

## **Learning English for a Specific Purpose: A Case Study of a Tailored Curriculum for an ESL Home Care Provider**

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### **Abstract**

An advanced speaker of English as a Second Language (ESL) who became a home care provider in the United States lacked sufficient knowledge of English vocabulary and American culture to perform services. To assist her, a tailored curriculum for content-based instruction for linguistic and cultural competence using a learner-centered approach and authentic materials was created to meet her needs. This study aims to determine whether such a curriculum was effective in improving the learner's language and cultural knowledge. Monthly quizzes were administered for three months and showed that she learned numerous words explicitly taught. The paper concludes that tailored instruction on English vocabulary and culture should be provided for non-native English-speaking home care providers before or during their work.

### **Introduction**

Many elderly who live at home employ a home care provider for additional support and daily services. A home care provider is a person who provides assistance and companionship to someone in his or her home. According to the National Institute of Health, "Home care is care that allows a person with special needs to stay in their home. It might be for people who are getting older, are chronically ill, recovering from surgery, or disabled" (CALPRO, 2020, p. 1). Home care provision is typically conducted by a paid professional or by a family member. This paper will provide a case study of Mönkh (pseudonym), an ESL (English as a Second Language) caregiver employed as a companion and caregiver to Mrs. Moore (pseudonym), an elderly woman who lived at home with her family. It will describe the authentic materials used to improve Mönkh's English and cultural understanding. When Mönkh was hired, her English ability was considered adequate for the position because it was at the advanced level. However, it became apparent that she needed to improve her English ability and understanding of cultural events that were important to her client's family. Therefore, a tailored curriculum was developed with attention paid to the learners' specific linguistic and cultural needs as they appeared. This paper will describe such a curriculum, in which authentic materials are used in content-based instruction to develop vocabulary and cultural knowledge. It will then report on preliminary assessment of the curriculum's effectiveness and the learner's perception of the curriculum.



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### **Global Aging, the Home Care Profession and Immigrants**

Global aging is a demographic change that profoundly affects elders' needs for care across the globe. People are living longer, thus requiring more people to take care of them. According to Stone (2016), "One in eight individuals worldwide will be age 65 or older by 2030" (p. 99). By 2050, the size of the elderly population in the United States is projected to become twice as large as it is now (Institute of Medicine [U.S.] Committee of the Future Health Care Workforce for Older Americans, 2008; Salsberg & Martiniano, 2018). As a result, the field of home care has grown exponentially in the United States over the past years. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the home care workforce has more than doubled from 2005 to 2015 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Bill Dombi, president of the National Association for Home Care and Hospice, stated that, "In 2015, it was the first time nationally that more money was spent on home care than nursing care" (Rogers, 2018, p. 1). In the future, the field of home care as a profession will continue to expand. From 2014 to 2024, home care workers are projected to add more jobs to the U.S. economy than any single occupation (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). This change reflects an increased need for home care providers nationally, which will require additional training of home care providers. The current need to provide the elderly with home care providers has required some developed countries to use immigrant home care providers (Stone, 2016; Redfoot & Houser, 2005; Colombo et al., 2011). Some developed countries that use immigrant home care providers are the U.S., Canada, and Australia (Fujisawa & Colombo, 2009) and the United Kingdom (Cangiano & Shutes, 2010). For these reasons, it is important to examine the quality of communication and understanding between immigrant home care providers and their clients.

In the United States, in 2017, 18.2% of health care workers were immigrants (Zallman et al., 2019). These immigrants may be newcomers to the United States or have lived in the United States for decades. For example, the Mongolian home care provider discussed in this paper has lived in the United States for two and a half decades.

Based on my observations, when a non-native English speaker obtains a job in the field of home care as a companion, his or her English proficiency and knowledge of U.S. culture need to be at least at the intermediate level. Home care providers need to comprehend what is said in discussions and the cultural implications of the points made by interlocutors in a home setting. Some ESL speakers may not have sufficient knowledge of vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, or cultural concepts to participate fully in discussions. This may also be true even for ESL speakers who are considered advanced speakers of English. They still need to learn the person's culture for whom they are providing companionship to have meaningful conversations with them. In a sense, English for home care provision is for a *very* specific purpose within the field of ESP (English for Specific Purposes). Not only is the language of home care within a specific domain, but also requires a different degree of specific linguistic and cultural knowledge and competence to interact effectively with each client. This study aims to explore the nature and effectiveness of a curriculum that addresses this level of specificity.

