

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN MULTILINGUAL SETTINGS

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Abstract

Today's generation is filled with globalization, making individuals appreciate the English language, although its process of acquisition may vary due to the sociocultural factors of the learners. The study in this research uses literature. The results showed that the cultural influences and language approach towards learning English as a second language in a multilingual classrooms setting differs with regards to the strategies employed in learning, the degree of anxiety while communicating, attitudes towards English language, internal desire to learn the language and the impact of the native language. So in e-learning multicultural education, the limitation of this study indicates the consistency-oriented principles of cultural awareness should be altered to address the issues raised in this study on how better English language learning can be optimized in multilingual societies. Keywords: Culture, English Language Acquisition, Multilingualism.

INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, the ability to speak English is becoming increasingly important as a means of international communication. However, the process of acquiring English as a second or foreign language is often influenced by various factors, one of which is the learners' cultural background. (Wei, 2023). This becomes even more complex in the context of multilingual societies, where different languages and cultures interact dynamically (Kai & Bevacqua, 2023). (Kai & Bevacqua, 2021)..

The cultural background of learners is a fundamental aspect that influences the learning process, including in language acquisition. Every individual grows and develops in a specific cultural context that shapes the way they perceive the world, interact with others, and make meaning of experiences (Wu & Qin, 2023). (Wu & Qin, 2023). This culture includes various elements such as values, beliefs, customs, social norms, and

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ways of communicating that have been internalized since childhood. In the context of language learning, this cultural background can influence motivation, learning strategies, communication styles, and even perceptions of the target language being learned. (Wang, 2023).

The diversity of learners' cultural backgrounds creates a unique dynamic in the learning environment, especially in a multicultural society like Indonesia. Each learner brings their own 'cultural baggage' to the learning process, which can be both a strength and a challenge. On the one hand, this diversity can enrich the learning experience through the cross-cultural exchange of perspectives and knowledge. (Čubrović, 2020). But on the other hand, cultural differences can also lead to misunderstandings, value conflicts, or difficulties in adopting learning methods that may go against certain cultural norms. Therefore, a deep understanding of the learners' cultural background is crucial in designing and implementing effective and inclusive learning strategies. (Syafriwana, 2023).

In Indonesia, as a country with high cultural and linguistic diversity, this phenomenon becomes even more interesting to study. Many regions in Indonesia have their own local languages in addition to Indonesian, so English learning often takes place in trilingual or even multilingual contexts. This situation poses its own challenges in the English language acquisition process. (Zeng, 2024).

Trilingual refers to one's ability to speak, understand and use three languages with a good level of fluency. Meanwhile, multilingual refers to one's ability to master more than three languages. This phenomenon is increasingly common in the era of globalization, where geographical and cultural boundaries are blurring. (Ma & Goo, 2020). Trilingual or multilingual individuals have significant advantages in various aspects of life, including career, education, and social interaction. They can easily adapt in various cultural and linguistic contexts, opening the door to wider opportunities in the global job market and facilitating deeper cross-cultural understanding (Nurmurodova, 2022). (Nurmurodova, 2022).

The process of becoming trilingual or multilingual can happen in many different ways. Some individuals grow up in family or community settings that naturally use several languages, so they acquire dual language skills early on. Others may learn additional languages through formal education, student exchange programs, or life experiences abroad. (Zhang & Kang, 2023). It is important to note that being trilingual or multilingual is not just about mastering the vocabulary and grammar of several languages, but also involves a deep understanding of cultural nuances, idioms, and the proper context of language use. This ability not only enhances cognitive flexibility and creativity, but also broadens one's perspective on the world, allowing them to bridge differences and contribute uniquely in an increasingly connected global society. (Dzhubanova, 2024).

With that said, although there has been some research examining the relationship between culture and language learning, there is still a gap in the understanding of how specific cultural backgrounds affect English language acquisition in multilingual contexts in Indonesia. (Singer, 2022); (Foltz, 2022). Previous studies tend to focus on bilingual contexts or on specific cultural groups only.

Therefore, this study aims to explore more deeply the influence of cultural background on English language acquisition in multilingual settings in Indonesia.

Research Methods

The study in this research uses the literature method. This method is a research method that focuses on collecting and analyzing written sources relevant to the research topic. The literature research method involves a systematic process of identifying, collecting, evaluating, and interpreting previously published scholarly works. These sources can be books, journal articles, research reports, theses, dissertations, and other official documents. (Setiowati, 2016); (Syahran, 2020); (Helaluddin, 2019).

