

Review

Culture as a Barrier to learning English as a Second Language (ESL): A Case study of College of Agriculture, Gujba and College of Administrative and Business Studies, Potiskum

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Language is used among people to express ideas, emotions, and feelings through communication with one another. It is easy to do all these in our mother tongue or our first language. But if we want to express our ideas, emotions, feelings in a second language difficulty occurs. The purpose of this paper is therefore, to investigate whether learners as well as teachers of English language feel and contend that the difficulties faced while learning English as a Second language (ESL) are due to the culture tied to the target language. 10 ESL teachers and 90 (70 males & 30 females) students and teachers participants formed the subject of this research. A questionnaire of 13 items adapted from the work of Ronnie Goodwin (2013) was administered amongst the participants. The major finding of the work is that while the teachers strongly felt that cultural differences affect how we learn other people's language, the students felt that culture is not a barrier in learning ESL. Though this might be due to the impact of Globalization however, the researchers concluded that teaching ESL should incorporate teaching the culture of the target language (TL), especially with learners of ESL.

Keywords: Culture, a barrier, English as a Second Language, Students of ESL, Teachers of ESL, Foreign languages.

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INTRODUCTION

ESL students come across great barriers as they learn the English language. These barriers are either with respect to linguistic factors or cultural factors. ESL learners have their culture which is so different from that of any native English speaking country as well as certain linguistic aspects based on their primary language.

One of the important cultural barriers affecting ESL education draws from the fact that most ESL Programs instructors were in most cases native English speakers.

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These native teachers occupy socioeconomically and culturally different styles of teaching ESL learners are used to, from their culture. This presents a lack of correlation of the two cultures especially if the teacher fails to employ effective instructional approaches mean such as group effort. This is made worse by the lack of fervor among the native teachers to learn these different cultures.

For a long time now English language has been considered and accepted as international language, and has been considered one of the prominent languages

one has to learn, especially in English colonized States like Nigeria. Today, for anyone to excel academically and socially, s/he has to understand and speak English language effectively.

Despite this popular and indispensable status the English language attained in Nigeria as the language of instruction, business, law, government etc. learners of the language at all levels are usually confronted by many problems posing a barrier to learning it effectively. The problems range from influence of mother-tong, variation in grammar and differences of structure of English from that of Mother-tong (MT) or First language (FL), and general influence of culture.

Consequently, researchers have been trying to find out how these and other problems work at affecting learning and teaching of the English language as second language situation. (Crystal, D. 2003; Bensalem, E. 2018; Jonah 2008; Zalakoro, 2016; Maduwesi and Amaka 2016).

English as a second language is a term used when English is 'taught to people whose first language is not English, but who live in an English-speaking country and need English to communicate in daily life.' (Macmillan Dictionary). One common example can be given in context of Nigeria where people in the country learn English as a second language beside their M/T as their first language. Students learn English as an academic subject to be able to understand other subjects that are also written and taught in English language. Another example could be Indian situation where English took the place of second language because of the cultural diversity of the country, as presented in a Bollywood film titled "English Vinglish" (2002).

Purpose of the Study

Although many researches (Forbes 2011; Weiler, A. 2012; Goodwin, R. 2013) have reported that people do intuitively understand that there is a connection between languages and culture but the authors of this research feel that the relationship between language learning and culture is not sufficiently explored and established among the teachers of English as well as their students in our higher institutions. Therefore the purpose of this study is to investigate whether learners as well as teachers of English language in College of Agriculture, Gujba and that of CABS feel and contend that some of the difficulties faced while learning the language are due to the culture tied to the target language. So that teachers would be better informed to develop and apply techniques in teaching culture or not with English Language learners. When learners of the language understand the cultural background of the language while subsequently learning the language itself, the easier and better learners overcome cultural barriers

such as Shyness, nodding or shrugging while talking, dressing norms.

Objectives of the study

The purpose of this project is to examine the impact of culture on student's learning ESL in order to determine:

1. Whether culture affects students learning English language.
2. Whether teachers of English are aware that culture affects language learning.
3. Whether it is possible to learn English language without learning its culture.
4. Whether learning English language affects one's culture.

Hypothesis of the study

In examining these questions, the following hypothesis will guide the research.

