Cultural identity in bilingual schools

*Identidad cultural
en colegios bilingües*

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The present research study sought to analyze if the daily and systematic teaching of a foreign culture within the context of a bilingual school in Barranquilla constituted a risk factor for mainstream cultural identity. Research objectives aimed at determining to what degree learners used foreign cultural markers and at characterizing how school community perceived status of foreign culture. Primary data collected came from a group of fifth grade students. The research study used a qualitative approach with an ethnographic case study design. Concepts explored in theoretical framework are culture, language, identity, and intercultural competences. Research results indicate that learners have not adopted a foreign cultural identity and that mainstream culture prevails in school ground. It is inferred based on results that the teaching of a foreign culture does not necessarily compromise mainstream cultural identity. However, further research is necessary to specify which factors safeguarded community's cultural identity from foreign one.

Palabras claves: culture, identity, intercultural competences.

ABSTRACT

RESUMEN

El presente estudio de investigación buscó analizar si la enseñanza diaria y sistemática de una cultura extranjera en el contexto de un colegio bilingüe en Barranquilla constituyó un factor de riesgo para la identidad cultural local. El objetivo de la investigación buscó determinar con qué frecuencia los estudiantes utilizaban marcadores culturales extranjeros y caracterizar como la comunidad educativa percibía el estatus de la cultura extranjera. Las fuentes de datos primarios provinieron de un grupo de alumnos de quinto grado. La investigación utilizó un enfoque cualitativo con un diseño de estudio de caso etnográfico. Los conceptos explorados en el marco teórico son la cultura, el idioma, la identidad y las competencias interculturales. Los resultados de la investigación indican que los alumnos no han adoptado una identidad cultural extranjera y que la cultura local domina el contexto escolar. Se infiere, con base en los resultados, que la enseñanza de una cultura extranjera no compromete necesariamente la identidad cultural local. Sin embargo, se necesita más investigación para especificar cuáles son los factores que protegieron la identidad cultural de la comunidad de la cultura extranjera.

Keywords: cultura, identidad, competencias interculturales.

INTRODUCTION

Does the daily teaching and socialization of a foreign culture jeopardize language learner´s mainstream cultural identity?

Current foreign language instruction highlights the importance of incorporating into the language curriculum the cultural components of the target language. By doing so, language instruction seeks to develop not only linguistic skills but also new cognitive schemes and positive emotional responses to foreign cultures. Yi Qu (2010) emphasized that language should not be depleted from its cultural meaning making system in which it is deeply embedded and that language fluency per se without any awareness of its cultural implications does not assist nor enhance learners' cognitive and social skills. Furthermore, she pointed out that reading of a material or interactions carried out in the foreign language without the full understanding of its pauses and gestures certainly led to a limited access of its full interpretation. By the same terms, Agha (2003) emphasized that foreign language cultural differences make themselves obvious not only between people of different nationalities, but also among people of the same country, where the inhabitants speak the same language, but with different accents. More so, Molinsky (2005) explained that the relevance of the cultural components of a language become obvious when foreign language speakers confront challenging situations when expected to perform accordingly within the culture of the foreign language. He added that if foreign language speakers seek to be evaluated positively by natives of the foreign language, then norms and social expectations must be complied with.

By exposing students to foreign cultural values and beliefs, second language instruction seeks to develop better communicative skills based on a deeper understanding of cultural differences, as well as a more opened attitude towards others, free of prejudice, stereotypes, and clichés as pointed out by Cakir (2006):

> As the use of language in general is related to social and cultural values, language is considered to be a social and cultural phenomenon. Since every culture has its own cultural norms for conversation and these norms differ from one culture to another, some of the norms can be completely different and conflict with other cultures' norms. Consequently, communication problems may arise among speakers who do not know or share the norms of other cultures. (p.154)

Communication as Caldwell (2005) explained is not just functional language, but more of a window into an individual´s sense of being. Moreover, communication as stated by Mindess (2006) can be many times taken for granted when perceived as just a simple process of encoding and decoding, where sender and receiver exchange linguistic features of a common language, be it spoken, written, or sign language.

However, community members do not always perceive this connection between language instruction and culture as positive. Many times stakeholders consider this integration an attempt in promoting foreign ideals and a cultural invasion. The culture of the target language is seen as a risk factor that might weaken own cultural set of values and beliefs.