Results and Discussion

Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition (SLA) emphasizes the achievement of acquiring or learning a language that is not the person's primary language. (Kupisch & Dressler, 2024). This encompasses foreign language attainments in institutional contexts like classrooms, or structured programs including the learning of languages in either bilingual or multilingual environments. Different from first language acquisition which is predominantly assumed to be a natural phenomenon nearly free from teaching and which takes place exclusively in the childhood stage, second language acquisition is something that can be experienced at various ages and entailing complex cognitive activities (Meierkord & Isingoma, 2021).

The second language acquisition textbook describes simple concepts such as the nature of learning. First, there are learners' types who learn fast or slow meriting different degrees of success according to various variables which include motivation, language, age, and strategies used. Second, there is the aspect of language input and language interaction in the target language, which is considered most essential for the language acquisition skills. (Itani-Adams & Biase, 2023). Third, it is the impact of the first language L1 in acquiring a second language L2, it is how L1 will facilitate or obstruct the learning of L2. Fourth, the stages of second language acquisition which do go through more or less the same stage irrespective of the language that the learner speaks first. Fifth, the degree of metalinguistic awareness and the nature of explicit and implicit learning in the process of going through the second language acquisition process (Li and Jansen, 2023).

It is quite evident that a number of interacting factors might affect second language acquisition. These factors can be categorized as internal or external factors. Internal factors pertain to the learners' age, their interests, attitudes to language, and language related or other personal qualities like personality, where they should be living at learning second language, etc. On the other hand, the external factors pertain to the area of study, resources, environment, teaching methods, and such like (Siegel, 2021). Besides, those factors of anxiety concerning the language to be spoken and that of self confidence are also important. Also difference in the native language and the second language assists affects the achievement and the rate at which acquisition takes place. The understanding of these factors is essential to learners as well as teachers for effective second language acquisition and formulation of proper techniques for learning the second language.

Cultural Background

Culture is a complex system that covers all aspects of human life in a society, including knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and various abilities and habits acquired as a member of that society. Culture is the result of human interaction with their environment that is passed down from generation to generation through the process of learning and socialization. (Lorensen, 2024). It includes patterns of behavior, values, norms, and symbols that form the identity of a community group. Culture is dynamic, constantly evolving and changing over time, yet retains core elements that are relatively stable. An understanding of culture is very important in understanding the differences and similarities between human groups, as well as how they interpret and interact with the world around them. (Sudarmo et al., 2021).

Culture consists of several key components that are interrelated and make up the entire cultural system. These components include: (1) Language, as a means of communication and shaping patterns of thought; (2) Knowledge systems, including science, technology, and local wisdom; (3) Social systems, including community structures, norms, and rules; (4) Systems of living equipment and technology; (5) Livelihood systems; (6) Religious and belief systems; (7) Arts, including various forms of aesthetic expression; (8) Values and ethics that guide behavior; (9) Customs and traditions; (10) History and mythology that form collective narratives; and (11) Cultural symbols and artifacts. (Aslan, 2019). Each of these components interacts with each other, forms a society's unique identity, and influences how members of that society perceive the world, behave, and interact with each other and their environment.

Culture and language have a very close relationship and influence each other, forming a complex symbiosis in human life. Language serves as the main tool for expressing, preserving and transmitting culture from one generation to the next. Conversely, culture shapes and influences the development of language, reflecting the values, beliefs, and ways of thinking of its users. (Morita-Mullaney et al., 2020)..

Vocabulary, idioms and language structures often reflect unique aspects of culture, while ways of speaking and communicating are influenced by cultural norms. Language also plays a role in shaping perceptions and mental categories used to make sense of the world, which in turn influence culture. Changes in culture can lead to changes in language, and conversely, changes in language can reflect or even drive cultural change. (Paquot, 2022). Thus, understanding the language of a society means also understanding its culture, and conversely, a deep understanding of a culture requires a mastery of its language.

Multilingual Settings

Multilingualism, also known as multilingualism, refers to the ability of a person or group of people to use more than one language in everyday communication. It is not simply the ability to speak several languages, but also includes the understanding and effective use of various linguistic systems, including grammar, vocabulary, and their accompanying cultural contexts (Ahmed, 2021). Multilingualism can occur at the individual level, where a person masters and uses several languages, or at the social level, where several languages are widely used in a society or country (Nacheva, 2022). (Nacheva, 2022).