- H1: culture does not impact on Teaching/Learning ESL.
 H2: English language should not be taught along with its culture.
 H3: T/L ESL does not influence teacher's/learner's culture.
 H4: Teachers of English language do not believe that learning English language affects ones culture.

Research Methodology

In this study, the qualitative methods involving a questionnaire and classroom observations are used. The questionnaires and classroom observations are mainly conducted to find out the cultural elements that hinder the learning process of learning a second or foreign language. The data used in this study is primary data. This research performs a case study analysis using a questionnaire adapted from the work of Hossain (2016), administered to both the English teachers and the students. This is because the dynamics of the native tongue of individual teachers and learners, necessitates a method of inquiry based on the understanding that the reality of linguistic acquisition consists of objects and events as they are perceived by the individual teacher/learner. The subjects used for this research involve 90 (60 males & 30 females) students from ND I and II; and HND I and II, and 10 English Teachers were administered the questionnaire restructured to suite the research questions. The questionnaires included 9 and 4 questions for the students and teachers, respectively, asking the participants students to express their own

ideas through those questions by means of the impact of culture in English language learning and the cultural elements which might hinder their learning process. Respondents' answers were collected and the data analyzed.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Researchers have published works about the ways in which culture influences thought and behavior (Gudykunst, 1994; Hofstede, 1986; Samover and Porter, 1995). They have made available a wide range of perspectives for conceptualizing the influences of different cultures on thinking and behaving. Three perspectives are of special potential relevance to L2/FL teaching, namely, the distinction between individualism and collectivism; different perception of power and authority; and different types of achievement motivation. (Littlewood, 2001).

Language is the key to a person's self-identity. It enables the person to express emotions, share feelings, tell stories and convey complex messages and knowledge. Language is our greatest mediator that allows us to relate and understand each other (Imberti, 2007).

Cultural environment differences provide the second language learner a sort of social psychological distance. (Hofstede, 1986).

On the basis of the significance of English as an International language spoken and taught worldwide, the present research focuses on the cultural impacts and barriers on ELT and effective communication in Bangladesh. The research question is to find out the common cultural barriers in Bangladesh which mainly hinder English language learning.

Culture

Culture' is a word that can be defined in various ways by different people. In the anthropological sense, culture is described 'as the way people live. Culture constitute the rules that a group lives by, and the heart bit is the "unspoken rules". Chastain (1988) defines Culture defines as 'an all-inclusive system which incorporates the biological and technical behaviour of human beings with their verbal and non-verbal systems of expressive behaviour is ranging from birth and this 'all-inclusive system' is acquired as the native culture. The human elements of language and culture are intricately and intimately intertwined, which is an aspect that has been studied by many linguistic scholars (Abdo& Breen, 2010; Annamali, 1989; Appel & Muysken, 2006; Gardner, 2012; Gregg, 2006; Hussein, 2013; Gumperz, 2001; Schegloff, 2001). There are many indications that language and

culture are derived from each other and there is evidence that culture affects the way individuals interpret information (Miller, 2007).

Language and Culture

The process, which can be referred to as socialization,' prepares the individual for the linguistically and non-linguistically accepted pattern of the society in which we lives. Culture is language and language is culture. Culture is a context within which we have a tendency to exist, think, feel and relate others. It is the 'glue' that binds a group of people together. Thus, culture helps us to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to the group.

All language learners consciously and unconsciously use language learning skills when they are learning a new language. Despite this, research, (Griffiths & Parr, 2001) has focused on language strategies used by only adolescents and adults. Education for ESL/EFL individuals in countries such as the USA, Canada, and Australia has been the primary focus of studies regarding language-learning strategies due to the large number of people migrating to these countries (Oxford, 1990).

There is a consensus that people do not acquire language skills in the same way, illustrating that code-switching and code-mixing are common phenomena in speech, provided that at least two languages exist in a community (Appel & Muysken, 2006; McKay & Hornberger, 1996; Philip, Oliver, & Mackey, 2008; Walte, 2007; Weinreich, 1953). In some societies, the expected means of communication is code-switched speech (Auer, 2002).

