

**RESEARCH PAPER****Cultural Implications on Teaching and Learning English at Graduate Level in Private Universities of Sialkot: A Minimalist Technique****<sup>1</sup>Hafiz Raza Razaq and <sup>2</sup>Dr. Aqsa Atta**

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**\*Corresponding Author**      hafizraza747@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This research delves into the current landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Pakistan, specifically focusing on its cultural implications at the graduate level within private universities in Sialkot. The study addresses the prevailing confusion among Pakistani educators regarding whether they are instructing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or a Second Language (ESL). Notably, language and culture have been traditionally treated as separate entities in English language classrooms in Pakistan, hindering the cultivation of cultural intelligibility and awareness among English Language learners. To tackle these issues, the study employs Carroll's minimalist framework and integrates Greaney's minimalism components. The research involves a sample size of 200 graduate-level students from two private universities in Sialkot, Pakistan. The experimental research design incorporates pre-tests and post-tests to validate the effectiveness of the minimalist technique. The findings of the study underscore the challenges faced by learners in grasping native equivalents for foreign cultural words, impacting conceptual comprehension. Consequently, the research emphasizes the critical need to implement cutting-edge teaching techniques to enhance language learners' comprehension and cultural sensitivity. The study advocates for the integration of native culture into language education in Pakistan, asserting that this integration is imperative for fostering a more effective and culturally aware English language learning environment.

**Keywords:**      Carroll's Minimalist Technique, Cultural Awareness, English Language Teaching, Foreign Language (EFL), Native Cultural Implications**Introduction**

Language is exclusively a human attribute a non-instinctive way of conveying ideas, emotions, and desires distinguishing humans apart from the other species on the planet. Bolinger (1979) says, "Language is species-specific a uniquely human trait shared by the cultures so diverse and by individuals physically and mentally so unlike with one another". It is a socio-cultural phenomenon, self-sustaining, a thermostatic and self-regulating system. In the diachronic and synchronic parameters of language, we find that it serves man in multiple ways. Anyhow, two of its functions are the most prominent. Firstly, helps in keeping man socially alive in that he communicates his ideas, feelings, and desires. The absence of this trait might convert humans no more than an animal. If man is vicegerent to Allah Almighty, language is perhaps the greatest attribute in this connection. Edward Sapir (2004) says, "Language is primarily a human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires utilizing a system of voluntarily produced symbols. Secondly, language is the storehouse of a culture where our religious doctrines, social norms, ideological maxims, and national disciplines, all are stored and transmitted from generation to generation.

Jespersion (2013) defines language as, “a set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expression to thoughts and feelings”; in the recent century, language research has given birth to Linguistics-the theory and philosophy of language helps us to understand that language plays a vital role in our survival as human beings. In the words of Bloch and Trager (1942), “A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates”. The Encyclopedia Britannica has established these very features of language as “a system of conventional, spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture communicate”.

Originally being the language of England English has become the primary or secondary language of various former British colonies such as the United States of America, Australia, Canada, and the Indian Subcontinent due to historical British Imperialism. Therefore, the English language being the language of the international community has been developed into the lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2011) of the globalized world due to its rapid and fast pace spread.

In addition, cultural diversity finds expression in the English language demonstrating the fact that the history of English is a description of cultures, which understates that the political, economic, and social forces at work in a particular socio-cultural setting are influencing language. These forces shape the language in every aspect, and in what is called “the sociology of language,” but in the meanings of words, in the accents of the spoken language, and even in the structures of the grammar (Baugh & Cables, 1993). Grim J as cited in Crystal David (1995) “Of all modern languages, not one has acquired such great strength and vigor as English ----- (It) may be called justly language of the world; and seems like English nation, to be destined to reign in future with more extensive capability”. Therefore, has an unparalleled rank in the languages of the world, one to digest the latest techniques and developments in the various fields of life

Becoming part, from primary education to higher studies, from our utility bills to the prescriptions by doctors, all are in the English language. To adopt culture may be regarded as harmful but language is just a system of transforming cultures. In other words, there will be ‘empire writes back to the center’. (Sulman Rushdie). If we plan to study abroad, we need IELTS, TOEFL, etc. For higher studies in the universities abroad, we have to qualify for aptitude tests that are in English. Scoring low means no chance of getting admission to foreign universities. In this way, the role of the English language cannot be undermined and underestimated in any way.

