



### THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE RECOGNITION IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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#### ABSTRACT

The important thing in learning a language is understanding its cultural elements. Mastering the language means mastering the elements of its culture. The relationship between language and culture can't be separated. According to Krasner (1999), for learners of a language are not only having language competence but also mastering and understanding the elements of culture. Integrating the cultural elements based on its context is important because languages are not only the product of the culture but also symbols of cultures. The purpose of this study is to know how the importance of cultural recognition in teaching English. The purpose of teaching foreign language are to communicate fluently and acceptably both spoken and written according to the context, situation, and condition. Further, English teachers should conduct the activities of teaching and learning where the teaching language and teaching of culture linked together. To achieve this goal, teachers are expected to teach linguistic elements, language skills, and also integrate elements of culture in English classroom appropriately using the most suitable technique, method and approach.

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## 1. Introduction

Societies that live widely spread in different places all over the world have different cultural backgrounds, values, and attitudes, and they use different languages. Language and culture are two things that look different but in fact, they have a very close relationship and influence each other mutually. Gleason (1961) indicated that languages are not only the products of cultures but also are the symbols of cultures. The growth of a language frequently affects its associated culture, and cultural patterns of cognition and custom are often explicitly coded in language. Moreover, language is also a social institution, both shaping and being shaped by society (Armour-Thomas & Gopaul-McNicol, 1998).

The teaching of foreign languages in Indonesia has been going on for a long time from the Dutch colonial occupation to the Japanese occupation. The history of teaching English has certainly undergone many changes and developments. In the colonial era, education was only given to certain circles in indigenous society. They are people who have a high social status in society. So do not be surprised if those who are educated are certainly the upper class. The simplest thing that appears from this difference is in the use of language. Those who came from the upper classes at that time were able to speak foreign languages. So the mastery of foreign languages at that time became a marker of a person's social status in society. There was a close relationship between language and social status at that time. Along with the times and the need to communicate with the outside world, the teaching of foreign languages such as English has become part of the subjects taught in the education curriculum in Indonesia from secondary to tertiary levels.

English as an international language has a very important role and position in the education system in Indonesia. This is important because in reality, most science and technology is written in English. Mastery of English is important for the Indonesian people in order to master science and technology.

In addition to being able to master science and technology, mastering foreign languages is also very important in order to be able to get along in the association of the world community. The ability to get along in this world community as a result of the development of science and the 4.0 industrial revolution requires citizens of the world community to be able to communicate and interact with each other in order to fulfill their needs. The socialization of the world community today is not limited by time, and place because everything has become global, therefore the ability to master foreign languages such as English will help to simplify all affairs.

Skills in mastering English or other foreign languages will be perfect if accompanied by mastery of cultural understanding of the language. The ability to understand the culture of the language will later help speakers to be better able to communicate with citizens of the world community according to the conditions and context of the local culture. This understanding is very important to avoid misinterpretation in communication.

Mastery of foreign language skills is not enough to be able to join the social arena of the world community. Every citizen of a country must have a national identity, namely culture. Indonesians need to study various national cultures in the world when this nation wants to be part of the world association but without leaving the original culture of the nation they have. Unity and peace between nations will be created when every country can respect and respect each other as well as tolerance for the culture of other nations

In a social context, language becomes a medium for communicating and conveying ideas, experiences, and information about the world around them. In the world of education, foreign language teaching, for example, understanding the culture of the target language speakers is common. Therefore, language learners, there is no reason not to realize the importance of cultural literacy of the target language, such as understanding the culture of speech acts, how to praise people, ask, agree or disagree, and so on. The procedures and ethics of speaking in each language are different, such as intonation, speech style, expressions, and including body language.

Effective and fluent communication will be created by mastering the culture of the speakers of the language.

It is not strange if then some scientists, educators, and professionals argue that it is not feasible to teach language without teaching culture, the role of the language teacher in the classroom as a professional mediator between foreign language and culture. In other words, language teaching is always accompanied by cultural teaching. Even according to Kramersch (1993) culture in language teaching has a very important role central, he called it not just a fifth skill, but rather a skill which is always the background and learned from day one. Glison (1961) as quoted by Ming-Mu Kuo and Cheng-Chieh Lai that languages are not only the products of cultures but also are the symbols of cultures. The development of a language frequently affects its associated culture, and cultural patterns of cognition and custom are often explicitly coded in language.