The main characteristics of multilingualism include: (1) Cognitive flexibility, where multilingual speakers can switch between different language systems with ease; (2) High metalinguistic awareness, i.e. a better understanding of language structure and function; (3) Better cultural adaptability, as language is often a window into understanding different cultures; (4) Variation in language acquisition levels, where a person may be more fluent in one language than another; (5) Phenomena such as code-switching and code-mixing, where speakers switch between languages or mix elements from different languages in a single utterance; (6) The potential for interlanguage interference, where the structure or vocabulary of one language can influence the use of another; and (7) Improved cross-cultural communication skills. (Elwerfalli, 2024); (Bhavani, 2024). Multilingualism not only provides linguistic advantages, but can also open up wider social, economic and cognitive opportunities for individuals and societies.

Multilingual environments offer significant challenges. One of the main challenges is the potential for misunderstandings and communication conflicts that can arise due to differences in language and cultural interpretation. In an educational context, students who come from different language backgrounds may have difficulty in following learning if the language of instruction is not well mastered. (Sujatha, 2024). In the workplace, language differences can hinder effective collaboration and exchange of ideas. Other challenges include maintaining minority language and cultural identities amidst the dominance of the majority language, as well as the additional cognitive burden experienced by individuals in managing and switching between different

language systems. In addition, there are also challenges in developing equitable and inclusive language policies, especially in the context of public service and governance. (Chiranjeevi, 2024).

However, a multilingual environment also opens up many exciting opportunities. Language diversity can be a source of cultural and intellectual wealth, encouraging creativity and innovation through the exchange of ideas across languages and cultures. In a global context, multilingualism provides a competitive advantage in the international job market and facilitates diplomatic and economic relations between countries. From a cognitive perspective, early exposure to multiple languages can increase mental flexibility, problem-solving ability, and may even delay the onset of dementia in old age. (Lazebna & Prykhodko, 2021).. Multilingualism also opens up opportunities for the development of more advanced language technologies, such as automatic translation systems and multilingual virtual assistants. Furthermore, multilingual environments can foster better cross-cultural tolerance and understanding, contributing to social cohesion in diverse societies. With proper management, challenges in multilingual environments can be transformed into valuable assets for individual growth and social progress (Porter & Castillo, 2023).

The Influence of Cultural Background on English Language Acquisition

Cultural background plays a very important role in the English language acquisition process. Each culture has its own unique system of values, norms and mindsets, which directly affect the way one perceives and learns a new language. For example, in cultures that highly value social hierarchy, learners may have difficulty with the concept of equality in informal English usage. (Chiranjeevi, 2024). In contrast, those from more egalitarian cultures may find this aspect easier to adapt to. In addition, differences in writing systems, sentence structures, and concepts of time between the native language and English may create additional challenges for learners from certain cultural backgrounds (Koval, 2023).

Cultural factors also influence motivation and attitudes towards learning English. In some societies, mastery of English is seen as the key to social mobility and economic success, leading to strong motivation to learn. Meanwhile, in other societies, there may be resistance to English as it is perceived as a threat to cultural identity or colonial heritage. (Zaretsky, 2020). Cultural aspects such as preferred learning styles, comfort level with ambiguity, and propensity to take risks in communication also affect language acquisition strategies and speed. For example, learners from cultures that emphasize compliance and avoid mistakes may be more reluctant to experiment with a new language, which may slow down their fluency development (Syrett et al., 2020).

Understanding the influence of this cultural background is crucial in English language teaching. An effective approach should consider and respect students' cultural diversity, while helping them bridge the differences between home and target

cultures. This may involve the use of culturally relevant learning materials, explicit discussion of cultural differences in language use, and the creation of a safe learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves. (Krulatz & Duggan, 2021). In addition, educators need to be aware of potential cultural conflicts and sensitive to students' emotional needs as they navigate their cultural identities in the context of learning a new language. With an approach that values cultural diversity, the English language acquisition process can be an enriching experience, not only improving language skills but also broadening students' cultural perspectives. (Kimura, 2022).