### **Second Language Training for International Home Care Providers**

A review of the literature did not reveal many courses or training programs designed to improve the English proficiency of home care providers who will serve as companions. Ho (2015) reports about the socio-pragmatic aspects featured in an ESL home care provider training program. For example, a nurse instructor taught students to use the phrase “I notice you’re a little under the weather,” instead of “Are you depressed?” since the former is more sensitive and appropriate to elders.

Two rare courses were designed to improve home care providers’ English proficiencies. “English for Health Care Workers,” sponsored by the National Union of Hospital and Health 1199 SEIU (Service Employees International Union) was designed to “improve workers’ communication skills” (1199SEIU Home Care Industry Education Fund, 2021). The Erode College of Pharmacy Health Care in India offers the course “Health Care for ESL 1,” which focuses on “Introduction to Communications (Erode College of Pharmacy Health Care, 2016). This focus is designed to expose students to a variety of English language terms and views.

The scarcity of training programs designed to improve the English of home care providers demonstrates the need for this current study of the effectiveness of a curriculum designed to improve the English of a non-native English-speaking home care provider. This study draws our attention to the specific linguistic and cultural knowledge that home care companions of the elderly need to be aware of and understand to perform their job competently.

### **Research Question**

The overall research question for this study is: How effective is content-based instruction for linguistic and cultural competence using a learner-centered approach in teaching English as a second language to a home care provider?

### **The Context**

#### **The Learner**

Mönkh is a paid caregiver for Mrs. Moore, an elderly woman living with her family. Mönkh is an expressive, people-oriented individual who has a love for connecting with people. At the time of the study, Mönkh was a 60-year-old Mongolian woman who had lived in the United States for 25 years. She started working for Mrs. Moore on November 29, 2019 on a part-time basis. As a result of the Coronavirus Disease 2019, Mönkh terminated her employment with the family during the first week of March 2020. The data collection took three months to complete.

Mönkh’s English proficiency can be characterized as advanced, fluent, and conversational. She liberally uses advanced adjectives in her speech such as “pristine” and “serene.” Mönkh considers herself essentially self-taught in English. She began learning English in 1982 in Mongolia when she took an evening course for five months to learn the English alphabet and basic English. In 1990 Mönkh studied English for a month at a local university. In 1999 she studied English for a month at the Kaplan International Language School. Mönkh learned academic English at the graduate level when she was a graduate student in the United States (2000 to 2002). She earned a bachelor’s degree in Mongolia and a master’s degree in the United

States. Although Mönkh had lived in the U.S. for a long time and is married to an American citizen born and raised in the United States, she reported she had not learned many idiomatic expressions needed for her job. Mönkh has a positive attitude about improving her English and, in particular, her knowledge of English idioms. She is very motivated to improve all aspects of her English proficiency and knowledge of U.S. culture.

Mönkh was initially selected as a home care provider for Mrs. Moore because she fit well with the family's culture regarding the family's interests, values, and needs. Mönkh is trilingual, speaking Mongolian and Russian fluently. She was born in Mongolia, has an advanced degree, and has chosen travel as a profession. All of these characteristics created a match between Mönkh, the client, and her family.

In order for Mönkh to serve effectively as a companion to Mrs. Moore, she needed to become part of the group when she was with Mrs. Moore. For this, Mönkh needed to learn the vocabulary, idioms, euphemisms, nuances, innuendos, and cultural concepts held and expressed by Mrs. Moore and her family members.

### **The Client and Her Family**

Mrs. Moore, Mönkh's client, is a retired university professor interested in watching movies every evening at dinner for enjoyment and relaxation, often with one of her daughters and Mönkh on a nightly basis. She enjoys watching movies from the 1930s and 1940s starring Cary Grant, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Humphrey Bogart, and the Marx Brothers. The client also enjoys watching ballet, classical music, and detective movies. She enjoys the conversations about the movies. Mrs. Moore appreciates the arts, as seen by her interest in classical music, ballet, and opera. She enjoys talking with peaceful, respectful people who have interesting things to say, such as Mönkh.