This statement is also the basis that learning a language is learning its culture. Linguistic competence is not enough to understand the language of a nation or group public. Due to the importance of understanding culture, English teachers must be able to integrate the cultural side in every material being taught. The method used by the teacher in the process of integrating cultural understanding can be done through creative ways that can be designed and applied by the teacher without having to reduce the content of the material that must be taught. It is intended that students not only master their language skills but are able to apply the use of the language in accordance with the cultural rules that exist in the language.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. What is culture?**

Regarding the importance of teaching culture in English classrooms, most scholars today believe that language and culture are inseparable, and culture learning must be an integral part of language learning. There are some reasons why culture and language are inseparable and have a very strong relationship that binds each other. According to Kramersch (1993), those reasons are first, language expresses cultural reality (with words people express facts and ideas but also reflect their attitudes). Second, language embodies cultural reality (people give meanings to their experience through the means of communication). Third, language symbolizes cultural reality (people view their language as a symbol of their social identity).

According to Yuen (2011) in Lestari, making the learners have the ability to communicate using the language is the aim of teaching English both written and spoken. Teaching English is not only covering teaching the language element and skills of language like grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, listening, writing, reading, and writing but also presenting the culture. Culture plays important role in communication. The one who can produce the language grammatically correct sometimes may be unable to conduct his/her idea perfectly and systematically when there is not enough understanding and sufficient knowledge on the culture of the language. For example, the students are given two sentences:

1. Ardi saw a weird flying object above his house last night.
2. Ardi passed his school with flying colors.

Both of the sentences are using the same word “flying” but it has a different meaning because of different contexts, situations, and cultural backgrounds. In sentence number 1, a flying object refers to a certain object that is flying. In sentence number 2, flying colors mean the best score. This term is used by the native of the language. When there is not enough understanding about the cultural background, misinterpretation will often happen in the activity of communication. The other example is about the use of *be + V ing* or *present continues*. The students will try to construct some sentences like “What are you doing?”, “Where are you going?”, “What are you looking for?”, “Why are you crying?”, and “Why are you studying?”.

All those sentences are grammatically correct and easily understood. On the other hand, when it is used in terms of its cultural background and appropriateness, it can be stated that those sentences are unacceptable because, in its culture, English-speaking culture, it is not polite for people to interfere with other's business or to ask more about someone's private activity. This is the reason why it considers not polite unless there is a close relationship between the interlocutors. From the above examples, it is clearly shown that there is a gap between Indonesian culture and English culture. The above examples are grammatically correct, but somehow sentences can be wrongly interpreted when they are used in the unappropriate context. As it is stated by Brown (2021), a person's behavior or speech may be interpreted differently by listeners or interlocutors who come from different cultural backgrounds. That is why it can be said that by understanding other cultures, understanding of one's own culture will increase. Seeley (1993) also stated that knowledge of linguistic elements without being equipped with knowledge of the cultural values that apply in the community using the language is inadequate to be used as a provision so that students can communicate in a language in an acceptable manner.

According to Zoreda and Vivaldo-Lime (2008) in Lestari, cultural exposure to the people who speak the language that is learned will increase the quality of understanding and sense of tolerance. This is one of the reasons, why English teachers should give attention to the cultural side of the English language in order to make the learners able to apply the language for communication both spoken and written. For the English learners, an understanding and awareness of the cultural side will help them to comprehend certain information and situations they encounter when applying language.

Brown (2021) stated that a person is said to have succeeded in learning a language if he can use that language to communicate correctly, fluently, and acceptably. Thus, he of course also needs to learn in the context in which an utterance is used. The understanding of cultural background becomes an essential thing that should be taught to build students' characteristics since they are not learning that language in the area where that language is not used. Here, the awareness and understanding of cross-cultural aspects in teaching English are needed from both teachers' and students' points of view.

In simple words, John H Bodley (1994) stated that culture is simply what people think, make and do which socially transmitted set of common beliefs that include symbolic, mental, behavioral, and material aspects patterned to provide a model for behavioral and create a common framework for human society.

## **2.2. Why is culture important to be integrally taught?**

Culture is an important aspect of learning the language. To learn a language means to learn the culture. Both of them can't be separated. A language will serve a particular culture and through the language, culture will give its value. This statement is in line with what Gao said that there is a close interrelationship between language learning and learning about the culture. It can be defined that learning the language is learning a set of cultural norms and unconsciously that teaching of language is teaching culture. Discussing culture means widely discussing social and tradition occurs in the social community. In general, according to Sowden (2007), culture is defined as a set of social, artistic, and intellectual traditions associated historically with a particular social or national group (... body of social, artistic, and intellectual traditions associated historically with a particular social or national group). Due to its wide definition about the culture which is always related to social, community, customs, traditions, customs, rules in a society, and education. It is hard to find an accurate definition to interpret culture.

The cultural aspect of the English subject is an especially complex and demanding task, as the English language is used in so many parts of the words, by diverse groups of people and for a variety of purposes (Dürmüller, 2008; Rindal, 2014; Simensen, 2014). In the future, the

students will interact with people all around the world. That is the reason why they have to be able to reach a cultural understanding as early as they learn the target language like English.

