

Integrating Culture and Language Teaching: How Do Teachers Perceive of the Objective of English as a Foreign Language Teaching?



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ABSTRACT: The study aimed to understand English teachers' perceptions on the objectives of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and their support for cultural objectives, including promoting intercultural competence. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research approach was used, with 79 teachers from three different provinces participating. The results showed varied perceptions among the teachers towards the objectives of EFL teaching and its implementation. This highlights the need for improvement in the teacher professional development system to address these differences. The variation is attributed to individual differences in opportunities and experiences during the development process.

KEYWORDS: culture, cultural competence, language teaching, perception

I. INTRODUCTION

Integrating culture into English language teaching has become increasingly important in recent years (Frigillano, 2022; Genc & Bada, 2005). It allows learners to develop a deeper understanding of the language and its use in different cultural contexts. Moreover, it provides students with a cultural experience that they might not have access to otherwise, and can help to foster intercultural communication skills (Genc & Bada, 2005; Hilliker, 2020).

As English is now a global language, spoken by people from all over the world, it is essential that students are exposed to the diverse cultures and perspectives associated with the language (Sharifian, 2013). This can be achieved by incorporating cultural content into lesson plans, such as discussions about holidays, traditions, festivals, and cultural practices in English-speaking countries. In this way, students can broaden their cultural horizons and develop a greater appreciation for the diversity of the English-speaking world (Huang, 2002).

Incorporating cultural elements into language lessons can make the learning process more enjoyable and engaging (Huang, 2002). Teachers can use authentic materials, such as music, films, or books, to create a more immersive cultural experience for students (Halim et al, 2018). This can help students to better understand and connect with the language and culture, making the material more memorable and relevant to them. In addition, integrating culture into English language teaching can help to develop intercultural communication skills. For example, teachers can encourage students to reflect on their own cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes and compare them with those of English-speaking cultures. This can promote greater understanding and respect for cultural differences and help students to become more culturally aware and sensitive. However, it is important for teachers to approach cultural integration in a responsible and sensitive manner (Deer, 2013). They must ensure that they are accurately representing different cultures and avoiding stereotypes or cultural appropriation. Teachers should also consider the cultural backgrounds of their students and make sure that the materials they use are appropriate and respectful.

Integrating culture into English language teaching has numerous benefits for students. It can provide a deeper understanding of the language and its cultural context, broaden students' cultural horizons, make the learning process more engaging and enjoyable, and develop intercultural communication skills (Chen & Yang, 2016). However, it is essential that teachers approach cultural integration in a responsible and sensitive manner to ensure that they are accurately representing different cultures.

Teacher perception towards student culture and English language teaching is important for several reasons: First, positive learning environment. When a teacher has a positive perception of their students' culture and language abilities, they are more likely to create a welcoming and supportive learning environment. This can help to increase student motivation and engagement, and lead

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to better academic outcomes (Castro et al., 2004). Second, cultural competence. Teachers who are culturally competent are better able to understand and respect their students' backgrounds, beliefs, and perspectives (Banks, 2004). This can help to build trust and rapport with students, and make them feel valued and understood.

Third, this holds promise for effective teaching strategies. Teachers who have a positive perception of their students' culture and language abilities are more likely to develop effective teaching strategies that are tailored to the needs and strengths of their students (Howard, 2001). This can help to ensure that students are receiving high-quality instruction that is aligned with their learning style and cultural background.

Fourth, it fosters student success. When teachers have a positive perception of their students' culture and language abilities, they are more likely to have high expectations for their students and provide them with the support and resources they need to succeed (Lee & Bowen, 2006). This can help to promote student confidence and self-esteem, and lead to better academic outcomes.

Last, it develops intercultural communication skills. Teachers who have a positive perception of their students' culture and language abilities are more likely to promote intercultural communication and understanding in the classroom (Eisenclas & Trevaskes, 2007). This can help to foster a more inclusive and culturally diverse learning environment, and prepare students for success.

