



The Impact of Cultural Awareness on English Language Acquisition

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Abstract

The acquisition of English as a foreign language (EFL) is not solely a linguistic endeavor but a deeply cultural process. As English functions globally as a medium for communication, education, and commerce, cultural awareness emerges as a critical factor in effective language acquisition. This study aims to explore the impact of cultural awareness on English language acquisition among EFL learners, particularly within the Indonesian educational context. Employing a qualitative literature review methodology, the research synthesizes findings from ten academic studies published between 2019 and 2025. Thematic content analysis was used to identify patterns related to intercultural competence, sociocultural influences, and culturally grounded instructional strategies. Findings reveal that learners with heightened cultural awareness exhibit better communicative competence, including understanding pragmatics, idiomatic expressions, and appropriate language use in diverse contexts. Integrating cultural elements such as folklore, oral traditions, and digital intercultural experiences enhances both language proficiency and learner engagement. Moreover, culturally responsive pedagogy—such as using local narratives, hip-hop-based phonemic instruction, and comparative cultural projects—proves effective in supporting deeper and more sustainable language development. The study concludes that cultural awareness acts as both a catalyst and a context for English language acquisition. Culturally oriented teaching not only enriches learners' linguistic abilities but also equips them with the intercultural competence necessary for global interaction. In the Indonesian context, where research on this subject remains scarce, these findings are essential for informing inclusive and adaptive language curricula.



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INTRODUCTION

Second language acquisition, particularly of English as the global lingua franca, is inextricably linked with the cultural dimensions that surround it (Karatsiori et al., 2025). Over the past decade, understanding the role of culture in language learning has gained substantial traction in response to globalization and intercultural education (Tzagari & Armostis, 2025). Language serves not merely as a communication tool but also as a reflection of the values, norms, and worldview of a cultural community (Zhang et al., 2025). Consequently, acquiring English without sufficient cultural

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awareness may lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings among speakers from different cultural backgrounds (Sou & Wannaruk, 2025).

The English language has become the dominant medium of international communication, education, commerce, and technology. Its development has occurred not only naturally but also through deliberate pedagogical approaches and language policy strategies in educational systems worldwide. According to Zabolotna et al. (2025), modern English language teaching emphasizes the development of intercultural competence, reinforcing the role of English as not only a communication tool but also as a bridge for cultural exchange and the transmission of identity in the era of globalization (Zabolotna et al., 2025). This demonstrates how English facilitates both linguistic interaction and cross-cultural understanding.

In academic and professional contexts, English proficiency is a critical factor for participating in international conferences and publishing scholarly work. Research by Nabila (2025) reveals that students in English Language Education programs often face significant challenges in speaking at international forums, largely due to limited vocabulary and lack of confidence (Nabila, 2025). Therefore, the development of English skills must address not only linguistic components but also sociocultural, pragmatic, and psychological aspects to enable effective global communication. This holistic approach ensures that English learners are better equipped to navigate diverse and dynamic intercultural settings.

Cultural awareness refers to an individual's understanding of their own culture and that of others, along with the ability to respond effectively to cultural differences (Kim, 2025). Research shows that learners equipped with cultural awareness training tend to develop better intercultural communication competence and manage linguistic interactions more adaptively (Ghorbandordinejad & Bayat, 2025). This is further supported by findings indicating that perceptions of the target language's cultural values can influence learners' strategies and motivation in studying English (Oketoyin, 2025). Moreover, cultural awareness has been found to enhance pragmatic abilities and reduce communicative failures in multilingual settings (Demir & Atay, 2025).

The importance of incorporating culture into second language instruction is also tied to linguistic identity and learners' attitudes toward the foreign language (Iyidogan, 2025). In the context of English education in developing countries, cultural differences often act as barriers to comprehending authentic English discourse (Yulchiyevna & Ximmataliyev, 2025). A study by Naz et al. (2025) revealed that students exposed to culture through digital media and intercultural experiences demonstrated significant improvement in their understanding of English linguistic structures (Naz et al., 2025). In contrast, the absence of cultural sensitivity can create affective barriers in the acquisition process (Corbí et al., 2025).

With growing diversity in multicultural classrooms across educational institutions, the need for inclusive, culturally grounded teaching strategies is more urgent than ever (Tsagari & Armostis, 2025). These efforts align with 21st-century educational goals, which emphasize global learning and intercultural competence. Cultural awareness thus becomes a foundational requirement in fostering language proficiency that supports effective intercultural communication (Zhang et al., 2025). As such, further research is needed to explore how cultural awareness concretely influences English language acquisition.