Dr. Muhammad Shahab-ud-Din (2007) has very rightly pointed out in his article, “English Language Teaching at Intermediate Level in Pakistan: Vision and Reality”, “Before partition in 1947, it was presumed that the end of the British government would result in the slow but sure demise of English in South Asia. This, of course, has not happened so far, since the inception of Pakistan, English as a language has enjoyed a prominent place though its status has kept on fluctuating from official language to non-official language”. In the same article, he further argues, “ELT situation in Pakistan is unsatisfactory. The textbooks are boring, teachers are untrained, classes are overcrowded, conducive learning conditions are missing, traditional teaching methodology is applied which permits no innovation and the evaluation system is faulty. There is a dire need to redress these problems”. However, owing to the complexity of the linguistic map in Pakistan, foreign language teaching and learning takes place concerning native culture, keeping in view the ethnic diversity of the learners, possible factors that hamper English as a foreign language teaching and learning can be addressed.

In 1952, the American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn, critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture, and compiled a list of 164 different definitions. Apte (1994: 2001 as cited in Spencer & Franklin, 2012), writing in the ten-volume Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics, summarized the problem as follows: “Despite a century of

efforts to define culture adequately, there was in the early 1990s no agreement among anthropologists regarding its nature." In the words of Tyler (1870), a British Anthropologist, "Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

The relationship and interconnectedness of language and culture have been much discussed and explored by researchers (Boas, 1941; Nida, 1998). Nida (1998) is of the view that language and culture are two symbolic systems. She further states, "Everything we say in language has meanings, designative or associative, denotative or connotative, in addition, every language form we use has meanings, carries meanings that are not in the same sense because it is associated with culture and culture is more extensive than language." Nida (1998) is of the view that people of different cultures can refer to different things while using the same language forms. For example, when one says lunch, an Englishman may be referring to hamburger or pizza, but a Chinese man will most probably be referring to steamed bread or rice. However, most English people associate a dog with a man's best friend, a good companion, being kept as a pet, together with many commendatory idioms, such as a lucky dog. Being culturally loaded, English words and their Chinese translations (or vice versa) are seldom equivalents, and often give rise to different associations or images."

This means language and culture, being the two symbolic systems are interlinked to describe and express everything that relates to social phenomenon. In this, way both language and culture not only reflect but also influence and shape each other in a social context. It has been a rising concern from Pakistani educators that the English language in the educational setting of Pakistan is taught under conditions, which are far from being satisfactory (Warsi, 2004). In addition, Warsi (2004) is of the view that English language courses in Pakistan are being taught without specified curricular objectives, and teachers are trained to deal with the implications that may originate in the process of foreign language teaching and learning.

Pennycook (1998) notes that the English language continues to be a language to which colonial discourses adhere as well as a language still laden with colonial representations of the inferiority of non-white people. Such cultural nuances are the most visible and dominant in the English textbooks of Pakistan at all levels that should hold and provide balanced and impartial cultural insights to the learners to avoid misperception and relegation of native culture.

Collin's dictionary defines minimalism as a style in which a small number of very simple things are used to create a particular effect.

Keeping in view this definition, minimalism can be used in teaching and learning a language in the sense that learners can be provided culture-specific linguistic resources for language comprehension in a particular context. On the other hand, the Minimalist theory of J.M. Carroll (1990) is a framework for the design of instruction, especially training materials for computer users. It provides learners an opportunity to pursue their own meaningful goals. Therefore, foreign language teaching and learning can be simplified and goal-oriented in cross-cultural linguistic contexts by using minimalist techniques.

Learners in Pakistan are used to learning English through cramming with a core focus on translation from English to Urdu. Despite English has been taught as a compulsory subject to learners from grade one in Pakistan, they are still unable to use the English language effectively in speech and writing. Owing to subject-based language teaching and learning, learners are unable to develop foreign language competence. Moreover, language and culture has been seen to be dealt with separately in Pakistani English language classroom. This factor hampers the development of cultural intelligibility and cultural awareness that eventually help learners understand the globalized world in a cross-cultural

context. In addition, learners face difficulty in finding appropriate native equivalents in place of foreign cultural words for conceptual comprehension.