Therefore, this study is important to understand English teachers' perceptions on the objectives of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and their support for cultural objectives, including promoting intercultural competence. Teacher perception towards student culture and English language teaching is critical for creating a positive learning environment, promoting cultural competence, developing effective teaching strategies, promoting student success, and fostering intercultural communication. In order to guide the research, the researchers developed two research questions:

1. How do English teachers perceive the objective of EFL teaching?
2. How do Indonesian English teachers support cultural objectives, including the objective to promote the acquisition of intercultural competence?

Understanding culture is important in regard to language teaching because it can provide students with a deeper understanding of the language, promote cultural awareness and understanding, foster intercultural communication skills, provide cultural context, and make the learning process more relevant and engaging. It makes Language and culture are interconnected, foster a more inclusive and culturally diverse learning environment, help students develop effective intercultural communication skills, provide students with a greater appreciation of the cultural context in which the language is used, and students can see how the language is used in different cultural contexts, and how it relates to their own experiences and background.

II. METHOD

This study employed both descriptive quantitative and qualitative methods to fulfil its research objectives. These methods were utilized to gather diverse data that corresponded to the research questions. The researcher adopted an instrument and developed open-ended interview questions from previous studies for data collection (Banks, 2004; Castro et al., 2004). This questionnaire contains several dimensions to measure several different issues. The first part is related to teachers' perceptions regarding the objectives of foreign language education, such as linguistic objectives, cultural objectives, learning skill objectives. The second part is related to teachers' perceptions regarding culture teaching objectives. The information collected is like the knowledge dimension and attitudinal dimension. These items collect the information with 5 scale Likert consisting strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N) disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD). The researchers also collected data about how teachers distribute teaching time over language teaching and culture teaching as well as teachers' supports on cultural objectives and intercultural competence in the form of open-ended questions.

The instrument was made electronic through google form in order to facilitate the process of collecting data from many teachers at different provinces. Seventy-nine of teachers from three major provinces in Indonesia responded to join as volunteer respondents to this research. They were given the choice voluntarily to fill in the questionnaire given.

The data from the questionnaire in the form of a Likert scale were processed using descriptive statistics. Meanwhile, data relating to teachers' supports on cultural objectives and intercultural competence is analyzed using a qualitative approach. The data is analyzed by carrying out the content analysis process, then the data is given coding labels. After the coding is done, the researchers can see what emerging issues are. The theme of the research findings can then be determined.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the survey indicate that teachers from East Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, and Jambi perceive enthusing pupils for learning foreign languages as the most important objective of foreign language education, with a mean score of 4.92. On the other hand, promoting the acquisition of an open mind and a positive disposition towards unfamiliar cultures is the least emphasized objective, with a mean score of 4.44.

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Table 1. Teachers' perceptions regarding the objectives of foreign language education

No	Item	Mean
Linguistic objective		
1	Enthuse my pupils for learning foreign languages	4,92
2	Promote the acquisition of a level of proficiency in the foreign language that will allow the learners to use the foreign language for practical purposes	4,65
3	Assist my pupils to acquire a level of proficiency in the foreign language that will allow them to read literary works in the foreign language	4,53
Cultural objectives		
4	Promote my pupils' familiarity with the culture, the civilization of the countries where the language that they are learning is spoken	4,49
5	Promote the acquisition of an open mind and a positive disposition towards unfamiliar cultures	4,44
6	Assist my pupils in developing a better understanding of their own identity and culture	4,77
(General) learning skills objectives		
7	Promote the acquisition of learning skills that will be useful for learning other foreign languages	4,64
8	Assist my pupils to acquire skills that will be useful in other subject areas and in live (such as memorize, summarize, put into words, formulate accurately, give a presentation, etc.)	4,69

While it is positive that teachers place a high importance on enthusing pupils for learning foreign languages, it is also important to consider the value of promoting an open mind and positive disposition towards unfamiliar cultures. This objective is important because it helps to develop intercultural competence, which is critical for success in a globalized world. To address this discrepancy, it may be helpful to provide teachers with professional development opportunities that focus on incorporating intercultural content into language lessons, and on teaching strategies for promoting cultural awareness and understanding. This can help to ensure that teachers are equipped to help their students develop both language skills and intercultural competence.