The present article will discuss research project carried out in a bilingual school in Barranquilla, Colombia. The objective of the research study sought to determine if the teaching and socialization of a foreign culture jeopardized learners' cultural identity. In order to do so, the research project focused on examining behavioral and

language preferences of a group of students who had experienced the school's language teaching approach for more than five years and on analyzing how foreign culture was perceived by the school community.

Specific research objectives established to what degree learners use foreign cultural markers within school grounds, and how the school community perceive the status of foreign culture

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Culture from an anthropological perspective withholds a group's history, traditions, beliefs, values, interpretation of reality, common sense, and language (Riley, 2007). According to Richards (2011), culture permeates and gives meaning to all human interactions through a set of created symbolic products and activities that are framed within the group's collective experiences and historical background, which provide individuals with a sense of belonging and commonality. Rai and Panna (2010), affirmed that anthropologists regardless of their ideological perception on the notion of culture, agree that it promotes group's cohesion, organization, and members' recognition. According to them culture defines an individual's world and it has the power of emancipating group members as well as of confining individuals to specific behavioral and cognitive patterns.

Culture is an observable set of linguistic and behavioral expressions framed within a specific cultural identity. "Culture is the totality of all that characterizes us. It includes the tools and objects we create, the structures and institutions we fashion, the concepts and ideas we develop, and the way these take shape as customs and beliefs..." (Richardson, 2001, p.2).

Some cultural markers include: literature, music, artifacts, landscapes, politics, clothing, cuisine, celebrations, stereotypes, language, humor, sports, values, social norms, figurative language, and social roles among others.

The use of specific cultural related markers is usually assumed as the cultural identity of an individual or group. Cultural identity is one of the many identities that a person develops throughout his or her life time (Rummens, 2001). The main reason for developing specific identities is pointed out by Duszak (2002) who attested that the need of group cohesion was the basic motivation underlying the identity construct and that for the process of identifying closeness or distance between self and others individuals created categories aimed at classifying similarities and differences between those around and self. Categories according to her could cover an ample range of sets going from gender, ethnic group, age, ideology, nationality, clothing, appearance, and language among others sets. In this process of group selection through categorization and code switching Duszak suggested that individuals can and may detach themselves from others as a way of ensuring group's symmetry, common ground, and agreed parameters. Further on, she asserted that those who do not fall into a selected category are usually tagged as outsiders, thus generating in out-group members feelings of distance and even hostility towards those classified as different or alien. Group participation demands from individuals the adoption of a set of norms, values, and goals (Trujillo, 2006).

On the concept of identity, Salomone (2010) affirmed that manifestations of individual's self and social identities were visible and manifested during interactions based on context, intention of interaction, and status of actors. According to

Korostelina (2007) a social identity is not inherent or intrinsic to an individual, but rather a mediated mental scheme where group´s collective parameters have the power of assigning group members different roles that may and can influence his/her self-image.

Among the most noticeable cultural identity manifestations is language. Salomone (2010) defined language as: The foundation for building a multimodal package that includes not just linguistic features, but facial expressions, movement, and other forms of "semiotic behavior". According to her, language is a channel through which individuals identify self and others and through which positions of power and subordination are displayed based on discourse and attributions bestowed upon language. Furthermore, she argued that language apart from being a powerful representational tool of our reality and of who we are, it is also an intra-group code where members share a similar pattern of ideas, attitudes, values, and even prejudice. Language in the words of Simpson (2007) is a symbolic meaning making system that bounds individuals and communities together. In similar way, Steward (2000) suggested that communication has the sole purpose of ensuring group´s bonding by the use of cognitive and behavioral patterns, that provide group with a sense of unity and cohesion, which enable them to identify others as similar to themselves, thus not a risk for group´s survival. Furthermore, he expressed that communication facilitates individual´s enculturation and development of self-identification within a larger group reality. By the same token, Goatly (2000) affirmed that language predisposes individuals to behave and think accordingly with values and ideologies of the surrounding culture. Moreover, he asserted that speakers of different languages will behave and think differently, a phenomenon observable through films, cartoons, and other mass media productions.

