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THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Annotation: This article emphasizes that learning a foreign language involves more than mastering grammar and vocabulary; it also includes understanding cultural contexts, as communication between cultures requires awareness of different social norms. Successful language education prepares students for real-life situations they might encounter globally. Culturally-inclusive teaching helps learners communicate effectively, understand behaviors shaped by culture, and handle cross-cultural interactions. The article argues that ignoring cultural aspects, especially for students with strong cultural backgrounds, can lead to misunderstandings and confusion. Teaching language alongside cultural elements fosters motivation and provides students with tools to engage meaningfully with diverse perspectives.

Key words: language learning, communication, cross-cultural awareness, culturally-inclusive teaching, social norms, real-life situations, motivation, cultural contexts, intercultural competence, cultural identity, language and culture connection, behavior understanding, educational strategies, cultural comparisons, islamic culture, local culture, cultural sensitivity, learning outcomes, student engagement.

In a globally connected world, language learning goes beyond just understanding grammar and vocabulary. Phonology, the study of sound patterns, is essential, as are the cultural nuances that enable effective communication. Modern education now emphasizes cross-cultural understanding to better prepare students for real-world interactions. By focusing on cultural elements, language educators can help students avoid misunderstandings, embarrassment, or isolation in unfamiliar cultural contexts.

Teaching language with cultural integration equips students to connect language learning with real-world applications. Culture, defined as a group's way of life, beliefs, and traditions, forms the foundation of effective communication. Teaching cultural elements helps learners better interpret behaviors and build relationships across cultures. Arab teachers suggest incorporating local culture into English teaching to avoid misinterpretations, especially when translating religious or culturally significant concepts (al-Faruqi, 1986).

Language and culture are interdependent, enhancing one another in the learning process. Kramsch (1998) notes that language conveys cultural reality, shaping and reflecting shared values. For example, English learners should understand that cultural

behaviors impact how messages are delivered, received, and interpreted. Miscommunications can arise when cultural differences are not recognized, as language alone cannot fully convey meaning without cultural context.

For instance, an American teacher complimented a Thai student, Usa, on her progress, but Usa's humility and discomfort with praise reflect her cultural values. This highlights the importance of understanding body language and cultural cues, which vary worldwide. Smiles, for example, might signify different emotions across cultures, from happiness to discomfort. Students should be taught these nuances to foster better communication and mutual respect.

Language educators can use culturally relevant teaching materials to make lessons more engaging. Studies suggest that students are more motivated when they learn about the cultural context of the language they study (Niederhauser, 1997). Motivating students with cultural activities, such as music, drama, and research, fosters a deeper interest in the language and culture they are studying. Tavares & Cavalcanti (1996) argue that cultural teaching allows students to understand other cultures and reflect on their own, aiding intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence—the ability to interact well with individuals from different cultures—is essential for English learners. Byram and Fleming (1998) emphasize that students with this skill can engage with diverse cultures and people, promoting effective communication. However, to achieve this, students must gain skills that allow them to appreciate different cultural beliefs and practices.

Islamic English, a model incorporating Islamic cultural elements in language learning, is an example of culturally specific education. Al-Faruqi (1986) advocates for preserving Islamic names and terms, as incorrect translations can cause confusion and loss of meaning. For example, names like "Ali" should be preserved, as they hold significant cultural value. Some educators support integrating Islamic cultural elements to better accommodate Muslim students, reducing culture shock and respecting their values.

Culture-focused language teaching also allows students to connect more personally with the material. Frederics (2007) observed that her Tajik students were more motivated when learning materials reflected their culture. This approach acknowledges that learning a foreign language should not require students to abandon their cultural identity. Instead, a balance between teaching the target culture and respecting students' local cultures fosters inclusivity and motivation.

Incorporating local culture in language teaching aligns with the goal of achieving intercultural competence.

This teaching approach does not reject Western culture but instead creates a culturally inclusive method, especially important in settings with specific cultural or religious needs, such as Islamic English. Language programs can meet diverse needs by acknowledging and integrating local culture, allowing students to learn effectively without losing touch with their heritage.

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In conclusion, learning a language without understanding its cultural context is incomplete. A language and its culture are interwoven, and successful communication depends on both. As globalization brings cultures closer, language education should prepare students to interact meaningfully across cultural boundaries. Teachers can foster motivation and engagement by combining language learning with cultural education, creating a learning environment where students appreciate their own culture while understanding others.

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