Since culture is not genetically inherited but is through the continuously sharing process from one person to others, from one generation to the next generation, it always experiences development and change according to changing times. This situation suits what is stated by Hofstede (1980) in Jalal Ali Belshek. He defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another”, which is passed from generation to generation, it is changing all the time because each generation adds something of its own before passing it on. It is usual that one’s culture is taken for granted and assumed to be correct because it is the only one, or at least the first, to be learned.

Moreover, the main reason for someone to take a language class is not only to master the four skills of language, get a degree, get a job easily, get promotion easily or pass the examination with flying color but also to reach the most important goal of learning English which is being able to communicate effectively whether for interpersonal or transactional communication. As it is cited by Alyasery (2018) from Wei (2005:56), language has a dual character, both as a tool of communication and a carrier of culture. Language without culture is unthinkable, so is a human culture without language. A particular language is a mirror of a particular culture. It is also stated by Brown (1994:165). He said that the relation between language and culture is as follows: ‘A language is part of a culture and culture is part of the language; they are intricately intertwined so that they can’t be separated and lost the importance of either language or culture’. In other word, it means that teaching language is teaching culture.

In this case, Zhou (2011) agrees with Seelye’s (1993) suggestion that when we consider the language as a communication tool, it cannot be kept out of the cultural framework of that language. Without cultural knowledge, it is difficult to understand the meaning of the language. This is because language and culture are closely connected. In this regard, Agar (1994, p. 28) has asserted that “culture is in language and language is loaded with culture”, because it should be automatically integrated when teachers teach a language, the teaching of the culture of that language must not be neglected.

In a society, culture changes according to the time and circumstances at that time. This cultural change is in line with changes in the social conditions of the community. This cultural change will result in a new cultural pattern in society. Culture will affect the mindset, habits, social rules, behavior of a person in social life. Byram (1997) emphasizes that teaching and learning aims which include understanding, tolerance, empathy, and related notions presuppose a psychological readiness in learners which may be age-dependent, may be influenced by social factors, maybe further, or even inhabited by exposure to a foreign culture and language. In the process of sharing and changing, education takes significant rule. Teaching and learning activities as part of the education become the media in introducing the culture. This process can be done directly and indirectly. Directly means teaching culture on special subjects about culture. While indirectly, the teacher integrates culture into the themes of the lessons being taught. They are linking the subject matter being taught with the appropriate cultural elements. Integrating the culture of a foreign language (English) should be done alongside the teaching of the language itself. Brown (2007b) suggested that the language-culture connections must be highlighted by teaching not only the language but cultural customs, values, ways of thinking, and acting. Along the same line, Kumaravadivelu (2003) suggested that raising cultural consciousness to shed light on classroom processes that acknowledge their power and knowledge structure.

Regarding the importance of teaching culture in integrated learning activities, according to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993, pp.7-8) cultural teaching must meet several criteria in order to help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviors; develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place

of residence; influence the way in which people speak and behave; become more aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture; increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language; develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence; develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture; and simulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

Another thing that should be recognized is making the goal of teaching culture. It is needed to be done at first to direct and lead every single teaching step that will be taken in the teaching activity itself. According to Stern (1992), the aim of teaching culture should cover knowledge about the target culture; awareness of its characteristics and of differences between the target culture and the learner's own country; a research-minded outlook; an emphasis on the understanding socio-cultural implications of language and language use; affective goals; interest, intellectual curiosity, and empathy.

In connection with the very high level of complexity between language and culture, it requires ways and methods of cultural interaction that are creative and able to show the meaningful side to students. Culture plays a significant role in daily life. It covers all the aspects of life and influences how people think, act, interact, communicate and transmit knowledge from one generation to another.

### **2.3. How to integrally teach culture in teaching language?**

Culture is a complex thing that should integrally be taught carefully. Learning without culture is incredible; a particular language is a mirror of a particular culture (Farnia & Sulaiman, n.d: 242). To put in another way, language and culture are strongly intertwined (Brody, 2003: 40; Jiang, 2000: 238). With respect to its complexity, there must be some significant considerations that the teachers should cope with before teaching and integrating culture in their language lessons. Those crucial considerations are the teachers themselves, the context in which the language is taught, and the last is the learners' age and their language competency.

In a multi-complex society, integrating the knowledge of culture in diversity is something that must be done by the school and all the stick holders. It is needed for the teachers to teach all the students about cultural differences into their knowledge base, to facilitate personal and professional success in a diverse world, it will help the students from a minority ethnic/racial background develop and improve a sense of identity as individuals, as well as proudly identify with their particular cultural group. Teachers play a significant role in helping the students succeed through the establishment of cultural understanding. Teachers hoping to help students have the awareness of interculturally competent and able to create culturally friendly classroom by doing some strategies described below.