### Literature Review

Different researchers and sociolinguists have elaborated the word “culture” differently. Duranti (1997) defines culture as “culture is such a diverse and complex notion that it may be neither possible nor desirable to arrive at an all-encompassing definition of it.” Keeping in view the above definition, culture can be seen as something that is acquired or learned, and transmitted from one age group to the next through a transition phase.

Kluckhohn (1962) is of the view that “culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action”. This indicates that language as an artifact of culture functions as an expression of thought based on collective knowledge systems of the members of certain communities or societies.

In the words of Salomon (1997), “cultural artifacts are both material and symbolic; they regulate interaction with one’s environment and oneself. In this respect, they are ‘tools’ broadly conceived, and the master tool is language.” It centralizes language as a social practice to express culture. It means that in a social sphere, language originates from culture. Every human achievement, whether material or spiritual, is recorded in history through language, a product of culture.

Larsen Freeman (2000) regards culture as a fifth language skill in learning a language. Indicating that culture helps to learn a language as other language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, do. It provides the fact that language is influenced by culture, as it is deep-rooted in culture, hence, different historical, social, and cultural backdrops, ordinary conditions, and surroundings lead to diverse understandings and responses to language.

In the words of Brown (1986), “A language is a part of culture and a culture is a part of language, the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.” Evolving together language and culture give the impression that is driven by diverse social contexts. *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain* (2013) point of view indicates that language and culture are community or society specific and communities and societies vary in terms of certain knowledge systems a group of people hold that diversify their social membership categories.

Hence, the role of culture in language learning and teaching is pivotal, particularly in the context of EFL settings in Pakistan’s educational milieu. Cultural incorporation in English language teaching and learning exposes students to foreign cultures but it also intrigues them to look for appropriate native culture equivalents- balanced perceptions about culture, as language is culture-specific; however, each language has different yet specific cultural expressions.

Carroll’s (1990) theory of minimalism and Greaney’s (2016) notion of the minimalist narrative technique, both are based on the premise that learners in general and adult learners, in particular, are impatient, cognitively active, and curious. They want to get the work done in no time using their problem-solving abilities and can reject the constraining instructional designs or activities (Farkas, Williams, 1990). In other words, the minimalist technique with origins in minimalism suggests the idea of freedom; to express, interpret, self-orient, and self-initiate the phenomenon in which learners are involved.

Hence, it centralizes perception and cognition by the teacher to formulate instructional designs keeping in view the minimalist technique and on the part of learners to learn more with minimal but specified and goal-oriented resources.

This idea of minimalist instruction in English language teaching and learning can be argued by Cook (2003) as he suggests that teaching foreign languages in the 'Western' sphere has been based on the understanding that 'the way into the new language was always through the student's first language'. This can be used to discuss English language teaching and learning using minimalist techniques in the sense that adult learners are given target language exposure, however, they are asked to reproduce the learning outcomes keeping in view native culture accounts.

## Materials and Methods

The research uses Carroll's (1990) minimalist framework for instructional design about Greaney's (2016) minimalism components in a two-fold way. On one hand, they have been used by the teacher to design pre-tests and post-tests to assess the learners for text comprehension and interpretation, on the other hand, they have also been employed by the teacher in the teaching phase to inculcate cultural awareness among the learners. More precisely, the minimalist technique established on Carroll's minimalist theory (1990) and Greaney's (2016) notion of minimalism can be considered to develop a mode of discourse highly aware of the relationships forged between objects and people. In this way, it can be assumed to reflect the subjective reality of the one who creates meaning.

Encyclopedia Britannica suggests that minimalism is characterized by extreme simplicity of form and a literal objective approach. Although, the terms minimalism or minimalist are arbitrary (Greaney, 2016, Shaiza, 2017) in nature but undoubtedly characterized generally by the notions of reduction and simplicity. Greaney (2016) is of the view that minimalism is used for generating maximum effort from minimum means as it asks the reader to create meaning keeping in view the following components:

1. The role of the narrator
2. The use of figurative language
3. The function of omission
4. The relationship to literary realism

Greaney (2016) centralizes his argument on the notion that "minimalist narrative techniques create an interpretive inter-determinacy, which asks a reader to make a growing contribution to its meaning, culminating in an awareness of what is revealed, rather than resolved, at short story's ending." Primarily, his concept advocating the implied phenomenon has been used in the present study, to evaluate the representation of distorting ideas in a subjective perspective.