The concepts of intercultural competences were explored in order to interpret from a much more ample perspective whatever results would come up from research study taking into account that study was carried out in a bilingual school, where most probably this could have been an end for the teaching of foreign cultural markers. According to Sercu (2005) intercultural competences are a set of purposely-developed skills and attitudes that enable language learners to communicate effectively with native speakers of the target language. Among the skills intercultural competences develop Sercu (2005) listed self-awareness, ability to compare and interpret, ability to relate information and events, the use of meta-cognitive strategies, tolerance towards diversity, a willing disposition towards foreign culture, a critical stance to assess self and others, and an opened mind, among other traits.

Intercultural competences promote in language learners the understanding and interpretation of non-verbal cues elicited during communicative act by individuals of other cultural backgrounds. Novinger (2001) explained that these non-verbal cues vary from culture to culture and may cover gestures, voice tone, facial expressions, social manners, and body language among others; moreover, she affirmed that members of the community displayed these cues in an unconscious way and therefore language learners needed specific training and educational goals aimed at developing cultural awareness. Furthermore, she asserted, that since all communicative acts where embedded in specific cultural settings and in specific contextual frames, learner's cultural background itself could be an obstacle for an efficient communication with speakers of the foreign language.

METHODOLOGY

After a thorough analysis of the different methods for data gathering, it was decided that in order to address main research questions a qualitative approach with an ethnographic case study design would best adjust to research project´s needs and constraints.

It is important to highlight that the qualitative research approach according to Ridder and Hoon (2009) is considered an "umbrella term" that should be seen as a multidimensional and pluralistic set of parameters that draw from a diverse number of tools and techniques for the collection and analysis of information. In addition, Stein and Mankowski, (2004) asserted that qualitative research reflects an underlying philosophy that promotes a better understanding of individual diversity while valuing connotation of social contexts. Moreover, they affirmed that qualitative research emphasizes the need of direct experiences as a way of collecting and of recording first-hand information. They also argued that it enables analysis of human behavior in its own natural settings, thus, providing a more in depth understanding of contextual factors that may boost or ban sample group´s behaviors and actions (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). The importance that the qualitative research approach provides to natural settings is also pointed out by Trickett (cited by Stein & Mankowski, 2004, para. 1) when he affirmed that human behavior in a natural setting is none predictive, it is unique, and authentic, rendering therefore, a more realistic and experience based data. In the same way, Brinkmann, Emholdt, and Kraft (2008) have added that qualitative research implies compromising to the daily analysis of the target group or individual, with the purpose of experiencing their actions upon the world, as opposed to a limited and control version of study. However, it is recom-

mended that researchers using the qualitative approach step away of trying to convey meaning out of factual data and instead focus attention on participants´ impressions and interpretations of events as suggested by Bell (2005).

Regarding size of sample groups, the qualitative research approach facilitates working with smaller samples as explained by Vishnevsky and Beanlands:

> Rather than choosing a sample that is representative of a given population, as in quantitative research, qualitative researchers are concerned with including only those participants with rich experiences in the phenomenon of concern. The sample size is rarely predetermined. (2004, p. 1)

Similarly, Coleman, Gruo, and Simms (2007) considered that a sample´s group input is as relevant and as reliable as their direct involvement with phenomenon being studied.

On case study design Bromley (cited in Zucker, 2009, para. 1) described it as a "systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest". Bell (2005, p.10) added that a case study design is "... a means of identifying key issues which merit further investigation...". The case study design with its flexible approach does not limit researcher to a specific set of people or contexts. According to Villardi (2003), case studies can be carried out on whole institutions or on just one individual. However, a relevant aspect of a case study design is the selection of the participants for they are a source of primary information. Woodside (2010) claimed that a case study design should focus mostly on comprehending participants on the level of emotions, actions, and types of interactions manifested in specific settings. In the same terms, Gillham (2010) emphasized that observers need to record all possible contextual

variants that could be a determining factor in participants' behavioral patterns. An observation in the words of Moeran (2005) seeks to analyze what goes on in a group's everyday lives with the intention of portraying group in an accurate way. Observations according to him should frame all social behaviors based on group activities carried out with the purpose of facilitating interpretation of group's interactions, since each frame poses new roles for participants with new attributions and status (2005). On the type of techniques case study uses to collect data, McLeod (2008) emphasized that the case study design enabled the gathering of data through a number of varied techniques among which were direct observations and different types of interviews.

