

# Students and Teachers' Preference towards Cultural Topics and Contents in Korean University English Language Classrooms

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## Abstract

The topics and contents in English language textbooks affect students' motivation toward learning language and the integration of cultural components into language teaching can increase motivation in a language class. The purpose of this paper was to investigate students' and teachers' preference towards cultural topics and contents in university English language classrooms. The research questions were: What cultural topics do students prefer to study?; What cultural topics do teachers prefer to teach?; Do these topics align with what research says are optimal topics for culturally competent study? Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered via questionnaire to students and teachers. Based on the findings, topics that would be optimal were suggested for future university EFL textbook content creators. The pedagogical implications and future directions of the study were discussed.

## Keywords

Cultural topics, cultural contents, university English classrooms, preference

## Introduction

As the popularity of culture-based study in Korea's EFL education has grown so has examination into the adequacy of what is being taught. Research still needs to explore what specific topics should content developers aim to incorporate into their lesson materials, especially at the tertiary education level.

## 1 Review of Literature

The most common way that culture topics are often divided and the way that this paper will approach culture topics is into two main

categories: big "C" Culture and little "c" culture, also referred to as "high culture" and "sociological" culture, respectively (Adaskou, Britten, & Fahsi, 1990; Chastain, 1976; Nelson, 1994; Valette, 1986). Big "C" culture refers to larger aspects of culture, such as geography, literature, education, societal norms, core values, and history; whereas, little "c" culture are those smaller parts of the culture which include the target culture's viewpoints, preferences or tastes, opinions, behaviors, clothing, food, hobbies, pop culture (e.g. music, trivia, facts, etc.), and current issues (Peterson, 2004).

## 2 Method

### 2.1 Participants

A total of 604 students provided responses. The number of teachers surveyed totaled 11.

### 2.2 Instrument

Data was collected using questionnaires which were distributed to students and teachers. They were asked to respond based on a scale of 1 through 5.

## 3 Results

The questionnaire questions 1-3 (Table 1) are as follows: 1. In English class, the topics for the textbook are important. 2. In English class, the culture topics or content are as important as English language knowledge. 3. In English class, cultural teaching improves English language communication ability.

Table 1: Student and Teacher Preference towards Culture in Language Class

N	1	2	3	4	5
1	9	19	155	288	135
S	(1.48)	(3.13)	(25.54)	(47.45)	(22.44)

T	0	0	0	5	6
	(0)	(0)	(0)	(45.45)	(54.55)
2	5	16	163	279	143
S	(0.82)	(2.64)	(26.85)	(45.96)	(23.56)
T	0	2	0	6	3
	(0)	(18.1)	(0)	(54.55)	(27.27)
3	4	22	144	283	153
S	(0.66)	(3.62)	(23.72)	(46.62)	(25.51)
T	0	1	1	6	3
	(0)	(9.09)	(9.09)	(54.55)	(27.27)

Note 1: Strongly disagree, 5: Strongly agree  
N(%) S: student T: teacher

The questions 4-7 and 10 (Table 2) are as follows:

4. The English conversation textbook needs to include various cultural topics or contents. 5. The English conversation textbook needs to include topics or contents on culture of native English speaking countries such as Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand, etc. 6. The English conversation textbook needs to include topics or contents on culture of non-native English speaking countries such as South America, Europe, Middle East, other Asian countries, etc. 7. The English conversation textbook needs to include topics or contents on students' own (Korean) culture. 10. Teaching about non-native English speaking cultures in the English language classroom does not improve intercultural competence, it is a waste of time.

Table 2: Student and Teacher Preference towards Source Culture

	N(%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
4	5	14	109	326	151
S	(0.82)	(2.31)	(17.96)	(53.71)	(24.88)
T	0	0	0	7	4
	(0)	(0)	(0)	(63.63)	(36.36)
5	4	25	174	274	128
S	(0.66)	(4.12)	(28.67)	(45.14)	(21.09)
T	0	0	2	6	3
	(0)	(0)	(18.1)	(54.5)	(27.2)
6	17	79	240	178	91
S	(2.80)	(13.0)	(39.54)	(29.32)	(14.99)
T	0	0	3	6	2
	(0)	(0)	(27.27)	(54.5)	(18.1)
7	30	96	226	179	75
S	(4.94)	(15.8)	(37.23)	(29.49)	(12.36)
T	0	0	3	4	4
	(0)	(0)	(27.27)	(36.36)	(36.36)
10	162	242	136	45	21
S	(26.6)	(39.8)	(22.41)	(7.41)	(3.46)
T	4	4	2	1	0
	(36.3)	(36.3)	(2.31)	(9.09)	(0)

Note 1: Strongly disagree, 5: Strongly agree

The questions 8-9 (Table 3) are as follows: 8. Students are motivated to participate in class by English conversation textbooks that include topics or contents on culture which interest them. 9. Comparing and contrasting students' culture with other cultures in the English language classroom is interesting to me.

Table 3: Cultural Topics for Motivation

	N(%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
8	5	10	111	316	164
	(0.82)	(1.65)	(18.29)	(52.06)	(27.02)
9	8	33	148	293	151
	(1.32)	(5.44)	(24.38)	(48.27)	(20.26)

Note 1: Strongly disagree, 5: Strongly agree

Student preference on cultural topics are as follows. (Teacher's preference will be introduced in the conference)

Table 4: Rank of Student Preference on Cultural Topics

Topic	BigC/SmallC	Average	Rank
Trends	√	4.97	1
Food	√	4.95	2
Popular culture	√	4.92	3
Body language	√	4.85	4
Life style	√	4.81	5
Hobbies	√	4.72	6
Media	√	4.61	7
Pastimes	√	4.48	8
Famous people	√	4.48	8
Social Norms	√	4.41	10
Values	√	4.36	11
Mythology	√	4.36	11
Holidays	√	4.24	13
Education	√	4.12	14
Geography	√	3.94	15
Technology	√	3.89	16
History	√	3.59	17
Politics	√	3.29	18
Science	√	3.12	19
Economy	√	3.09	20

## References

- Adaskou, K., Britten, D., & Fahsi, B. (1990). Design decisions on the culture content of a secondary English course for Morocco. *ELT Journal*, 44(1), 3-10.