It is also important to regularly assess and evaluate the effectiveness of foreign language education programs, and to make changes as needed based on the results of these evaluations. By continually working to improve the quality and effectiveness of foreign language education, teachers from East Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, and Jambi can help their students to achieve the full range of benefits that foreign language education has to offer.

Table 2. Teachers' perceptions regarding culture teaching objectives

No	Item	Mean
Knowledge dimension		
1	Provide information about daily life and routines	4,54
2	Provide experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theatre, film, etc.)	4,58
3	Provide information about shared values and beliefs	4,35
4	Promote increased understanding of students' own culture	4,70
5	Provide information about the history, geography and political conditions of the foreign culture(s)	4,28
Attitudinal dimension		
6	Develop attitudes of openness and tolerance towards other people and culture	4,69
7	Promote the ability to empathize with people living in other culture	4,60
Behavioral dimension		
8	Promote reflection on cultural differences	4,58
9	Promote the ability to handle intercultural contact situations	4,40

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The results of the survey show that the majority of teachers have similar perceptions towards the objectives of teaching culture, with a range of 4.60. This suggests that teachers generally have a shared understanding of the goals and benefits of incorporating cultural content into language lessons.

The fact that the item on promoting increased understanding of students' own culture received the highest score, with a mean score of 4.70, is particularly noteworthy. This highlights the importance of cultural self-awareness and understanding in language education. By helping students to understand their own culture, teachers can lay the foundation for intercultural competence, which is critical for success. However, the low score for the item on providing information about the history, geography, and political conditions of the foreign culture, with a mean score of 4.28, is concerning. This suggests that teachers may not place enough emphasis on teaching cultural content, which can limit students' understanding and appreciation of other cultures. Teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities that focus on incorporating cultural content into language lessons, and on teaching strategies for promoting cultural awareness and understanding. This can help to ensure that teachers are equipped to help their students develop intercultural competence, and to succeed.

Check the one that reflects your teaching practice
79 responses

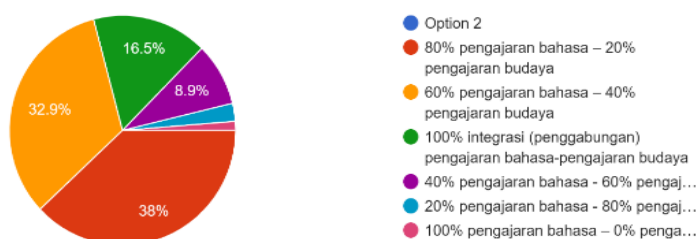


Figure 1 Reflection of teaching composition between cultural and language content percentage

Figure 1 provides insight into the distribution of teaching time between language teaching and culture teaching. The results show that, for most respondents, language teaching still takes up the majority of the teaching time, with cultural teaching accounting for 20-40 percent of the total time.

This data suggests that the integration of culture and language teaching is still in its early stages, with a focus on language subject matter. While language is certainly an important aspect of language education, it is also critical to incorporate cultural content in order to provide students with a well-rounded education that prepares them for success.

Teachers' supports on cultural objectives and intercultural competence

The results of the open-ended questionnaire show that teachers generally understand the significance of incorporating culture into language teaching. However, the deeper findings reveal that there are challenges in putting this into practice in the classroom. In particular, instilling awareness of students' own culture in order to foster intercultural competence can be a difficult task.