Moreover, minimalist theory emphasizes the necessity to build upon the learner's experience (Knowles, 1975, Rogers, 1965). Carroll (1990) states: "Adult learners are not blank slates; they don't have funnels in their heads; they have little patience for being treated as "don't knows". In conducting this research, the researcher collected data from Pre-test and Pro-test assessments including 200 English language learners of graduation level from two private universities: the University of Management and Technology, and the University of Sialkot. Considered and arranged two different groups named the controlled group and the experimental group. The present study uses Carroll's (1990) minimalist framework for instructional design in relation with Greaney's (2016) minimalism components in a two-fold way. On one hand, the teacher designs pre-test has used them and post-test to assess the learners for text comprehension and interpretation, on the other hand, they have also been employed by the teacher in the teaching phase to inculcate cultural awareness among the learners.

The selection of the subjects is ensured by the similar indigenous culture between both groups and the minimization of the influence of cultural backgrounds and language on the study. The study implemented an assessment as a tool for data collection including language texts particularly poetry to determine the cultural intelligibility of foreign language learners. The language text of 'Inside Out' was given to the experimental group while the control group was provided with the language text of 'The New Anthology of English Verse'. In analyzing the data, a comparison of Pre-test and Post-test results between both controlled and experimental groups was conducted where the main objective was to examine the differences in the results gathered by each of these groups. Post-test results were gathered and examined to find out whether the incorporation of indigenous culture aided in language learning

The outcomes of both groups were evaluated and contrasted with the aid of tables, which also helped to highlight the cultural ramifications for the teaching and learning of the English language at graduate level in private universities. Using this kind of visual representation enriches the analysis and makes research findings more nuanced.

## Results and Discussions

The following section offers an in-depth examination and discussion of the research findings, illuminating the complex interplay among instructional methods, language acquisition, and culture. Further, it investigates the subtle implications of these factors for graduate-level English language in Sialkot's private universities, 'University of Management and Technology' and the 'University of Sialkot'. By using minimalist techniques, the research seeks to understand the effects of cultural integration on English language teaching against the background of the private universities on a sample of 200 students from both universities.

An assessment conducted before and after the test proposes quantitative information that moreover complemented by qualitative data outcomes the framework of a minimalist approach.

The primary goal was to explore the impact of culture on the graduate level in English learning and teaching. The resulting review of the pre-test and post-test reveals how much impact it creates for incorporating culture into language learning. An appreciable increase in cultural intelligibility is noted in the experimental group after they observe 'Inside out' and that surpasses the traditional conventional approaches evidenced by controlled groups' exposure to 'The New Anthology of English Verse'.

**Table 1**  
**Cultural Implications Assessment**

Group	Pre-Test Score	Pre-Test Score	Improvement
Controlled Group	65%	75%	15.38%
Experimental Group	55%	85%	54.55%

With its foundation in classical English poetry, the control group showed a 15.38 percent increase in cultural intelligibility. However, the experimental group benefiting from culture-specific linguistic resources through 'Inside out' showed a noticeably greater improvement of 54.55 percent. In contrast to the controlled group, the experimental group, which was exposed to the linguistics resources specific to culture, demonstrated a deeper comprehension and retention of cultural nuances, as evidenced by the pre-test and post-test results. The percentage of improvement highlights how well incorporating one's native culture works well.

Carroll's minimalist framework is used in this study to assess the cultural implications during the pre-test, post-test, and teaching phases. The research acknowledges

the contribution the minimalist approach makes to the development of meaningful and self-contained language activities.

**Table 2**  
**Minimalist Technique Effectiveness**

Phase	Controlled group	Experimental group
Pre-test	65%	75%
Post-test	75%	85%
Teaching phase	80%	90%

The efficiency of the minimalist technique is obvious in the teaching phase. Language learners who were exposed to culturally relevant language resources through minimalist approaches demonstrated a more engaged and proactive approach to language learning, which resulted in improved cultural awareness.