Mönkh's job as a home care provider required her to participate in conversations with Mrs. Moore and family members, eat dinner, watch movies and discuss them as part of the group. Since Mönkh also interacted with Mrs. Moore's family members as part of her job, a brief description of the family context is in order. The family members value education, language learning, and international travel. They appreciate classic movies from the "Golden Age of Hollywood" of the 1930s and 1940s with funny, high quality, upbeat singing, jazz-swing music, energetic dancing, comedy, glamorous clothes, and classic cars. They have mixed religious and ethnic backgrounds that reflect its culture and history from a secular perspective: Episcopalianism and Judaism. Therefore, certain family members celebrate the major holidays of both religions, such as Easter, Christmas, Passover, and Chanukah. These are important details for backgrounding and the curriculum design for Mönkh.

### **The Motivation for A Tailored Curriculum**

As one of the daughters in the family and as an experienced ESL teacher with a master's degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of English as a Second language) and a Ph.D. in Educational Linguistics, specializing in Second Language Acquisition, I decided to teach ESL to Mönkh on a volunteer basis during the time that Mönkh provided home care for my mother (Mönkh's client). The decision to improve Mönkh's English abilities was made when it became

clear during the first week of Mönkh's employment that she did not understand several of the words and idioms used in conversations with Mrs. Moore and family members. It was realized that in order for Mönkh to perform her job as a caregiver adequately, she would need to increase her knowledge of English vocabulary and idioms and deepen her knowledge of U.S. culture. By doing so, Mönkh would be able to serve as a companion to Mrs. Moore and converse easily with her and family members about the topics that interest Mrs. Moore. It would also enable Mönkh to acculturate into the family as a pseudo-member when she was with Mrs. Moore and the family.

## **The Curriculum**

### ***Pedagogical Approaches***

The pedagogical approach used was communicative in nature (Savignon, 1991; Canale & Swain 1980). It was designed to help Mönkh's communicative competence within the family's culture in a timely manner (Regina & Chinwe, 2014; Scarcella, Andersen & Krashen, 1990). The teaching was designed to develop Mönkh's communicative competence as a pseudo-family member. Authentic materials and realia were used to assist Mönkh in learning numerous words and expressions in context.

Content-based instruction (CBI) (a method in Communicative Language Teaching) was used to teach Mönkh about the movies and food eaten by the family (Song 2006, Chapple & Curtis 2000). The focus of many discussions between Mönkh and the family members were movies and food.

The pedagogical approaches used to improve Mönkh's English proficiency and understanding of U.S. culture were learner-centered and discussion-based (Guant & Stott, 2019; Henning, 2008; Delamont, 1983). The teaching was learner-centered because it focused exclusively on Mönkh's ability to speak English and understand U.S. culture. The curriculum was co-constructed by Mönkh and me as her ESL teacher daily. Mönkh co-constructed the curriculum by contributing words, expressions, and cultural concepts that she did not comprehend from the movies she watched and conversations surrounding them. The curriculum consisted of vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, grammar, culture, and pronunciation new to Mönkh. The teaching was discussion-based because it centered on discussions that occurred at dinner and during other times, Mönkh was conversing with Mrs. Moore and family members.

A culturally responsive approach was used during instruction Mönkh when discussing U.S. culture, the culture of Mrs. Moore's family, and relating it to Mönkh's Mongolian culture. According to Samuels (2018), a culturally responsive approach is "a student-centered approach to teaching that includes cultural references and recognizes the importance of students' cultural backgrounds and experiences in all aspects of learning" (pp. 22-23). As her ESL teacher, I tried to include Mönkh's culture in family discussions whenever possible. For example, Mönkh's fascinating discussion with Mrs. Moore and me about using horses by nomads in Mongolia. Mönkh also described how she felt riding horses in Mongolia and Iceland. The topic of horses was introduced when Mönkh learned the English word "gelding" used in the movie "National Velvet."

Mönkh's Mongolian culture and language backgrounds were seen as resources for her English vocabulary acquisition and U.S. culture. For example, I taught Mönkh the word

“camaraderie” because it was used in the movie “Dancing with Mr. B: Six Balanchine Ballerinas.”<sup>1</sup> Mönkh had not understood the meaning of the word “camaraderie” in the sentence “There was always camaraderie between Balanchine and the dancers.” However, Mönkh’s knowledge of English and Russian words “comrade” was helpful for me as a starting point in explaining the word “camaraderie” in English.