Furthermore, the influence of cultural background on English language acquisition is also seen in the non-verbal communication and pragmatics aspects of language. Every culture has unwritten rules regarding eye contact, personal distance, touch, and gestures that can differ greatly from the norms in English-speaking cultures. For example, learners from cultures that consider direct eye contact a sign of disrespect may have difficulty in English conversational situations where eye contact is considered important to show attention and honesty (Sadeghi & Hasham, 2009). (Sadeghi & Hashamdar, 2020).. Similarly, understanding and using idioms, sarcasm or humor in English often requires in-depth knowledge of the cultural context that learners from different cultural backgrounds may not possess.

In addition, cultural background also affects the way learners interact with modern learning technologies and resources. In this digital age, many English learning methods rely on technology and self-directed learning. However, the effectiveness of these methods may vary depending on learners' familiarity and comfort with technology, which is often influenced by cultural and socio-economic factors. (Angelovska, 2020). Learners from cultures that emphasize face-to-face learning and in-person interaction may feel less comfortable with e-learning approaches or mobile-based language learning applications, even though these tools are increasingly becoming an integral part of modern language education. (Grothman, 2021).

In conclusion, cultural background has a profound and multifaceted impact on the English language acquisition process. From ways of thinking and processing information to communication styles and learning preferences, cultural aspects color every stage of a learner's journey in mastering English. Recognizing and appreciating these influences is crucial for language educators and learners. (Dasari, 2024). By understanding how cultural backgrounds shape learning experiences, we can develop more inclusive and effective teaching and learning strategies. Approaches that respect cultural diversity not only improve learners' English language proficiency, but also promote greater cross-cultural understanding. (Aris & Hashim, 2023). Ultimately, recognition of the role of culture in language learning can transform the process of English language acquisition into an enriching experience, opening the door not only to new linguistic skills but also to a broader global perspective.

Differences in English Language Acquisition between Cultural Groups

Differences in English language acquisition between cultural groups can be observed in various aspects, reflecting the diversity of learners' linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. One significant difference is seen in the speed and ease of acquisition of certain aspects of English. (Okamura, 2021). For example, learners from cultural groups whose native language has a similar phonological system to English tend to master English pronunciation and intonation more easily. In contrast, those who come from very different language backgrounds, such as East Asian languages, may face greater challenges in producing certain sounds that do not exist in their mother tongue. (Fajrinur, 2021).

Differences are also seen in learners' approach to grammar and sentence structure. Cultural groups with languages that have grammatical structures similar to English, such as Western European languages, often find less difficulty in understanding and using English grammar. (Rani, 2023). On the other hand, learners from language backgrounds that have very different structures, such as languages that use case marker systems or tonal languages, may take longer to internalize English grammatical rules. This can affect the overall speed of language acquisition and require different learning strategies. (Bjornsson, 2023).

In addition, cultural differences in communication styles and social norms also affect the way learners approach the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of English. Cultural groups that emphasize indirect communication and conflict avoidance may have difficulty with the direct communication style often associated with English use in professional or academic contexts. (Winaldo & Oktaviani, 2022).. Conversely, learners from cultures that value strong self-expression may be more adaptable to certain aspects of communication in English, but may need to learn more about the nuances of politeness and manners in different English-speaking contexts. (Wang, 2023). Understanding these differences is important for developing more effective and inclusive teaching approaches in English language learning.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the influence of cultural background on English language acquisition in multilingual settings includes;

First, cultural background plays a very significant role in the process of English language acquisition in a multilingual environment. Research shows that factors such as social norms, cultural values and previous linguistic experiences directly affect the way individuals approach, process and internalize English. These cultural differences not only affect linguistic aspects such as pronunciation and grammar, but also impact on the understanding of pragmatics, communication styles and learning strategies used by learners.

Second, in a multilingual context, the interaction between learners' cultural backgrounds and diverse language environments creates unique dynamics in English language acquisition. Learners who are exposed to multiple languages and cultures tend to develop higher metalinguistic awareness and greater cognitive flexibility. However, this can also pose challenges, such as language interference and cultural identity conflicts, which need to be overcome to achieve optimal English proficiency.

Third, this understanding of the influence of cultural background has important implications for English language education in multilingual societies. Teaching approaches that recognize and take advantage of students' cultural diversity can enhance learning effectiveness. Strategies such as the use of culturally relevant materials, an emphasis on intercultural competence, and the development of metalinguistic awareness can help overcome cultural barriers and improve English language acquisition success. Thus, educators and policy makers need to consider these cultural factors in designing inclusive and effective English language teaching curricula and methodologies in multilingual contexts.

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