There are some ways that can be done to obtain teaching culture correctly. The first is involving culture in the real language activities. This way is a more realistic way for students. The second is to put the language based on its context. By applying this way, the knowledge that students gain will be long remembered. For example, a language teacher teaches about the time. In teaching and learning activity the teacher will ask and lead the students to find out everything about time, how to use the time appropriately, how to distinguish and compare the use of time between two different countries, the country of the target language, and their own country. From all those activities, students will both consciously and unconsciously learn about the culture brought by the time. Here students also will automatically learn about grammar, vocabulary, and cultural side from both the country of the target language and their own country. In spite of this, later on, they will understand, appreciate, and respect the difference that is commonly happened among the different countries.

Teachers still need to do several things in boosting students' understanding and awareness about culture. Teachers should be able to build and create an atmosphere of the cultural classroom. There are several things that can be done by the teachers in order to reach this objective. Teachers show interest in students' ethnic backgrounds. This can be done by having students do research and share information about the cultural background than having them analyzed and celebrate differences in tradition, beliefs, and social behavior.

Teachers are needed to be able to change and modify their role in the classroom from being the instructor to the facilitator. This modification of role can be done by reducing the power of differential between the instructor and the students. When teachers dominate and authorize the classroom it will bring negative impact to the students as a result of a sense of social injustice. The other thing to support this role modification is providing students with questionnaires about something fun, interesting, and useful from their cultural background. Giving the student's motivation and a clear understanding of the connectedness to the materials are also another significant thing that must be done in the classroom. Linking language and its culture together for teaching purposes relates to students' degree of 'motivation' (Sárdi, 2002; Tang, 2009; Xu, 2009). It must also be by the teacher to provide enough time and opportunity for the students to both interact with and share stories, thoughts, and ideas that are important to their cultural social perspective.

Teachers should be able to keep a strict level of sensitivity to language concerns. Celebrating the diversity of language in the classroom with the students will improve and promote students' awareness of respect. It can be done by providing instructional materials which are suitable to the level of English fluency for non-native speakers. Providing the additional materials to boost students and encourage students to master English competence.

Keeping on the strict to the high expectation for students' performance is also something crucial for the teachers to be done. Don't give lavish praise to simple tasks, do the lavish praise for their best proportion of accomplishment. Stay guiding and helping students who are not able yet to accomplish their work step by step clearly.

Engage students in the method of self-testing. This method will really help students to remember and use what they have learned and will help them realize their ability to continue understanding a certain topic in greater depth. Train students to have the feeling of respect for differences. Sizer (1999) stated that students cannot be taught well if we do not know them. It will ensure them in peace situation classroom. Dealing with this, teachers must have a good understanding and recognition of each student.

According to Jerold Frank (2013), another way to foster curiosity and openness to English-speaking culture is to establish a "collection" of cultural information in a variety of formats. It can be done through movies, music, literature, online sites, and everyday items like stamps, currency, toys, musical instruments, menus, travel brochures, magazines, and newspapers from English-speaking countries. By providing students the opportunity to smell, see, touch, use and listen to real things from different cultures, teachers can connect the concepts beyond ideas and help students understand the realities of life in that culture. In doing this, teachers should consider the condition of the classroom. Whether they will be in the classroom with complete facilities or not to support the idea of teaching and integrating culture in English lesson, the treatment will be different from one class to another class even the teachers set the same goal.

There are some general things that teachers should do to realize the above statement. They should be able to decide which aspect of culture for students to explore such as etiquette and manners, food and cuisine, religion, music, customs and traditions, clothing and customs, or games base on the material in that unit. Next, they design questions to help and guide students to find the information needed. Students can work on it individually or in a group. Give them the

opportunity to deliver and share the idea from the result of their work. When there is still enough time, teachers can invite the students to do more fun activities like playing games or doing role play to make it more interesting and create fun ways in order students will really experience the real thing of learning culture through language.

### 3. Conclusion

Culture and language are two intertwined things. They are very closely related, influence, complement each other, and have been studied by many researchers and linguists. Learning culture in the language is something must be done by educators considering the importance of cultural elements in understanding a language. Learning a language means learning the culture that exists in the language and the lives of the people who use that language. Success in learning language means mastering both language skills and cultural elements.

In this case, creativity, innovation, and approach in teaching need to be carried out by teachers in order to provide opportunities for students to experience understanding and reflecting cultural elements that exist in the culture of English language society. Students who understand the cultural background of the target language they learned will automatically be able to apply the language appropriately base on its context and needs.

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