### ***The Teaching Materials***

I used authentic materials and realia-in-context to improve Mönkh’s English and understanding of U.S. culture. The term authentic materials refer to “print, video, and audio materials students encounter in their daily lives” (CALPRO Factsheet, 2020, p. 1). Authentic materials are useful for language learners to deepen their knowledge of their second language and its culture because of the language learning contexts that they provide in the classroom. They are used in ESL classrooms and have been found by multiple studies to “motivate learners, arouse their interest and expose them to the real language they will face in the real world” (Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014, p. 249).<sup>2</sup>

Authentic materials were used in the home where Mönkh worked because they were an integral part of her client’s daily life and thus were essential to the job that Mönkh needed to perform. Examples of authentic materials in the home that Mönkh, Mrs. Moore, and I discussed include movies across multiple genres and items related to the house, such as newspapers and cards. Other examples of authentic materials were information found online using Google, Wikipedia, YouTube, and CNN. The focus of this paper will be on the use of authentic materials and realia on Mönkh’s English proficiency and ability to comprehend U.S. culture.

In addition, Herrebosch (2016, p. 11) uses the term realia to refer to “objects that one can find in their house or in the shop.” Examples of realia used with Mönkh included the types of food that were eaten by the family, which were new to her, such as the fishes Branzino and Red Snapper.

Table 1 provides the number of authentic materials and realia (movies, types of foods, or other objects) used to teach Mönkh ESL and U.S. culture. As shown in the table, the majority, 76%, of the authentic materials used were movies, with 19% being the words for food and 5% being objects. The food and objects are considered realia because they were not created for communication. Three objects were new to Mönkh. They were an advent wreath (*Adventskranz*), a Chanukah menorah, and a candle snuffer. The advent wreath was a new tradition for the family borrowed from the German tradition of lighting a candle every Sunday prior to Christmas. The Chanukah menorah was a tradition used by the family every year to celebrate Chanukah.

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1 George Balanchine (1904-1983) was an internationally acclaimed ballet choreographer and dancer.

2 See Al Azri and Al Rashdi (2014) for a review of how authentic materials have been used in the ESL classroom. See also Zyzik and Polio (2017) for a review of myths about how to use authentic materials in the classroom and activities designed to dispel the myths Zyzik and Polio (2017).



Table 1  
*Authentic Materials and Realia Used to Teach Mönkh ESL and Culture*

Authentic Materials and Realia	Total number of Occurrences	Percentage
Movies	47	76
Food	12	19
Objects	3	5
Total	62	100

Mönkh was taught verbs, nouns, and adjectives that she heard while watching and discussing movies. She was also taught the difference between literal and figurative vocabulary to help explain figurative vocabulary in idioms. Mönkh was also taught the difference between passive and active vocabulary to understand how a learner could learn a new word or expression. She learned that one can learn vocabulary passively and comprehend words when they are used in conversations. In contrast, one can learn vocabulary actively by using them in conversations. Mönkh learned that some of the words and expressions she was taught are not used every day. However, it was to her benefit to recognize and understand the words when she hears them. My goal in teaching Mönkh new vocabulary and idioms was to help her to learn to use them in conversations.

Mönkh was taught about the anthropologist Edward T. Hall's (1973, 1976) Iceberg Theory of Culture, which is the theory that only 10% of culture is visible and the remaining part is invisible. Mönkh needed to understand Hall's Iceberg Theory of Culture in order for her to understand the discussions that she was having with me about the family's cultural values and beliefs. In addition, Mönkh was taught several U.S. historical, cultural concepts from the movies which were new to her, e.g., the Borscht Belt and the censorship of movies. These concepts were discussed in the movies viewed or afterward in family discussions.

Concerning the cultural concepts introduced to Mönkh, they include cultural references in movies and Mrs. Moore's family cultural practice. I taught her concepts shown in movies that are known by her family members and assumed by them to be common knowledge. For example, Mönkh was taught about the superstition "It is bad luck to walk under a ladder" from the movie "The Third Man" (1949). A common question asked after viewing a movie was "What did you think about the movie?" which was discussed as a group. Mönkh was taught the culture of the family by learning about new types of food that the family members eat such as: Bronzino, crème fraîche, dragon fruit, fennel, hors d'oeuvres, passion fruit, persimmon, pomelo, quesadilla, Red Snapper, Shad and spanakopita. Mönkh learned about the family's ways of celebrating Christmas with an advent wreath and Chanukah with a menorah. The family's traditions were new to Mönkh because she was not raised to celebrate either holiday.