Derwing and Waugh looked at the role of language and cultural practices at how immigrants develop friendships, join social organizations within the mainstream." They noted that some cultural groups have more difficulty than others in picking up Canadian. Ottawa, 2012, cited some researches showing just how important cultural and personal issues are in learning languages. It talked about the "secret rules" of Canadian life that immigrants had to learn to master not just the language but living in Canada. Weiler, 2012 reported that People do intuitively understand that there is a connection between languages and culture but sometimes the relationship between language learning and culture is not sufficiently explored ... Every language has embedded cultural overtones.

Code Switching

Although code-switching and code-mixing were once viewed as interference phenomena among imperfect bilinguals, these entities have come to be recognized as imperative and indispensable communication strategies

(Myers-Scotton, 1993). Studies have primarily investigated bilingual students placed in immersion classrooms, as well as individuals in ESL classrooms when attempting to evaluate the efficacy of teaching language without accompanying instruction regarding the parent culture (Allam & Salmani-Nadoushan, 2009). The high influx of foreign immigrants in every developed nation has increased the demand for EFL/ESL educational programs. This has facilitated an investigation of language learning behaviors, principally how culture interacts with morphological development (Cohen, 1998).

In vocabulary, for example, culture plays a factor in meanings of some words and can change the statement as a whole. In the sentence, "Dressed in white, she approaches with tears in her eyes." for some westerners and other people who believe in matrimony; they can picture a lady dressed in a white gown celebrating her wedding day. It is understandable when you know that it is a common practice for a bride to wear a white gown for her wedding. But for Chinese people, wearing white is a symbol of mourning, they wear white when a family member or a relative is dead.

One common mode of speech alteration when Arabic speakers are learning a new language is code-switching. Code-switching is considered as "appropriate changes in the speech situation" rather than "an unchanged speech situation", and it is also indicated that this switching does not occur "within a single sentence" (Weinreich, 1953, p. 73). Simply defined, codeswitching is "the mixing of elements of two linguistic varieties within a single utterance or text" (Gluth, 2008, p. 6). When used in ESL/EFL communities, this demonstrates how the meaning in code-switching is derived from the stylistic association between sentences or phrases.

Defining conversational code-switching has been challenging because it frequently occurs in conjunction with other kinds of language contact phenomena including convergence, borrowing, and interference (Gluth, 2008; Halmari, 1997). In addition, codes themselves involve a high degree of variability and are often viewed as non-standard, in particular when bilinguals lack proficiency in what is known or perceived as standard codes (Gluth, 2008). Interestingly, preceding studies determined that one needs to perceive differently the process of selecting one definite code from the process of mixing as many as two existing codes, to generate the product that may be regarded as a third code (Bentahila & Davies, 1983).

Furthermore, research has proposed that code-switching is performed only for the duration of a conversational discourse, while the code-mixing is not performed with full sentences and has the grammar structures from other languages (Annamali, 1989). Additionally, it is suggested that code-mixing is essentially the mechanism of mixing elements from a

minimum of two languages within one utterance, differentiating it from code-switching in that the latter is the product of this mix (Bader, 1995; Myers-Scotton, 1993).

Theoretical Foundation

Whorfian Linguistic Development Theory

According to Whorfian theory, our words are coded in language and so are our thoughts and this linguistic pattern dictates more than just the language we speak. This pattern also dictates our sense of reason, how we view nature, our relationship views, and every other aspect of our conscious and unconscious mind. This phenomenon is known as linguistic determinism and is based on Whorf's theory that every language utilizes a unique set of semantic representations. These semantics determine aspects of our conceptual representations which is how linguistics influences habitual thought (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). When analyzed, Whorf's theory has proven to bear significant merit. Franz Boas' linguistic analysis revealed that many languages exclude specification of gender, tenses, location, and a vast array of descriptive terms present within the English language. Other linguists believe that lexical development is contingent upon the life experiences of those speaking the language, meaning a culture that has only thatched-roofed huts would not be able to conceptualize a building, thus could not fathom a skyscraper (Sybing, 2011).