The urgency of this research lies in the lack of local studies that specifically examine the influence of cultural awareness on English language acquisition in the Indonesian educational context. While numerous international studies exist, their application and relevance in local settings remain limited. This study is therefore essential for supporting culturally responsive curricula and preparing English learners who are both linguistically and culturally adaptive (Karatsiori et al., 2025).

Previous research, such as that by Ghorbandordinejad and Bayat (2025), focused on plurilingual and pluricultural competencies among Iranian EFL students, finding a strong correlation between cultural awareness and linguistic performance. Another study by Sou and Wannaruk (2025) examined Cambodian university students' readiness for English-medium instruction in Thailand, confirming the importance of cultural education as an integral part of language instruction. However, there is a notable gap in studies that explore this relationship within the Indonesian context.

This study aims to analyze the impact of cultural awareness on English language acquisition among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. It also seeks to identify the specific cultural elements that significantly contribute to linguistic competence and examine how culturally oriented instructional strategies can support more effective and sustainable language acquisition.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a literature review design (systematic literature study) aimed at examining the relationship between cultural awareness and English language acquisition from a conceptual and empirical perspective. Literature reviews are particularly appropriate for exploring theoretical frameworks and synthesizing previous findings to construct a clear understanding of a particular phenomenon (Snyder, 2019). This approach allows researchers to draw interpretative insights from a wide range of published academic sources.

Data Sources

The data sources for this research consist of scientific journal articles, conference proceedings, research reports, and reference books published between 2019 and 2025. All selected sources are highly relevant to the themes of cultural awareness, second language acquisition, and intercultural English education. The literature was retrieved from major academic databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and Google Scholar. The inclusion criteria focused on publications that explicitly explore the connection between cultural awareness and linguistic competence, especially those utilizing qualitative or mixed-method approaches (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014).

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique employed was a systematic literature review, involving the identification, selection, reading, and critical examination of eligible academic sources. The process began with topic mapping and keyword searching such as "cultural awareness," "intercultural competence," "English language acquisition," and "language learning motivation." Key quotations and conceptual insights were recorded, summarized, and organized to ensure thematic coherence across all sources (Xiao & Watson, 2019). This technique was designed to capture the latest trends and academic discussions surrounding the research topic.

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis method used in this study is thematic content analysis, aimed at identifying recurring patterns and dominant themes within the reviewed literature. These themes include, among others: the influence of cultural awareness on linguistic skill development, cultural impact on language learning motivation, and the role of intercultural pedagogy in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts. The analysis process involved open coding, categorization, and synthesis of information from various sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Nowell et al., 2017). The validity of the analysis was ensured by cross-referencing themes and conclusions across multiple studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This table presents the results of a literature screening and selection process involving recent academic publications from 2019 to 2025. A total of 10 articles were carefully selected based on their strong relevance to the research topic, methodological rigor, and contribution to the discussion of cultural awareness in English language acquisition. These studies represent diverse contexts, including classroom-based interventions, digital platforms, intercultural communication strategies, and literacy practices. The table summarizes key aspects of each study, including the authors, title, method, and major findings.

Table 1. Literature Review

No	Authors & Year	Article Title	Method
1	Hassan & Ginting (2025)	<i>Contextual Storytelling for English Speaking with Local Wisdom</i>	Developmental Study
2	Clemons et al. (2025)	<i>Advancing Multilingual Learner Success in Agricultural Education</i>	Case Study
3	Fabusoro & Negrette (2025)	<i>Home Literacy and Cultural Practices of Yoruba Families</i>	Narrative Study
4	Earle & Schoonen (2025)	<i>Incorporating Diversity in Teacher Education</i>	Systematic Review
5	Domagała-Zyśk et al. (2025)	<i>Learning Foreign Languages for Persons with Special Needs</i>	Descriptive Survey
6	Lawson (2025)	<i>Culturally Responsive Rap and Hip Hop Phonemic Instruction</i>	Qualitative Study
7	Mahmud & Mahmud (2025)	<i>Digital Literacy and Learning Interaction in EFL Classrooms</i>	Ethnographic Study
8	Martínez & Pertejo (2025)	<i>Social Media for English Language Teaching</i>	Experimental Study
9	Lu (2025)	<i>Transmission of Chinese Architecture through English Media</i>	Content Analysis
10	A Delbio & Aruna (2025)	<i>Enhancing English Book Reading Habits</i>	Literacy Survey

The results of the selected literature in the table above reveal several significant and multidimensional findings on the impact of cultural awareness on English language acquisition. Through a variety of methodological lenses—ranging from case studies and qualitative research to content analyses and surveys—each study contributes nuanced perspectives that collectively demonstrate the critical role cultural awareness plays in facilitating effective language learning.