"Students need to be taught about their culture and the culture of other people, especially the culture of the country whose language we are studying, because the language of a country is very closely related to the culture of that country" (participant 1)

"Can compare other cultures with their own culture and take the positive side of other cultures." (participant 5)

This highlights the need for teacher training and support in this area. Teachers may benefit from professional development opportunities that focus on teaching strategies for promoting cultural self-awareness and understanding, as well as incorporating cultural content into language lessons. This can help to ensure that teachers are equipped to help their students develop intercultural competence while retaining their own cultural identity.

"Cultural teaching and student learning development are correlated with their ability to communicate (using the target language) in the classroom and in society properly (the structure and grammar) and correctly (social functions/purposes of using the language)." (participant 1)

There are some teachers who argue that cultural teaching and student language development are closely linked. These teachers believe that cultural awareness and understanding can enhance students' ability to communicate in the target language, both in the classroom and in society. Cultural knowledge helps students to understand the social functions and purposes of using the language, and to use the language in a more appropriate and effective manner. It can also help students to develop a deeper understanding of the target culture, which can improve their ability to interact with native speakers, and to understand and appreciate cultural differences.

Based on the research findings, there are several things that can be highlighted. Teachers have sufficient understanding for integration between culture and foreign language learning. Previous study, for example from Gonen & Saglam (2012), has supported

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what has been found that, in general, related to the objective of language teaching, teachers already understand the importance of this, although there are some things that must be improved, such as promoting the acquisition of an open mind and a positive disposition towards unfamiliar cultures and providing information about the history, geography, and political conditions of the foreign culture. Castro et al., (2004) have also emphasized the significance of cultural integration in language learning as it helps students to better understand the target language, as well as develop intercultural competence. However, as shown in the findings of this study, there are still difficulties faced by teachers in implementing cultural integration effectively in the classroom.

The integration between cultural teaching and language teaching is still in the process stage, as most teachers still focus on language subject matter, with cultural aspects being given 20-40 percent of the teaching time. This indicates that there is room for improvement in the integration of culture and language in the teaching process. Zhou & Zhang (2014) reported that there are some challenges faced by students during studying in new environment due to cultural differences. By infusing more culture to the language teaching may help both teacher and students. Teacher may benefit with the student's performance and the students may learn more because the lesson is more understandable with the culture. Moreover, Coyle, Hood, & Marsh (2010) discussed the benefits of incorporating culture into language teaching, including improved motivation, language proficiency, and cultural understanding. Incorporating cultural elements into language teaching can be highly motivating for students, as they are able to connect with the language in a more meaningful way. This can lead to increased engagement and participation in class, as well as improved language proficiency. Promoting cultural awareness in language teaching can also help to reduce stereotypes and promote diversity. By learning about different cultures and customs, students can gain a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the people who speak the language they are learning. This can lead to a more positive attitude towards unfamiliar cultures, and can also help students to develop intercultural competence.

Teachers who have a positive perception of their students' culture and language abilities are more likely to develop effective teaching strategies that are tailored to the needs and strengths of their students (Howard, 2001). However, the challenges of promoting cultural awareness and preserving students' cultural identity should also be considered. Teachers must be careful not to stereotype cultures or perpetuate cultural biases in their teaching. They must also be sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of their students and work to create a safe and inclusive learning environment. Teachers can improve the effectiveness of their instruction by having a favorable opinion of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students. Recognizing and valuing the diversity of cultures and languages in the classroom allows teachers to develop strategies that address the specific needs and strengths of each student. This approach fosters a supportive learning environment. Incorporating cultural elements into language lessons can make the learning process more enjoyable and engaging (Huang, 2002).