However, slang is a lexical innovation created by individuals and often incorporates words and phrases from various languages, as well as variations of standard words (Bullard, Johnson, Morris, Fox, & Howell, 2010). Originally considered to be the lowest form of communication, slang is now commonly used in the highest social circles and is perpetuated based upon its usefulness and applicability (Bullard, Johnson, Morris, Fox, & Howell, 2010). The instructional strategy used by ESL/EFL educators determines whether they will attempt to integrate cultural aspects into the lessons. Instruction that is used for teaching has changed focus and shifted to learner-centered environments that place increased attention to the learning processes that take place. The definition of strategy in this context is taken as a procedure that is used to develop, and promote learning process, it is developed by both the teacher and the learner based on the learning outcome desired (Hymes, 1964). The choice of a learning strategy will affect the way the learner acquires, selects, integrates, and organizes new information, and may alter the motivational state of the learner (Hymes, 1967).

Joseph, (2013), reported that the studies on strategy research that have been done mostly focus on the attributes of a good learner, and show the strategies a

good language learner employs in the process of learning the second language (L2). This shows that all language learners use certain types of strategies, but the occurrence of use varies from learner to learner. Learners' have psychological and social differences, and therefore cannot use the same learning strategies.

Strategies used for adolescents and adults cannot be used for children.

Cultural Dynamics of Language Acquisition

Culture is technically defined as people's learned, shared behaviors and beliefs (Miller, 2007). The culture of Nigerians entails values that consider teaching as a noble profession. Teachers typically command significant levels of respect from both the students and the community at large. This environment facilitates the student's interpretation of the teacher as the benchmark to which they try to emulate, which enables the educator to have a dominating influence in their academic decisions. It is through this perception that a second language learner will tend to rely more on the teacher than the rest of the students (Gumperz, 2001). As stated earlier, the strategies should be tailored to meet the dynamic needs of the students including culture and therefore, the teacher should lead the students in the best way to easily and comprehensively master the language as there is a higher chance the teacher will dominate and influence the choice of strategy to be used by such a learner. The teacher should take the cultural background to effectively deliver the best as the learner expects the teacher to be perfect.

Social effectiveness is the worst hit strategy in the Nigerian set up. Due to their cultural set up, where languages are spoken without nodding of the head or shrugging of shoulders – except to show approval or otherwise. The system therefore maintains nodding and shrugging as a sign of showing-off or prestige. Whereas, the native speaker employ nodding and shrugging unconsciously as para-linguistic items. The system blocks out the social effectiveness of free speech and imposes anxiety in learning of English. During informal communication, people typically use physical gestures, facial expressions, and many other informal types of body language to convey various messages.

With such, the second language learner will have difficulty in learning language in an environment that will differ from what s/he already knows. The understanding of such background information will help the instructors of these students to structure their strategies in a manner that is acceptable by the learner. At no instance should there be a conflict between the learner and the teacher concerning social setup or difference in belief; therefore, the teacher should appreciate the cultural beliefs of the learner.

Language acquisition is based on mastery of the five aspects of language knowledge, which are classified as morphemic, phonetic, pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic. These elements constitute the foundational attributes that comprise the three levels of language knowledge, which are linguistic knowledge, metalinguistic knowledge, and verbalization of metalinguistic knowledge (Otto, 2010). Since the mother tongue is, in most cases, every child's first language, this is the foundation by which each individual bases all future knowledge concerning language acquisition, as (Harris, 2009) observes that learning how to communicate orally is the prelude to mastery of an additional linguistic paradigm.

Slang is a cultural aspect of linguistic expression that is typically defined as an informal way of speaking derived exclusively from the speaker's awareness of social and stylistic customs as well as the slang status of any word or phrase (Bullard, Johnson, Morris, Fox, & Howell, 2010). Such terminologies often exist as culturally relevant jargon that interjects various stylistic elements into daily vernacular and they are linked to different kinds of social interactions that give the unique vocabulary meaning (Duff, 2001). The recognition and use of slang or jargon as a linguistic element is specifically linked with the connection these expressions have to cultural or societal dynamics (Joseph, 2013). This includes the social jargon of small, localized groups that may be widespread for a short period before fading into obscurity. The origins and dynamics of casual speech tend to be ethnically inclined and originate within various areas so those native to the area can deliver messages faster and express ideas, events, or experiences (Bullard, Johnson, Morris, Fox, & Howell, 2010).

