversity.....	68
Differences in Content and Method.....	71
Conclusion.....	75

Goals and Aims for Addressing Teacher’s Needs.....	79
CHAPTER THREE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL CONTENT IN EFL MATERIALS.....	81
Literature Review.....	86
Selection of Texts.....	94
Synthesis of Results from International Texts.....	99
Synthesis of Results from Domestic Texts.....	103
Analysis.....	104
International Publishers.....	104
Summary of Analysis.....	124
Domestic Publishers.....	126
Summary of Analysis.....	136
Conclusion.....	137
Implications for textbook writers and publishers.....	146
CHAPTER FOUR: CULTURAL AWARENESS RAISING THROUGH LEARNER ETHNOGRAPHIES.....	149
Rationale for Ethnographic Method.....	152
Rationale for Japanese Context.....	159
Cultural Awareness Raising Tasks.....	163
Context.....	168
Curriculum, Tasks, Materials.....	169

Perception and Perspective Analysis.....	174
Self and Group Awareness.....	178
Exploring Core Values.....	183
Participant Observation and Fieldwork in the Classroom.....	186
Local Ethnographic Research Project.....	189
Ethnographic Tasks; Engaging in Fieldwork.....	193
Reflections.....	200
Analysis of Ethnographic Tasks and Approach to Cultural Awareness	
Raising.....	201
Method.....	201
Procedure.....	202
Subjects.....	203
Results and Discussion.....	205
Research Methods.....	206
English and Communication.....	208
Cultural Awareness.....	210
Attitudes and Perspectives.....	211
Conclusion.....	213
 CHAPTER FIVE: SYNTHESIS.....	 218
 REFERENCES AND WORKS CITED.....	 223



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of survey results measuring teachers' attitudes towards cultural awareness raising.....	61
Table 2: Summary of cultural content and activities in textbooks published internationally.....	97
Table 3: Summary of cultural content and activities in textbooks published domestically.....	101
Table 4: Examples of ethnographic activities that can be done locally.....	173
Table 5: Questions to answer when exploring cultural behaviour.....	173
Table 6: Field note and reflection chart.....	188

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Ambiguous images and illusions.....	177
Figure 2: Life experience timeline.....	181
Figure 3: Identity and critical incident activity.....	182
Figure 4: Diagram of cultural dimensions.....	195
Figure 5: Topic and hypothesis development chart.....	197
Figure 6: Diagram and flowchart of the ethnographic cycle.....	197

## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Teachers needs and perspectives survey.....	235
Appendix B: Teachers needs and perspectives survey results.....	241
Appendix C: Survey of ethnographic research tasks and project.....	244
Appendix D: Ethnographic research tasks and project survey results.....	248
Appendix E: Students comments on ethnographic project participation.....	250
Appendix F: List of relevant publications.....	253

## **FOREWORD**

### **RAISING CULTURAL AWARENESS**

That language is inseparably intertwined with culture is by no means a new concept, originally proposed within the theory of Linguistic Relativity (1929) and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (1940), stating that the basic components of any language are indivisible from the perspectives of the users and therefore affect the way a certain language group views the world. Present research investigating this relationship aims to understand and explain differences in language learning and how contexts, cultures and methodologies affect each other and influence the overall learning process. In light of recent trends focusing on English as a Global Language and the diversity of learners and contexts, attention has shifted to developing cultural awareness and competence as an essential component of second language acquisition. With the steady increase of international travel, global economy, communication technology and the prospect that most people will have frequent and sustained contact and experience with other cultures in the future, it is no longer adequate that language learners merely have a command or a level of competence in a language. What is required, for full participation in an increasingly integrated world, is a deeper understanding and a comprehensive arsenal of

meta-skills which will assist learners with acquisition and navigation of the finer nuances and sub levels of communication and interaction. Apart from language, what other skills do learners require? What are common problems that all people have when engaging with a new culture or in a new environment? How can these be taught or acquired out of context? What is the role of the teacher in facilitating cultural awareness? In seeking answers to these questions, this study will critically review relevant research, analyze various contexts and methodologies and attempt to determine what type of approach is best suited to the needs and environments of today's EFL learners. In conclusion, some ideas will be proposed which may provide insight into the nature, and feasibility of a cross culturally appropriate pedagogy.

Recent literature (Kramsch, 1993, Byram, 1997, Canagarajah, 2002) on curriculum innovation and second language acquisition in general has determined an almost unanimous need for more globalised and context sensitive teaching methodologies, however, has been fairly inconclusive on how best to meet these needs. The following considers this previous research and endeavors to seek out a practical means of raising cultural awareness as part of regular EFL instruction.