However, it is important to navigate the challenges associated with promoting cultural awareness and preserving students' cultural identity. Teachers must be mindful not to engage in stereotyping or perpetuating biases when teaching about different cultures. It is essential to approach cultural education with sensitivity and respect, avoiding generalizations and promoting a nuanced understanding of each student's background. Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment requires teachers to be mindful of their students' cultural backgrounds. They should actively seek to create an environment where students feel valued and respected, regardless of their cultural identities (Azis & Adnan, 2020; Nuraini, 2017). This includes providing opportunities for students to share their cultural experiences and perspectives, fostering dialogue, and celebrating diversity in the classroom (Goodarzarparvari & Camejo, 2018).

The results of the open-ended questionnaire suggest that there are difficulties in instilling awareness of one's own culture as a foundation for understanding other cultures. This highlights the importance of addressing this issue and finding effective ways to balance the learning of foreign languages and cultures with the preservation of students' own cultural identity (Banks, 2015; Liddicoat et al., 2018). The research findings suggest that while teachers have a good understanding of the importance of integrating culture in language teaching, there is still room for improvement in terms of the actual integration in the teaching process. Addressing the challenges of promoting cultural awareness and preserving students' cultural identity is important in achieving a comprehensive and effective foreign language education. Teacher training programs should also focus on developing strategies to deal with cultural differences and potential misunderstandings that may arise in a multicultural classroom. This includes providing teachers with the skills and knowledge to effectively communicate with students from different cultural backgrounds, and to create a classroom environment that is inclusive and respectful of all students' cultural identities. By prioritizing intercultural competence and cultural awareness in teacher training programs, educators can better equip themselves to provide their students with a truly comprehensive and effective foreign language education that promotes cultural diversity and understanding.

Additionally, in-service teacher training programs and continuous professional development opportunities could play a crucial role in improving the integration of culture and language in language teaching (Pennington & Richard, 2016). The teacher training programs should provide teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge to promote intercultural competence, cultural awareness, and encourage students to maintain a positive attitude towards unfamiliar cultures. Intercultural competence and cultural awareness are important aspects of education, especially in diverse and multicultural societies. Teachers play a crucial role in promoting these values in their classrooms. Therefore, teacher training programs should include courses on intercultural competence and cultural

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awareness to provide teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge to promote these values in their classrooms. Teachers should also be encouraged to maintain a positive attitude towards unfamiliar cultures and help their students do the same. This will not only help students appreciate diversity but also develop a sense of empathy and respect for others who come from different cultural backgrounds. In the end, promoting intercultural competence and cultural awareness in classrooms can help create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.

IV. CONCLUSION

The integration of culture in foreign language teaching is important as it helps students to gain a deeper understanding of the target language and culture, promotes cultural awareness, and contributes to the development of intercultural communication skills. The results of the survey conducted among teachers from three different provinces show that teachers have a positive perception towards the objectives of foreign language education and cultural teaching. However, the findings also indicate that the integration between cultural teaching and language teaching is still in the process stage and needs to be improved. The open-ended questionnaire highlights the difficulties encountered by teachers in balancing the learning of foreign languages and cultures with the preservation of students' own cultural identity. Addressing these challenges is important in achieving comprehensive and effective foreign language education. In summary, the importance of integrating culture in language teaching must be recognized and the necessary steps should be taken to enhance the integration in the teaching process. For teachers, it is important for teachers to continually improve their understanding of the integration of culture and language teaching, including incorporating cultural elements into language teaching activities. Teachers should strive to provide a balance between language and culture teaching, while also creating opportunities for students to understand their own culture better. They should also be conscious of promoting an open mind and a positive attitude towards unfamiliar cultures among their students. For the students, they should be encouraged to actively participate in cultural activities and events, both in and outside the classroom. They should also be taught to respect and appreciate the cultures of others. For policymakers, there should be a clear policy that emphasizes the importance of integrating culture and language teaching in foreign language education. Policymakers should also allocate sufficient resources and provide training for teachers to effectively implement cultural teaching in the classroom. For researchers, there should be continued research on the integration of culture and language teaching, to further understand the challenges and opportunities in implementing it effectively. This will also provide valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers and teachers in improving the foreign language education system.

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