Individuals that are attempting to become bi or multi-lingual do not always speak in the same way, illustrating that code-switching and code-mixing are common phenomena in speech, where at least two languages communally exist (Annamali, 1989). The most basic definition of code switching describes an act that occurs in conversation where two languages come into contact with each other and both languages are used interchangeably (Appel & Muysken, 2006; Deibert,

2008; Halmari, 1997; Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Liu, 2008; Poplack, 2001). These transient dynamics create perpetual fluctuations in linguistic meaning that are culturally derived and the creation of new terminologies ensures that languages are continually changed and renewed. The migration of casual conversational terms between cultures and races and the adaptations of these cultural terms by different groups help diverse people connect through the assimilation of linguistics and magnify the boundaries of interpersonal communication (Bullard, Johnson, Morris, Fox, & Howell, 2010). The paradigms of linguistic acquisition are not restricted to simply words, but gestures and body language as well and nonverbal messages are a large part of interpersonal

communication.

Some of these informal communicative patterns are coded within the culture of language deeply imbedded within the human vernacular not limited by social boundaries and can exist in all languages, cultures, and classes of society. In examining the cultural aspects of linguistic acquisition and the development of multi-language skills, the deeper relevance to EFL/ESL individuals can be examined through analysis of current practice.

For example as presented by (Abdo & Breen, 2010), students whose native language is Arabic face a particularly challenging learning curve when attempting to learn English as a second language due to the significant differences inherent in the dynamics of these vastly different languages.

1. Arabic is written from right to left, which is the exact opposite of English.
2. Arabic orthography is subjective depending on the placement of the letter in the word, which means that the shapes of letters varies according to their initial, medial, or end placement in a word. Conversely, English letters only change shape if they are upper or lower case,
3. In English grapho-phonetic rules that govern the treatment of vowels are unpredictable and irregular, but predictable in Arabic,
4. Verb-free sentences in English would include a copula, but are allowable in Arabic, and
5. Arabic tenses are indicated by the addition of a suffix to a root.

While these are simply a few of the rules that differentiate these two languages, the differences are so vast that Jordanian ESL/EFL learners cannot rely on Arabic (L1) competence for building English (L2) competence. From the foregoing, it is seen that covertly or overtly culture affects the general acquisition of language especially in learning a foreign language. Although there are many differences, these are just a few of the major obstacles that present for EFL/ESL learners whose native tongue is not English.

In the case of the languages of the target students the few inherent differences that are exhibited are, in Hausa language for instance:

1. Most consonants must be accompanied by a vowel, except in use of double consonants, as in 'Tattasai' where there must not be a vowel for the second 't'. While in English language there could be 2, 3 or more consonants before a vowel and double consonants are considered as a single sound, as in 'E-ngl-ish' and bubble where the double 'b' are pronounced as single sound.
2. Rising and falling tones are not significant like it is in English language.

Differences between the English language and any of the languages of the target students minimal which only interfere in pronunciation of English words. Unlike the Arabic language, our languages drive their method of writing from the English orthography. Therefore the barrier for ESL in the case of this study area is culture-bound not rule-bound.

It is not that English is a different language but because, apart from other barriers, the cultural barrier is one that is creating obstacles in learning ESL.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table-1. Usage of both your culture and English cultural based factors

S/N	Questions	Strongly agree	Partially agree	Undecided	Partially disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Using our culturally related topics in discussions would lead to a better understanding of English Texts.	30%	10%	–	10%	50%
2	Knowing the culture of English speaking country would facilitate the learning process.	12%	25	5	18	40%
3	Learners would select subjects for discussions based on their culture.	2%	8%	10%	50%	30%

Table-2. Faithfulness to your culture

S/N	Questions	Totally agree	Partially agree	Undecided	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
4	Learners' fear of losing their traditions and values has negative effect on ESL	10%	7%	7%	16%	60%
5	Learners faithfulness to their culture and religious believes would limit learners not to choose, subjects that is not suitable to the culture.	15%	20%	15%	20%	30%
6	Using religion-related topics would lead to a better understanding of the texts.	–	20%	–	–	80%

Table-3. Taboo words, Religious and Political beliefs

S/N	Questions	Totally agree	Partially agree	Undecided	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
7	Culture has to be a part of English Language Learning?	60%	15%	–	5	20%
8	Taboo words cause perception gape for learners.	15%	50%	15%	10%	10%
9	Learners refuse using English words which are taboo words in their language.	10%	45%	10%	7%	28%