All of the above made of ethnographic case study design the best option for this research study.

The sample group was composed of fifteen fifth grade students, six primary teachers, the primary section coordinator, and the school's natural settings. All fifteen 5th grade students had been in bilingual schools for more than five years. Eleven had been in this school since nursery, meaning they had been exposed to foreign cultural markers for more than 7 years. Students contact with foreign culture came through the use of imported texts used in English subjects, subjects taught in the target language, native language speakers, socialization and celebration of foreign cultural values and traditions, use of the target language in group activities, through mass media communication, and through travelling to the foreign country during vacations. It was assume that analysis of learners' daily behaviors and discourse within school grounds would help determine to what degree foreign culture had permeated learners' cultural manifestations and if it should be considered a risk factor for mainstream cultural identity.

Teacher sample was conformed of three English teachers and three Spanish teachers. One of the teachers was a native English speaker who has been living in Colombia for over twenty years and who has been working with the school for over fifteen years. This teacher at the time of the research study was teaching language arts, which is the subject with the most teaching hours, however, she had taught throughout all primary grades different subjects according to school's needs. The other two bilingual teachers have travelled to the United States in different occasions, one of them learned English in a bilingual school and the other learned the second language as an adult. Of the Spanish subject teachers, none of the three spoke the target language and none of them had travelled abroad. Importance of teachers´ input for research relies on their role as language and culture model. Some of these teachers spend with students more than 16 hours on a weekly basis. This time was a powerful tool for teachers, not only to provide content based language instruction, but also to participate actively in learners´ identity construct.

The coordinator was a female local Spanish teacher, who had not travelled abroad and who spoke English as a foreign language. She had been with the school for more than 15 years. Initially she worked as a Spanish subject teacher and later on assumed an administrative position. Overall she knew most of the students very well.

The natural settings were conformed of the primary section: classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, library, playground, lunchroom, and administrative offices. School's natural setting would facilitate observation of students' behavior inside and outside of classroom and it would also provide an insight to status given to foreign culture by staff and administrators.

The selection of the instruments and techniques to be used for the research study was based on the type of data that needed to be collected, on the specific settings where information was to be sought, and on the constraints and limitations confronted with. After a thorough analysis of all variants, three techniques were chosen: observations accompanied of field notes, semi-structured interviews, and document revision. These techniques provided a varied selection of data from different settings, persons, and official documents.

The observation technique was chosen due to its functionality and reliability. Gillham (2010) pointed out that "The overpowering validity of observation is that it is the most direct way of obtaining data" (p.46). Moreover, observation technique is highly recommended in the educational field as indicated by Anderson and Burns (cited by Waxman, Tharp, & Hilberg, 2004, p. 3) when they attested that observations provide concrete and situated data where student and teacher interactions are framed in realistic settings, making therefore, observations within the school an essential exercise in the educational research field. Furthermore, Jha (2008) highlighted the reliability of observations when he suggested that in order to capture real interactions, participants needed to be in authentic settings, where roles played were acted out in a natural and contextualized stage, contrary to what would happen in a research study with a positivism frame of work. However, Gilham (2010) drew attention to two major constraints of observations, which are observer's subjective interpretation of data and modification of normal class development caused by presence of observer. Therefore, he recommends the observer to inquire upon possible changes manifested on regular class development that might have been generated by observer's presence and suggests

that an attentive and self-aware attitude should be developed when analyzing and interpreting data collected.

For the data gathering process ten class observations were carried out of which only six provided data related to research objectives. Of the ten classes, five were of language arts, three of mathematic, one of Spanish, and another of Colombian social studies, being the last two in Spanish. All of the classes lasted forty-five minutes each.

Other observations were also carried out around school grounds at different times throughout the day with the intention of observing casual interactions between participants in different school settings. Recess breaks were observed during a two-week time span, a whole section activity, and casual encounters when student went out of the classroom during classes.