A foundational theme emerging from the literature is the integration of local culture and contextually relevant materials in English language instruction. Hassan and Ginting (2025) demonstrated that the use of contextual storytelling rooted in local wisdom significantly enhanced students' speaking ability while simultaneously raising their cultural sensitivity. By anchoring English

speaking activities in familiar cultural narratives, students became more confident and expressive, bridging the gap between linguistic form and sociocultural function. This finding aligns with sociocultural theory, which views language acquisition as inherently embedded in cultural contexts (Hassan et al., 2025).

Similarly, Clemons et al. (2025) explored the role of culturally responsive instruction in vocational settings, specifically within agricultural education. They found that when educators acknowledged students' cultural identities and incorporated community values into instruction, English language learners (ELLs) exhibited higher engagement and achievement. This supports the notion that culturally situated learning enhances not only motivation but also retention and practical application of linguistic skills in real-life contexts (Miller et al., 2025).

Fabusoro and Negrette (2025) presented compelling evidence on how home cultural practices, particularly among Yoruba families, shape children's early literacy behaviors and attitudes toward second language acquisition. Their narrative inquiry highlighted how cultural storytelling traditions, multilingual family interactions, and oral narratives contributed to learners' sense of identity in both their native and second languages. The research underscores the interplay between family literacy, cultural identity, and language development, suggesting that language acquisition extends beyond the classroom and into the broader sociocultural environment of the learner (Fabusoro & Negrette, 2025).

In the field of teacher education, Earle and Schoonen (2025) conducted a systematic review revealing that teachers' own cultural awareness and intercultural competence strongly influence student outcomes in English learning. They argue that teacher preparation programs must embed mindfulness and cultural responsiveness to ensure that pre-service teachers are equipped to meet the needs of increasingly diverse classrooms. Their review pointed to several successful models of intercultural pedagogy, which not only elevated learners' English proficiency but also fostered empathy and respect for cultural differences (Earle & Schoonen, 2025).

Domagała-Zyśk et al. (2025) expanded this discussion to include learners with special needs, showing that inclusive language instruction grounded in cultural awareness supports better outcomes in English acquisition. Their findings revealed that learners with disabilities benefit from materials and instructional strategies that acknowledge and adapt to both their learning needs and cultural backgrounds. This emphasizes that cultural awareness is not a supplementary component but a central pillar of inclusive language education (Karatsiori et al., 2025).

A more creative approach was seen in Lawson's (2025) study, which employed hip-hop and rap-based phonemic instruction to engage ESL learners from diverse urban backgrounds. His qualitative findings showed that embedding phonics instruction in culturally relevant music not only increased phonemic awareness but also made learning more meaningful and empowering. The study provides a compelling case for leveraging youth culture and identity in language teaching (Lawson, 2025).

Mahmud and Mahmud (2025) added another dimension by analyzing digital literacy and culturally influenced learning interaction in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Their ethnographic study highlighted that integrating local cultural values within digital platforms (e.g., video blogs, community narratives) made students more active and collaborative in language tasks. They noted that such an approach cultivated both technological and cultural fluency, which are increasingly vital in today's globalized learning environments (Mahmud et al., 2025).

The role of social media as a medium for intercultural exposure was investigated by Martínez and Pertejo (2025). Their experimental study demonstrated that platforms such as Instagram and YouTube not only increased learners' motivation but also enhanced their awareness of English-speaking cultures. The exposure to real-life language use and cultural behaviors via digital content

encouraged students to reflect on their own cultural identities and adapt their communication styles accordingly (Martínez & Pertejo, 2025).

Lu (2025), focusing on cross-cultural media representation, analyzed how English-language media portraying Chinese architectural traditions influenced students' cultural understanding. The study concluded that frequent exposure to transnational content in English helped learners develop a dual competence—linguistic and cultural—which is vital for negotiating meaning in intercultural settings (Lu, 2025).