Table-4. Teacher based questions

S/N	Questions	Totally agree	Partially agree	Undecided	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
10	Culture affects students learning English language.	60%	20%	–	–	20%
11	Teachers of English are aware that culture affects language learning.	15%	50%	15%	10%	10%
12	It is possible to teach English language without teaching its culture.	10%	7%	10%	45%	28%
13	Teaching English language affects one's culture.	40%	10%	30%	5%	15%

The questionnaires were distributed to 90 students using a Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly disagree) to 1 (strongly agree) which include 9 questions to the students to assess their responses in regard to the effect of culture in English language learning and the cultural elements which might hinder their learning process and there are information about a number of items which are existed in the tables. The questionnaire are divided into four parts, first usage of both their culture and English cultural based factors , Second one faithfulness to your culture, third one Religious and political belief and last one taboo words as cultural barrier. Based on the opinion of the students, the usage of both English and their culture is not a necessary top priority in the community English is being studied (10% & 50% - disagree). It also analyzed that barriers like taboo words (18% & 40% - disagree), political relations (80% - disagree) are partially effective or totally not effective on student's learning of ESL. According to the information from the tables above, students disagreed with the first up to the nine questions, except question five, in categories 1-3, where they are indifferent with item 5 in category 2.

In short, we can explicate that based on the result students under study area do not see the interference culture in their learning ESL. The implication of students' response can be attributed to effects of globalization. From the last category, teacher based questions, we can infer that teachers strongly agree that culture affects students learning ESL. They also believed that as teachers teaching ESL affects their culture. While teachers under study content that it is possible to teach English without teaching its culture.

The English language spoken in Nigeria can be identified with many faulty realizations which are mainly phonological and structural, (Saleh, T. S. & Maina U. A 2018 &2019). This is as a result of being Nigeria a multilingual and diverse multi-cultural society with already existing sociolinguistic influence such as nature and structure of the first language of individual language communities.

Examination of the selected case study by implication, demonstrates that there is a need for the ESL teachers to understand the skills, and cultural heritage that their students bring to the classroom. Additional research suggests that teachers should develop pedagogical practices that investigate the relationship that exist between student's cognitive progress, the social, and the cultural context in which they engage in ESL/EFL educational paradigms. The case study further indicates that learning is mediated by social-cultural practices of students.

To supplement the indications presented in the case study, a survey was conducted in which students and EFL/ESL instructors were asked about their views regarding the inclusion of culturally relevant instruction amalgamated with the linguistic context. The results of

this survey strengthened the argument posited in this paper, which favors the inclusion of cultural paradigms when teaching ESL/EFL to learners of English as a second language.

CONCLUSION

The English language spoken in Nigeria can be identified with many faulty realizations. This is as a result of the diverse multilingual and sociolinguistic influence such as culture, age, and environment, method of acquisition, nature and structure of the first language of the learner.

Many studies like cited(Gardner, 2012, Gholson & Stumpf, 2005, Ajayi, 2008, DeCapua, 2008) contended that , to learn this language completely, one does not only need to listen to it but to also have a good grasp of its culture and maintain a deep understanding of his culture. Contrarily the students of Yobe State College of Agriculture and that of College of Administration and Business Studies of the same state feel that in this modern world and considering the role of ESL in the country, in addition, considering the long lasting stay of English in the country, learning the English language does not necessarily posit a barrier to learning.

Limitations of the Study

Research using the findings of a case study has inherent limitations in that the study sample may be limited, as well as the extent of control the researcher has since this process relies on examination of information derived from restricted venues. Furthermore, restricting the discussion to EFL/ESL learners from the North-East of the country that most of them practice different religion and with different background of the English language from their counterpart in the South, limits the generalizability of the results. Another limitation stems from the manner in which the data is collected because case study data often represent natural behavior, making it difficult to categorize and organize responses in a meaningful and qualitative way. Case study research often requires some creativity on the researcher's part, such as analysis, and the challenges mentioned will be addressed by conduction similar studies, especially in the south and careful selection of the studies used in support of the findings to avoid inclusion of invalid details.

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