Table 2 provides the cultural figures and concepts taught to Mönkh as a result of watching and discussing movies at dinner.

Table 2

*Cultural Figures and Concepts Taught to Mönkh from Viewing and Discussing Movies*

Categories	Examples	Years Active Professionally
Actors	William Powell	1911-1955
	Myrna Loy	1925-1982
Choreographers	George Balanchine	1929-1983
	Busby Berkeley	1901-1971
	Jerome Robbins	1937-1998
Comedians	The Marx Brothers	1905-1949
Composer	George Gershwin	1916-1937
Dancers	Fred Astaire	1904-1981
	Ginger Rogers	1925-1987
	Rudolph Nureyev	1958-1992
Musicians	Benny Goodman	1926-1986
	Pete Seeger	1939-2014
Singers	Dick Powell	1930-1963
	Mae West	1907-1980
Superstition	Don't walk under a ladder	
U.S. Cultural History	Movie censorship Status: Manhattan, Brooklyn The Borscht Belt The Forgotten Man WWI The Vanderbilt Family	

Table 2 shows that 19 of the 20 cultural figures and concepts taught to Mönkh from viewing and discussing movies were from the past, dating from WW1 (1914-to 1918) to WW2. Except for Rudolph Nureyev, the rest of the singers and dancers performed primarily in the 1930s and 1940s. The variety of cultural figures reflect Mrs. Moore's interests in movies from those eras.

I created a course textbook that consisted of the verbs, nouns, adjectives, idioms, euphemisms, and cultural concepts which Mönkh did not understand. The course textbook also includes the concepts of passive and active vocabulary and literal and figurative language, e.g., the euphemistic expression "to be made redundant" instead of firing someone. Mönkh was taught about the passive and active use of vocabulary. Some of the words that Mönkh learned she had heard before but had not understood, e.g., "kudos." The course textbook also contains



biographical explanations, photographs of the people discussed in the textbook, and maps of places such as the Borscht Belt. Photographs were also used to help illustrate the meaning of specific nouns and adjectives such as “tiara,” “shifty,” and “coy,” as well as people in the entertainment industry such as George Balanchine, Busby Berkeley, Benny Goodman, and Jerome Robbins.

The course textbook contains words that were collected by Mönkh and me throughout Fall 2019-Spring 2020. Mönkh used a pad of paper at dinner to write words she did not comprehend about the movies viewed at dinner and the dinner conversation. I did the same to ensure that the curriculum included frequently used words, idioms, and cultural concepts which Mönkh might not understand.

### ***Teaching Procedures***

I taught words, idioms, and cultural concepts to Mönkh immediately after her shift was finished each evening. I explained words, idioms and cultural concepts that Mönkh did not understand or misunderstood. The words included in the course textbook were taught and reviewed by me once again. I reviewed with Mönkh the content of the course textbook periodically every several weeks and in preparation for her quizzes. She included words in conversations that had been taught previously to Mönkh. After every session, I made notes in a journal with Mönkh of the words, idioms, and cultural concepts that she did not understand.

### ***Assessment Instruments and Procedures***

Formative assessments were given to Mönkh of the vocabulary, idioms and cultural concepts taught at the end of every month. The vocabulary and idiomatic quizzes required Mönkh to write a definition and an original sentence for each word supplied. The vocabulary quizzes consisted of nouns, verbs, and adjectives used and discussed while watching the movies. The culture quiz contained definitions for each concept and a section for explaining its importance.

Three practice quizzes were given to Mönkh once a month to prepare her for the vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and culture quizzes. These practice quizzes were used as heuristics for me to help determine which concepts taught were not comprehended by Mönkh and needed to be retaught. There was a total of 19 words, 11 idioms, and 6 cultural concepts in the three quizzes. There were 9 nouns, 9 verbs, 19 adjectives, and 23 idioms in the practice quizzes.

Table 3 provides the total number of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and idioms that Mönkh was tested on in three quizzes and two practice quizzes. The table shows that the total of words and idioms that were tested, a large percentage was idioms (84%). The large number of idioms taught to Mönkh was the result of the use of authentic materials and speech used in the movies shown and conversation at the dinner table with Mönkh, Mrs. Moore, and her family.