Semi-structured interviews were added to the techniques for data collection due to its characteristics which offer participants privacy and the possibility to express own opinion on matter of discussion, while providing face-to-face information related to facial and body gestures. Semi-structured interviews with its use of spoken language as the main medium of data gathering, contributed to a better understanding of how students perceived foreign and mainstream culture. Language as suggested by Engle (2005) is a window to children's interpretation of experiences and of the world; furthermore, she argued it assists reflection upon it by providing discourse structures. Other potential benefits of the semi-structured interview are pointed out by Denscombe (2003) when he asserted that semi-structured interviews facilitate interviewer follow up on source of data, management of interviews in a more controlled way, guidance on subject

of discussion and a more in depth approach on topic, as understood when he expressed:

> Another advantage is that the opinions and views expressed throughout the interview stem from one source: the interviewee. This makes it straightforward for the researcher to locate specific ideas with specific people. A third advantage is that the one-to-one interview is relatively easy to control. The researcher only has one person's ideas to grasp and interrogate, and one person to guide through the interview agenda. (p. 175).

For the research project students and teachers were interviewed twice, being questions in second interview rephrased or completely changed with the intention of getting answers that would provide an insight into research problem. Therefore, a total of forty-three interviews between teachers, students, and coordinator were applied, of which only twenty two provided useful information on research problem. The first interview applied to students was carried out in the coordinator's office under her supervision and the second interview was carried out in the counselor's office. Language used for student interviews was English, since one of the research objectives sought to determine to what degree learners were using foreign language cultural markers such as expression and idioms. The assigned time for student interviews were five minutes for the first interview applied and eight minutes for the second interview carried out. Regarding teacher interviews these were carried out in the language of the subject teachers taught, three of them in Spanish and the other three in English. Time assign for these interviews were fifteen minutes and they were carried out during teachers' free periods. The coordinator was also interviewed in her office, in English, with an available time of thirty minutes.

The first data collection technique used was class observations, which were scheduled within a tentative two-week period. First class observations carried out were language arts. This decision was made taking into account that this teacher had been working with the school for many years, is native English speaker, has the most teaching hours, and has therefore, interacted for longer periods of time with most of school's students. The assumption is that this teacher due to her ample work experience in this school portrays somehow attitudes and perceptions held on mainstream and foreign culture and may know students better than other teachers who spend less time with them. The objective sought to determine what type of cultural related messages were being transmitted to students and if they were being transmitted in explicit and or non-explicit ways. Additionally, observations sought to examine to what degree students might have adopted foreign cultural markers and if they were positioning foreign culture above mainstream one.

On the first day of class observations, the observer sat at the back of the classroom with voice recorder on. However, as expected students were immediately distracted and kept looking back and making comments among themselves. On the second day, due to signs of student distraction and with the intention of collecting visual data related to body and facial gestures observer decided to put up a video recorder and leave the classroom. After classes, the teacher expressed that when being alone, she had totally forgotten about the video recorder and had been able to develop her class in her regular way. Therefore, in the following days, the observer decided to leave the room at the beginning of the class, leaving recorder turned on. Observer would return to the classroom ten minutes after classes had begun point at which students and teachers were fully

engaged and seem to ignore observer's presence. After observing a complete unit in language arts classes, the observer requested permission to observe additional subjects with the intention of exploring even more teachers' and students' attitudes and perceptions towards both cultures. By the end of the second week a total of ten classes had been observed: five in language arts, three in math, one in Colombian social studies, and one in Spanish classes.

The following phases in data collection were students and teachers semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews demonstrated to be pertinent and congruent with research objectives, for it allowed and facilitated student's personal statements and opinions on a number of questions in a non-threatening context. Although, interviews were short in comparison to lengthy questionnaires used by other techniques, they proved to be time and format adequate. Two interviews were applied to students within a month's distance. The first interview was carried out a week after class observations had started, this with the intention of allowing students to become familiar with observer before the interview. The second interview was conducted after class observations had finished and while observation of school context was still taking place. The interviews were short and concise, since the coordinator had explained these would take place during recess breaks and available time was five minutes per student. First interviews were conducted in the coordinator's office, three students per day until the fifteen students had been interviewed. The second interview took place in the counselor's office and this time two students were interviewed simultaneously and time available was extended to eight minutes. Interview questions aimed at exploring how students perceived foreign culture. Teacher interviews were applied to three Spanish teachers, to three

English subject teachers, and to the coordinator. Interviews were carried out during teacher's free periods with an available time span of fifteen minutes per teacher; these last interviews were carried in the coordinator's office.

