

# Allure Journal

*by Irwin Talenta*

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## Exploring and Reflecting on Problems and Challenges in Teaching Culture for English Young Learners

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to reflect on the problems and challenges in teaching culture to English Young Learners (EYL) primarily related to the English context. The study focused on two objectives; to find out problems and challenges faced by the teacher in teaching culture for EYL, as well as the effective methods used to teach culture for EYL. Recently, many more pre-schools in Indonesia have offered English as a major in the learning process. For example, KB TK Hj Isriati Baiturrahman 2 made English as a central subject in daily life. Ideally, the teachers are required to know English culture besides the teaching itself. However, they found some problems in teaching culture when they asked the students to practice "how to say, go to the toilet in English"; it made students' perspectives in their home opposites. This study tried to investigate this issue from the teachers' problems. The interviews and classroom observations data showed that the cultural aspects of language were still not good. The possible strategies also showed a solution to face the problems. Make talking about different backgrounds, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and racial differences part of the conversation at home were the novelty of the study. Thus, teaching English in Indonesia should consider the culture because to communicate functionally using the language and the students have to be familiar with the culture. This study suggested some other memorable ways to learn about other cultures include traveling to other places, visiting museums, and attending cultural events and festivals.*

*Keywords: English context; English for young learner; problems and challenge; teaching culture.*

### INTRODUCTION

The features and characteristics of the culture are other conditions while learning a language besides knowledge of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Leading us to encounter cultural differences involves the ability to use the language to carry out the intended functions and the ability to communicate interculturally. Such differences exist in every language, such as expressions, dialogues, and tone of voice. Brown (1994) described the relationship between language and culture as follows: "A language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture." In a word, culture and language are inseparable.

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The importance of culture in teaching language involves us in a condition such as Brown, (2007) to include culture as the fifth skill besides listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Tomalin (2008) in Farnia (2010),

“... the international role of the English language and globalisation are the two main reasons to teach culture as a fifth language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing. “What the fifth language skill teaches you is the mindset and technique to adapt your use of English to learn about, understand and appreciate the values, ways of doing things and unique qualities of other cultures” (Farnia 2010 p. 19).

It means that learning another language, like English, the teachers and learners need to understand how to use language to embrace the differences. They need to find a solution for completing the culture as the fifth skill in communication; it is a primary reason for teaching and learning at school. The teachers are about to meet some issues in teaching culture, especially in preschool, because the students need to understand the culture better. They only know that a language is to communicate with others. Besides, they need to know how influential culture is.

Understanding the influence of culture is an important aspect of adapting programs or interventions for different populations. Culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a group or society. Cultural factors can significantly impact how individuals perceive and respond to health interventions or educational programs. For example, cultural beliefs and practices around health and illness may affect how individuals seek medical care, adhere to treatment plans, or perceive the effectiveness of interventions. Cultural factors can also influence communication styles, decision-making processes, and social norms, all of which can affect the success of an intervention or program. Therefore, it is important for developers of procedure schemes to be aware of and sensitive to cultural factors that may impact the effectiveness of the program. This may involve conducting a cultural assessment of the target population, involving cultural experts in the development process, or adapting program materials to be culturally appropriate and relevant.

When people think about culture, they often think about an aspect of culture on the surface where they are easy to explore. However, as Peterson (2004) emphasized, there are, in fact, two distinctive types of culture, which he illustrated using the metaphor of an iceberg. At the top of the iceberg are the visible aspects of a culture; art, music, and literature. At the bottom of the iceberg – the immense, unseen area below the surface – is the visible features of the culture, such as its core values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions, all of which cannot be perceived with our senses. However, they are the foundation for what people see at the top. Liu et al. (2014) explored that culture teaches us what the essential rules, rituals, norms, and procedures are within our society; culture also cultivates and reinforces our beliefs and values.