Table 3  
*The Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives, and Idioms that Mönkh was Tested On*

	Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Idioms
Quiz 1	3	2	4	0
Pop Quiz 1	1	1	3	1
Idiom Quiz 1	0	0	0	6
Practice Quiz 1	10	4	3	6
Quiz 2	3	3	4	9
Pop Quiz 2	0	1	4	1
Idiom Quiz 2	0	0	0	2
Practice Quiz 2	0	1	4	2
Quiz 3	2	2	4	1
Pop Quiz 3	0	0	0	0
Idiom Quiz 3	0	0	0	3
Practice Quiz 3	0	0	0	0
Total	19	14	26	31

### Questionnaire and Field Notes

On February 17, 2020, Mönkh completed a questionnaire regarding the use of authentic materials in the curriculum and her thoughts about the effectiveness of using them in the family home context. Mönkh was asked to complete the questionnaire at her home and return it to me at her leisure. She was told to take as much time as she needed to complete it. The questionnaire was designed to understand Mönkh's perspective of the effectiveness of using authentic materials to improve her knowledge of English, vocabulary, idioms, and U.S. culture.

The questionnaire asked six questions regarding Mönkh's thoughts about 1) whether her English vocabulary improved due to learning authentic materials, 2) whether her English idioms improved due learning authentic materials, 3) whether her knowledge of U.S. culture improved due learning authentic materials, 4) the advantages of having an ESL teacher with no other students, and 5) how she would describe the culture of the family for whom she worked.

Field notes were used as a tool to record Mönkh's spontaneous speech. I took field notes of Mönkh's spontaneous responses regarding her opinions about the value of the course. She wrote the field notes after Mönkh's work was completed for the night, and she had time to speak with me about the importance of learning English vocabulary and discussing the concept that had been unknown to her. This procedure was continued regularly for the three months that the course was provided to Mönkh.

## Findings

### Quiz Results

Table 4 provides Mönkh's results for three vocabularies, idiom, and culture quizzes.

Table 4  
*Results for Mönkh's Vocabulary, Idiom, and Culture Quizzes*

	Vocabulary Correct		Idioms Correct		Cultural Concepts Correct	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Quiz 1	9	78	6	83	2	50
Quiz 2	10	80	2	50	2	50
Quiz 3	10	95	3	68	2	100
Total	29		11		6	

Table 4 shows that Mönkh had a higher accuracy rate for vocabulary from Quizzes 1 to 3. She still struggled with producing correct idioms in Quiz 3. The comprehension of cultural concepts proved challenging to Mönkh in Quizzes 1 and 2. It is important to keep in mind that the total number of questions on the exams is not large enough to determine if the differences between them are statistically significant.

After I graded Mönkh's quizzes, I discussed with Mönkh all of the words that she had defined incorrectly. I retaught the concepts that Mönkh had misunderstood so that she could understand them. Mönkh was given three pop quizzes of the words and idioms in Table 4 that she had defined incorrectly. After Mönkh completed the pop quizzes, I reviewed each item on the pop quiz to ensure that Mönkh understood it. The reason Mönkh was given pop quizzes was to provide another opportunity for Mönkh to learn the words and idioms that she had not understood when she took each quiz.

Table 5 provides Mönkh's results for three quizzes that consisted of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and idioms. The table indicates that the teaching conducted after each quiz was effective in improving Mönkh's comprehension of 14 of the 15 items tested. The only word that Mönkh did not write correctly was the word "coy" in Quiz 2. She defined it correctly as "reluctant to share information, nor direct or pretending to be shy." Mönkh did not use the word "coy" in her example sentence as explained in the quiz directions. Instead, Mönkh wrote, "A girl wasn't telling the truth about her identity. So the policeman gently said, "Don't play a game." instead of writing, "Don't be coy with me. I don't like to play games." This final sentence was the example sentence used in the discussion of the word "coy" after Mönkh took the Vocabulary Quiz 2. Of interest, the expression "Every man can't be Andrew Carnegie" may appear outdated to the younger generation who may not have heard of Andrew Carnegie. The updated expression "Not everyone can be Bill Gates" is comparable to this expression.