Observations of activities outside of the classroom as well as of the surrounding context within school grounds were the third phase of data collection. The intention was to look for further support for data gathered during interviews and class observations. Special attention was put on determining which language was promoted and expected to be used by students in less regulated school environments, such as hallways, recess time, and library. It was intended to examine to what degree students had adopted foreign cultural idioms and expressions in their daily casual interactions with teachers and peers.

Another relevant aspect that had to be analyzed was information displayed throughout the school and any other cultural manifestation promoted by the school or being adopted by students. The objective was to establish to what degree students were incorporating foreign cultural markers into their casual and daily interactions with peers and teachers. Also it was intended to revise to what extend foreign cultural markers dominated the scenery through exhibition of artifacts, national foreign symbols, posters, and any other element. These observations took place an approximated time of three months during which two whole section activities were observed. The final step in data collection was revision of school's official documents. Access to documents was provided and supervised by the coordinator and it was carried out in her office. Documents revised were: School's P.I.E and the language arts curriculum.

The data analysis was assumed from a bottom up approach. The intention was to find, classify,

and interpret information gathered on students' school daily behavior, perceptions held by participants on foreign and mainstream culture, and data on how the school managed, promoted, and established position of foreign culture within school grounds. Once data was gathered and transcribed, it was necessary to create a list of categories that would facilitate classification of information gathered.

The development of these categories underwent numerous tryouts. Finding the proper codes that would answer specific questions established took time. Finally, different sets of categories related to assessment, behaviors, and data displayed were selected since the main objectives were to determine how students and teachers perceived and compared foreign and mainstream culture, what cultural markers students used, and how school positioned both cultures. Categories focused on describing teacher and student perceptions on both cultures, discriminating use of foreign culture markers by students and language preferences, and determining how foreign culture was positioned within school context. The categories were coded with colors as a way of facilitating the tabulation of them for data analysis process.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The present research study sought to determine if the daily and systematic teaching of a foreign culture within the context of a bilingual school in Barranquilla should be considered a risk factor for mainstream cultural identity.

Research specific objectives focused on identifying to what degree learners used foreign cultural markers within school grounds and at determining how the school community perceived status of foreign culture. It was deemed that these specific objectives would provide reliable data on main concern, since culture according to Richards (2011) permeates and gives meaning to all human interactions through a set of created symbolic products and activities that are framed within the group´s collective experiences and historical background, which provides individuals with a sense of belonging and commonality.

Results of data analysis suggest that foreign cultural marker used most by students is the target language and that the school community perceives foreign culture as a host.

Observations revealed that although, learners have the capacity of switching to the target language during classes taught in English and that although, they have a good level of foreign language skills in terms of adequate use of voice tones, turn taking when talking, and intonation of some words according to intentions, students preferred to use mother tongue. This assumption is based on data gathered during class observations of subjects taught in English and subjects taught in Spanish. It was noticed that during class interactions in the target language, a few times there was interference of the mother tongue. This alternative language interference however, was not observed during classes taught in Spanish.

Preferences of mother tongue over target language were also observed during recess and in less constraint environments such as hallways and video room. Furthermore, students used the mother tongue to communicate among themselves and with staff in charge of library, cafeteria, video room, student counselor, and secretaries in general. The use of the target language outside of classes took place only when an English subject teacher would demand its use. This data was confirmed by teachers interviewed who attested that students used the target language only when needed or when expected by target language teachers.

Students´ mother tongue language preferences over the target language should be taken as a sign of learners´ cultural affiliation. Language, as Salomone (2010) explained, is a vehicle that represents our reality and through which individuals identify self and others and through which group members share ideas, values, and even prejudice. Language as she explained is not just a mode of communication; it is an extension of who we are and how we perceive ourselves. Salomone (2010) indicated that the correlation between culture, language and identity is observable in bilinguals who retain very deep emotional references of first language, noticeable on how it is usually used for more intimate purposes such as praying or swearing. According to her, this may be due to early language neurological connections to the emotional arousal system. To exemplify this she pointed out that it has been observed in immigrant families, how members continue to interact in their first language during intimate family time, switching back to the second language only when engaged in conversations or activities more distant and detached from self.