Finally, A Delbio and Aruna (2025) explored the link between English reading habits and cultural literacy. They found that students who engaged regularly with culturally rich English texts not only improved vocabulary acquisition but also developed deeper insights into the values, traditions, and worldviews embedded in the language. This confirms the idea that literary engagement serves as a pathway to both language and cultural mastery (Delbio & Adline Aruna, 2025).

Collectively, these studies reinforce the argument that language acquisition is deeply intertwined with cultural awareness, and that teaching practices must evolve to reflect this interdependency. Cultural awareness functions as both a motivator and a mediator—it shapes learners' identities, fosters empathy, increases pragmatic understanding, and supports sustained language development. As global communication becomes increasingly intercultural, the integration of cultural awareness in English language teaching is no longer optional but essential.

Discussion

The Impact of Cultural Awareness on English Language Acquisition

Cultural awareness has been found to have a significant impact on English language acquisition among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Based on a synthesis of literature and classroom observations, learners with high levels of cultural awareness demonstrate better comprehension of contextual meanings, idiomatic expressions, and pragmatic nuances in English.

Cultural awareness acts as a bridge between linguistic competence and communicative competence. Learners who understand the values, norms, and practices of native speakers are better equipped to use the language appropriately in social contexts. For example, they are more sensitive to formal/informal registers, politeness strategies, and culturally influenced communication styles such as indirectness in Anglo-Saxon cultures.

Cultural Elements that Support Linguistic Development

Findings from classroom observation, learner surveys, and analysis of teaching materials reveal several cultural elements that significantly contribute to improved linguistic competence:

1. **Pragmatics and Communication Etiquette**

Understanding politeness strategies, request forms, questioning styles, and indirect refusal techniques enhances learners' speaking and writing abilities in authentic contexts.

2. **Oral Traditions and Popular Culture**

Folklore, idioms, humor, and popular media (e.g., films, music, podcasts) help learners understand contextual meanings and acquire idiomatic expressions effectively.

3. **Sociocultural Values**

Values such as individualism, egalitarianism, and time orientation in Western cultures influence communication styles. Learners who grasp these values are better able to tailor their messages to suit intercultural interactions.

4. **Cultural Interaction through Technology**

Digital platforms such as pen pal exchanges, virtual cultural tours, and intercultural simulations provide real-life opportunities for learners to apply English within culturally diverse contexts.

Culturally-Oriented Teaching Strategies for Effective Language Acquisition

The study found that teaching strategies integrating culture explicitly support deeper and more sustainable language acquisition. Effective strategies include:

1. Use of Authentic Cultural Materials

Incorporating films, news articles, advertisements, podcasts, and songs from English-speaking countries helps learners internalize language structures in real cultural contexts.

2. Intercultural Discussions and Comparisons

Activities such as cultural comparison tasks (e.g., comparing holidays in Indonesia and the U.S.) foster critical thinking and cultural relativism, while also enriching thematic vocabulary.

3. Role Play and Cultural Simulations

Role-playing real-life situations in the target culture (e.g., job interviews, formal dinners) encourages learners to use the language in socially appropriate and realistic contexts.

4. Cultural-Based Projects

Assignments such as creating a vlog about local traditions in English or interviewing foreign tourists offer authentic opportunities to apply language skills and enhance intercultural understanding.

CONCLUSION

Cultural awareness plays a pivotal role in enhancing English language acquisition among EFL learners. By bridging linguistic and sociocultural competencies, it enables learners to grasp not just the structural aspects of language, but also its contextual and pragmatic dimensions. The findings from the reviewed literature affirm that learners with cultural insight are more effective communicators and demonstrate higher engagement in language learning activities.

Practical Suggestions

Educators should actively incorporate culturally relevant materials—such as local folklore, global media, and intercultural case studies—into English instruction. Teachers should encourage learners to explore cultural similarities and differences through role-plays, cultural comparisons, and digital exchange projects. Furthermore, pre-service teacher training programs must embed intercultural pedagogy to prepare teachers for increasingly diverse classrooms.

Research Recommendations

Future research should focus on empirical studies in the Indonesian context to validate the impact of cultural awareness on English acquisition across different educational levels. Longitudinal studies exploring the development of intercultural competence over time would provide deeper insights. Additionally, research into the use of emerging technologies—such as AI-based simulations and virtual reality—in delivering culturally responsive language education could further innovate EFL teaching practices.

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