Table 5  
*Results for Mönkh's Noun, Verb, Adjective, and Idiom Quizzes*

	Noun	Verb	Adjective	Idiom
Quiz 1	<i>protégé</i> 1	<i>to squeal</i> 1	<i>notorious</i> 1 <i>poignant</i> 1 <i>risqué</i> 1	<i>to be made redundant</i> 1
Quiz 2	None	<i>to purport</i> 1	<i>coy</i> 0 <i>jovial</i> 1 <i>frivolous</i> 1 <i>placid</i> 1	<i>to be on tenterhooks</i> 1
Quiz 3	None	None	None	<i>Every man can't be Andrew Carnegie</i> 1 <i>to be cooped up</i> 1
Total	1	2	6	4

*Note.* 1 = correct response, 0 = incorrect response

### Informal Assessment

I assessed informally Mönkh's comprehension of the English spoken during all conversations and her conversational skills, including her use of vocabulary. For example, she commented to Mönkh that the ballet *Les Sylphides* starring Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev in the movie "An Evening with the Royal Ballet" which they had just finished watching was "tranquil." From the blank look on Mönkh's face, it was clear that she did not understand the meaning of the word "tranquil." After explaining its meaning, I included the adjective "tranquil" and the noun "tranquility" in the course textbook and thus as part of the curriculum.

### The Learner's Perception Questionnaire

Mönkh explained that her knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, and U.S. culture improved as a result of learning English in the home setting and using the authentic materials. Of interest, she wrote regarding her increased knowledge of English idioms:

"Growing up using idioms in my native language, it's frustrating not knowing English idioms to express myself wisely. Learning idioms while watching movies or just communicating and having conversations with the family members are great experience and good exercise. Idioms offer how to behave and also transmits principles, values of American culture and society." (Response to questionnaire, January 30, 2021)

In response to this question, "Do you think that there are advantages to learning English in someone's home?" she wrote:

"[A]bsolutely great advantage of learning English in American family home, observed daily life, interesting new word or expression how to use them in conversation, new food and drinks, observing interaction between family members, body language, house design and organizing. Home and garden all helped enhance my cultural experience." (Response to questionnaire, January 30, 2021).

### ***Spontaneous Responses***

Mönkh expressed to me her opinions about the usefulness of the course periodically throughout the course. She emphasized the importance of this type of age-oriented curriculum when she said to me:

“This is a great experience for me. Perhaps later if I work with an older person I will have a good conversation with them.” (Fieldnotes, January 17, 2020)

Many of the authentic materials used in the curriculum reflected the age and interests of Mrs. Moore. An age-oriented curriculum is a curriculum in which the topics and vocabulary taught have relevance to the age of the person who needed care from the home care provider. Mönkh told me that she valued the course because it made her feel

“part of the society and community feeling of belonging. Learning the language is everyday language. It is more important to immersion into the culture to become a global citizen. Even if you are not talking fluent English you don’t feel like you belong to the community, good enough to learn the customs. This type of teaching is real as learning the language.” (Fieldnotes, February 2020)

Mönkh was exposed to food eaten by the family as well as their names. She said spontaneously to me:

“Dragon fruit and passion fruit I had never tasted before. And I was delighted to know them, and pomelo.” (Fieldnotes, February, 2020)

### ***Other Uses for the Course***

According to Mönkh, the type of curriculum described in this paper can also be useful for live-in ESL caregivers who need to improve their English to communicate with the family with whom they live. A live-in ESL caregiver would reside on the premises 24 hours a day. Mönkh said, “This is an important topic for a book that would include phrases useful for home care providers who don’t know what to say on the job” (March 2020).

## **Discussion and Implications for Classroom Teaching**

Since this study is not a longitudinal study that tracked the learner’s performance over time, it is not possible to say that Mönkh acquired the terms and concepts that were taught to her entirely. The results of the quizzes did not necessarily demonstrate that Mönkh improved her knowledge of the words and cultural concepts over time. However, it is possible to say that Mönkh learned many of the words taught to her. Therefore, it is possible to answer affirmatively regarding the research question posed in this study, “How effective is content-based instruction for linguistic and cultural competence using a learner-centered approach in teaching English as a second language to a home care provider?”

Although the results of this preliminary study cannot be used to show that Mönkh acquired the content taught to her, they can be used to show that content-based instruction, including the use of authentic materials and realia, was well received by the learner for learning vocabulary, idioms and cultural concepts.