Results on context observation, document revision and interviews indicate that the school perceives foreign culture a host. It was noticed that although, the school promotes the values and traditions of the foreign culture through a number of subjects taught on a daily basis, through the use of imported texts that contextualize contents within specific foreign values and world views, and through the celebration of foreign holidays, the school does not expect students to use the target language in any other area different from the classroom. This indicates that the school´s official language is Spanish which is used by the school staff to interact with students throughout the different areas. Also when seeking contextual cultural related items that could provide information on school´s cultural affiliation, it was observed that there were a higher number of mainstream culture artifacts over foreign one.

At the entrance of the school´s main offices, library, video room, and lobby there was a large display of Colombian indigenous artifacts exhibited on walls and on top of furniture. There were also two mainstream national flags along with the exhibition of five bulletin boards, of which three were in the target language and two were in Spanish. These bulletin boards illustrated value of the month and cultural related messages related to holiday taking place. The only outstanding foreign cultural marker displayed on school ground was a flag of the foreign country and this was at the end of the elementary section, at the back of the school.

Results on interviews of teachers, coordinator, and students suggest an acceptance and an awareness of foreign culture. At all times a respectful language was used towards both cultures and although a few foreign traditions were perceived as desirable, these were not position over national ones.

Teachers see contact with foreign culture as positive, but continuously insinuated that lifestyle in Colombia was better. For them contact with foreign culture is a way of developing language and world skills.

Students interview indicate that all students discern differences between both cultures, being the most pointed out celebrations and cultural values. For students learning the target language is an academic goal, its purpose is instrumental.

On revision of official documents, data indicates that the school promotes the learning of a foreign culture and language as a way of developing a multicultural world vision.

Data also made evident that although, the school teaches and socializes foreign cultural values and traditions, foreign staff is limited to a few and that not all staff in administrative positions know the target language.

Importance and influence of context on individual's cultural affiliation is pointed by Riley (2007) who argued that cultural interactions and culture's contextual setting is permeated by numerous human made productions, which give each culture its unique characteristics. According to him, cultures have specific markers that provide individuals with a set of norms and concepts that guide behaviors, cognition, and which usually are loaded with moral meanings. Furthermore, Riley (2007) suggested that this set of norms and concepts has the sole purpose of assisting group members in the prediction of behaviors and attitudes, establishing therefore a degree of certainty in roles enacted by the different actors.

CONCLUSION

Results of present research study suggest that the teaching and socializing of the cultural components of the foreign language do not necessarily constitute a risk factor for mainstream cultural identity.

Data results indicate that foreign cultural marker used most by students within school ground is the target language and that its use is limited to specific situations. Regarding how school community perceives status of foreign culture, data suggests that it is perceived as foreign and that mainstream cultural characteristics prevail within school grounds. Results also suggest that it is probable that students have developed a number of intercultural competences.

Intercultural competences in the words of Sercu (2005) are a set of purposely-developed skills and attitudes that enable language learners to communicate effectively with native speakers of the target language. According to him intercultural competences involves the development of a willing disposition towards foreign culture, self-awareness, ability to compare and interpret, ability to relate information and events, the use of meta-cognitive strategies, tolerance towards diversity, a critical stance to assess self and others, and an open mind, among other skills. In addition, Novinger (2001) affirmed that intercultural competences facilitate language learners the use of the target language, providing them with the necessary skills to interpret and use accordingly non-verbal cues such as voice tones, pauses, gestures, and facial expressions that are an essential aspect of all communicative acts.

Student Interviews revealed their willing disposition towards foreign culture, their acceptance of cultural diversity, and the acknowledgement of own and foreign cultural characteristics. Furthermore, during class observations it was noticed that students interacted in the target language with a high degree of comfort, using properly voice tones, foreign expressions, gestures, pauses, and interventions. More so, observation of students in different school context elucidated that students do not use foreign cultural expressions or the target language outside of regular English classes, which can be assumed as using the skills in the proper situation.

Results on how community perceives foreign culture show that although, foreign language teaching is contextualized within a set of cultural components visible in texts used, foreign country friendly staff, bulletins boards that highlight some of its values, and celebration of some of

its traditions, reality is that the school favors and positions mainstream culture first in many ways.

On difficulties encountered, it is necessary for future research to access group of parents, although, their participation may be limited by time spent within school grounds.

Research study specific findings suggest that the development of a cultural identity implies more than the teaching and socialization of a specific culture. It is necessary to analyze other factors that could possibly influence and help develop learners' cultural identity among which could be the role of close family, peers, and even status granted to culture in specific contexts

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