The outcomes illustrate that language learning at the graduate level in Sialkot's private universities is positively impacted by integrating native culture through a minimalist approach. Students who use language resources tailored to their culture demonstrate improved understanding and cultural sensitivity. Providing valuable insightful information about how language and culture interact in Pakistan. It highlights how important it is to incorporate cultural aspects into language instructions and how successful minimalist methods are at doing so.

**Table 3**  
**Aggregated Results for Two Universities**

University	Group	Pre-test	Pro-test	Improvement
University of Sialkot	Controlled	60%	70%	16.67%
	Experimental	50%	80%	60.00%
University of management and technology	Controlled	70%	78%	11.43%
	Experimental	52%	80%	53.85%
Aggregated Results	Controlled	65%	74%	14.05%
	Experimental	51%	80%	56.92%

The combined findings of a thorough inquiry into the cultural consequences of graduate-level English language instructions in Sialkot's private universities are displayed in the table encompassing 200 students from both Universities.

After being exposed to traditional English poetry, the University of Sialkot's controlled group first showed a median pre-test score of 60 percent. Their post-test result score rose to 70% after the intervention, indicating an increase of 16.67 percent. On the other hand, the experimental group, which was introduced to culture-specific resources tailored to their culture through the 'Inside out' approach, began with a pre-test score of 50 percent. Their post-test score increased dramatically to 80 percent following the method, which indicated an impressive rise of 60.00 percent.

Contrary to the University of Management and Technology, the control group started with an average pre-test score of 70 percent and a slight improvement to 78 percent in the post-test, yielding an 11.34 percent increase. After being exposed to the resources unique to their culture, the experimental group began with a pre-test score of 52 percent. Their post-test score rose to 80 percent following the intervention, signifying a significant 53.85 percent improvement.

After averaging the results, the controlled groups from both universities had a combined average pre-test score of 65 percent and a post-test average of 74 percent which

resulted in an average enhancement of 14.05 percent. Meanwhile, the experimental group's combined average pre-test score was 51 percent which increased to 80 percent in the post-test indicating a remarkable average improvement of 56.92 percent. These results indicate the benefits of incorporating one's own culture into language learning, with the 'Inside Out' method demonstrating particular efficacy. Highlighting the importance of culture in language education, it promotes the implementation of efficient approaches, like minimalist technique, to prove the cultural comprehensibility of English language learners in private universities.

The results highlighted the benefits of integrating one's own culture into language learning with an 'inside out' method demonstrating notable success. The finding went beyond what the researcher had anticipated; suggesting that creative teaching approaches could lead to significant gains in cultural awareness and intelligibility. Finally, the study opens up by highlighting the necessity of a cultural integration approach in language instruction and provides insightful information. The study highlights the necessity of a cultural integration approach in language instruction and provides insightful information about the complex relationship between language and culture in the Pakistani context.

### **Findings**

Based on Carroll's framework and Greaney's components, the research demonstrated how successful the minimalist approach is in raising awareness about culture. Students exposed to this method showed enhanced comprehension and memory of cultural quirks.

Language teaching and learning can never be neutral however, since culture has been regarded as all-pervasive and subconscious, one tends to comprehend and describe one's cultural ways as the natural ones. This assertion has appeared to influence adult learners greatly as their performance may be improved or declined when native culture integration in foreign language teaching and learning has been used as stimuli.

### **Conclusion**

This research looked into the outcomes of incorporating native culture into graduate-level English language instruction in Sialkot, Pakistan's private universities. With an emphasis on the minimalist technique and a mixed-method approach, the investigation showed that the experimental group exposed to 'Inside Out' culture-specific resources showed a substantial rise in cultural intelligibility when contrasted with the control group exposed to traditional English poetry.

The combined findings from the two universities highlighted how successful this cultural integration was, showing an average enhancement among the experimental groups of 56.92 percent.

The study concludes that adopting cutting-edge teaching strategies, such as the minimalist methodology, is essential for improving English language learners' comprehension and cultural awareness. The results support a change in graduate English language instruction at private universities in Sialkot toward culturally integrated methods.

### **Recommendations**

Given the findings of the study, strongly advice that educators and creators of the curriculum must take advantage of aspects of local culture in their instructional materials. This may be accomplished by choosing textbooks, discussions, and assessments that are culturally relevant and speak to the learner's cultural background.

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