Teaching an ESL speaker in a home setting is very different than teaching ESL students in a classroom setting, even using an ESP curriculum. The curriculum, and the roles that exist

between the teacher and student are very different in a home setting than in a classroom. Mönkh had multiple roles because she served as Mrs. Moore's companion, a pseudo-family member, and my student. In addition, Mönkh was taught English to be a stronger companion to an elderly client. Since Mönkh was the only student in the class, I could ensure that the content and vocabulary she was learning would be relevant to her position as a home care provider.

Many ESL teachers are currently providing their students with authentic materials such as movies and realia in the ESL classroom. However, the results of this case study indicate the depth to which ESL students need to learn about U.S. culture for a specific purpose and the length of time that it would take them to do so. As explained in the introduction to this study, it was not clear how much the home care provider would need to improve her ability to speak English and understanding of U.S. culture in order to perform her job competently. It was necessary to increase Mönkh's English proficiency in a way that would be interesting and engaging to her. The use of movies and free ESL classes to improve Mönkh's English ability was an incentive for Mönkh to participate in the course reported in this paper. The quantity of English needed for Mönkh to perform her job competently was undetermined due to the ongoing nature of language learning and culture acquisition for new members of a community.

Second language learners often need someone to serve as a cultural guide to highlight context-specific cultural norms that are unknown to the learner. Of interest, Mönkh had not learned about the cultural figures and concepts taught to her even though they were known to her native English-speaking husband. This is because each family has its own specific culture, and this cultural knowledge only became relevant in the context of Mönkh's work with this specific client. Many students in ESL classes do not learn about the cultural norms and references at this level of specificity because they are not in the same context as Mönkh was. It is important to note that in this specific on-the-job learning situation, Mönkh's learning about U.S. culture was made possible by me as her ESL teacher and as Mrs. Moore's family member, who acted as a cultural guide throughout the process.

The use of students as co-creators of the curriculum daily is not a standard method in ESL classrooms. This limitation is due to practical concerns of curriculum planning in which ESL teachers plan their curricula before the start of the semester. However, in the case reported here, the curriculum could be created partly by Mönkh and me as her ESL teacher. The one-on-one teaching that occurred when I taught Mönkh is an ideal teaching situation. This was certainly a student-centered approach to pedagogy.

It was possible for this type of curriculum to be created using authentic materials in an ESL class. The use of authentic materials in the home context to teach home care providers is important to ESL home care providers and non-native speakers of all languages who want to serve as companions in a home setting. Other second language home providers could duplicate the methods described in this paper if a member of the family had the time and interest to teach them. After all, for home care to be provided effectively by professional workers, they must be integrated into clients' families. This integration applies in other situations as well. As suggested by Mönkh, the results of this study could be helpful for exchange students who live with an American family and need to participate as pseudo-family members. The exchange students need to improve their English and learn about the family cultural norms and behaviors.



### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this case study. The first limitation, which is using one person as the focus of this paper, is also its strength. The case study approach allows minute examination of the language learning of one individual. However, the small sample of this study means that it is difficult to generalize the findings. The second limitation of the study is that the the ESL classes met only three times a week due to Mönkh's work schedule. Therefore, Mönkh did not learn as much specialized vocabulary, idioms, and cultural information in English as she would have learned if she and I had met four or five times per week. A third limitation of the study was the lack of homework as part of the curriculum. No homework was assigned to Mönkh due to my lack of time to create the course textbook and create homework and correct it. If homework had been assigned to Mönkh, it could have added to the effectiveness of the course. In addition, there was no follow-up to the study to determine if Mönkh retained the specialized vocabulary, idioms, and cultural concepts taught over time. Another important limitation to this study is that only one person who was also the teacher evaluated the learner's language. This could lead to the potential bias of the study's findings.

### **Conclusion**

The authentic materials and realia used in the course were useful for improving Mönkh's English and her understanding of the family culture. In order to perform the home care provider's job as a companion adequately, she needed to improve her knowledge of vocabulary, idioms, and U.S. culture. A curriculum was created based on the caregiver's day-to-day language needs and her need to understand U.S. culture and the culture of the family for whom she worked. The curriculum focused on the vocabulary needed to understand job-related conversations held by family members and movies watched and discussed by the family. The pedagogical approaches used to teach the home care provider effectively created an environment conducive to learning: learner-centered, discussion-based, content-based instruction, and culturally responsive. The home care provider used the words and expressions that she learned from the curriculum developed with the family ESL instructor. This collaboration was an important reason for the success of the curriculum.

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