Many mainstream values of English-speaking people and most cultures may mean different things to different people. According to Brown (1994), culture is deeply ingrained part of the very fiber of our being, but language – the means for communication among members of a culture – is the most visible and available expression of that culture. Thus, a person's worldview, self-identity, and systems of thinking, acting, feeling, and communicating can be disrupted by a change from one culture to another. Similarly, Tang (1999) claimed that culture is language, and language is culture. He suggested that to speak a language well, one has to be able to think in that language, and thought is compelling. Language is the soul of the country and the people who speak it. Language and culture are inextricably linked. As such, we might think about moving away from questions about the inclusion or exclusion of culture in foreign language curricula to issues of deliberate

immersion versus non-deliberate exposure to it. "Culture" is a broad concept that embraces all aspects of human life. It includes everything people learn to do. It is everything humans have learned. Culture shapes our thoughts and actions, and often does so with a heavy hand" (Seelye, 1993). Of its several meanings, two are of significant importance to teachers (Brooks, 1975): Hearthstone or "little-c" culture: Culture as everything in humanlife (also called culture BBV: Beliefs, Behavior, and Values). Olympian or "big-C" culture: the best in human life restricted to the elitists (also called culture MLA: great Music, Literature, and Art of the country).

In other words, culture is a way of life (Brown, 1994). It is the context in which we exist, think, feel and relate to others. It is the "glue" that holds groups of people together. It can be defined as a blueprint that guides people's behavior in the community and is nurtured in family life—governing our behavior within the group, being sensitive to status issues, knowing what others expect of us, and what they do when we fail to meet their expectations. In this way, culture helps us know how far we can go as individuals and our responsibilities to the group. When talking about "teaching culture," theoreticians and practitioners often restrict themselves to the specific culture of the target language (Chlopek, 2008). This may be a good approach in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, where students live and are immersed in the English speakers' culture. Anggrani et al (2022) stated the culture of Indonesian society can be divided into three layers: regional or local culture, national culture, and international or global culture. However, this is a very narrow view in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. Byram & Wagner (2018) stated that teaching 'culture' is part of 'language teaching' is an axiom widely shared among World Languages educators. In EFL classes, the students typically study English monolingually while living in their own country, where English is not used in society. They have little access to the target culture, which limits their ability to become culturally competent (Wahidah, et al, 2020). Importantly, their goal in learning English is to communicate not only with native English speakers but also with non-native speakers such as schoolmates. Learning English enables EFL students to become users of international/intercultural communication. Therefore, you can turn your target language into a tool for learning foreign cultures.

It is possible that some preschools in Indonesia offer English as a major in their teaching and learning curriculum, particularly in areas where there is a high demand for English language proficiency. It is happening since English is widely spoken around the world and is considered an important language for international communication, business, and education. As such, many countries, including Indonesia, have recognized the importance of teaching English to their citizens, particularly to young learners. In Indonesia, English is taught as a mandatory subject in primary and secondary schools, and many universities also offer English language courses. Some preschools may also offer English language classes as an elective subject or as part of their regular curriculum. It is worth noting that not all preschools in Indonesia may offer English language instruction, and the availability of such programs may vary depending on the school's location, resources, and educational philosophy. It is always advisable to do research on a particular preschool's curriculum and language instruction before enrolling your child.

Recently, many more preschool in Indonesia has offered English as a major in teaching and learning. For example, *KB TK Hj Isriati Baiturrahman 2* made English as the main subject in daily life. Ideally, teachers are required to know English culture besides the teaching itself. This urgency led the researchers conducted research aimed at reflecting on the importance and problems of teaching culture to English Young Learners (EYL), primarily related to the English context. The study focused on two objectives; to find out

problems and challenges faced by the teacher in teaching culture for EYL, as well as the effective methods used to teach culture for EYL.

### METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researchers used qualitative research with a grounded theory approach. The development of a procedure scheme for adaptation results involves several key steps. The following is a general outline of the process, adapted from Creswell (2007):

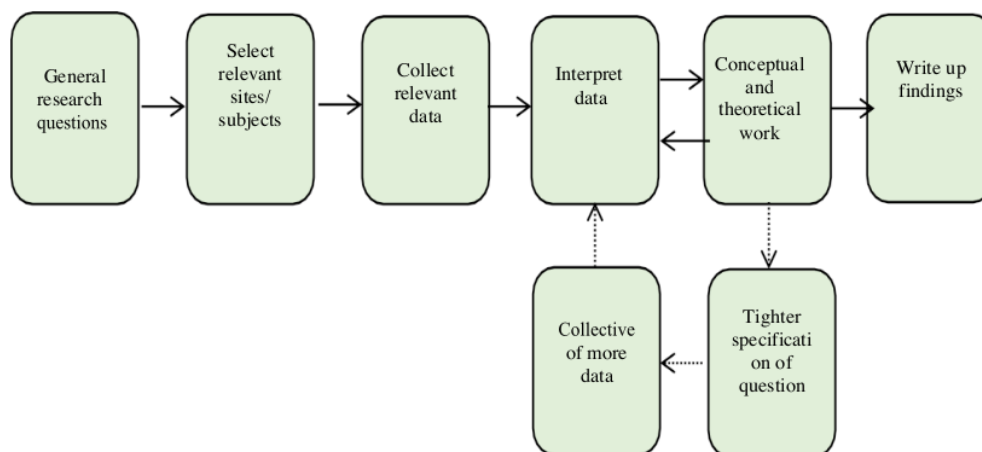


FIGURE 1. Developing procedure scheme of adaptation results in developing procedure (Creswell, 2007)

Figure 1 displayed the developing procedure scheme of adaptation results in developing procedure. 1) Define the purpose of the adaptation: The first step is to clearly define the purpose of the adaptation. This includes identifying the target population, the specific outcomes to be achieved, and the contextual factors that may affect the adaptation process. 2) Conduct a needs assessment: A needs assessment involves collecting information about the needs and preferences of the target population, as well as any existing resources or programs that may be relevant to the adaptation. 3) Develop the adaptation framework: Based on the needs assessment, a framework should be developed that outlines the key components of the adaptation, including the specific interventions or activities to be used, the training and support needed for staff and stakeholders, and the evaluation plan. 4) Pilot test the adaptation: Before implementing the adaptation on a larger scale, it is important to pilot test the procedure scheme to ensure that it is feasible, acceptable, and effective. This may involve testing the adaptation with a small group of participants or in a specific setting. 5) Implement the adaptation: Once the adaptation has been pilot tested and any necessary revisions have been made, it can be implemented on a larger scale. 6) Evaluate the adaptation: Finally, the effectiveness of the adaptation should be evaluated using appropriate methods, such as pre- and post-test assessments or qualitative interviews. The results of the evaluation should be used to refine the procedure scheme and inform future adaptations.

The researchers used some instruments (questionnaire sheet and in-depth interview) for collecting data by using two methods. In the first method, the researchers visited the school to observe the condition. Later, the researchers took a retrospective interview to collect information by checking teachers' answers about his/ her teaching experience in the

past, for example, how did they introduce culture to the students and what did they find? Then the researchers asked everyone to write down their experiences and asked the teachers to interview each other based on the questions the researchers gave; in this part, the researchers put on rules to maintain and protect teachers' experiences. The following day, the teachers shared their experience in teaching culture by filling out questionnaires. Interestingly, in the first method, the researchers asked the teachers to make written diaries and journals of teaching activities.

The second method was an oral part of collecting data. The researchers had to focus on student teachers' discussions. They offered something different in their experience because the researchers asked them to record their teaching activity in the classroom. During this term, stimulated recall interviews (SRI) were used. Shocking videos were the main point and reflected the decision-making processes during the video playing. Indeed, the researchers had prepared the instrument sheets before. There were a growing number of researchers using video-stimulated recall interview (SRI) as a research method that produced both insightful and valuable data for examining the way people experience a specific event of interaction in education (Calderhead, 1981; Dempsey, 2010; Haw & Hadfield, 2011; Hoffman, 2003; Marland, 1984; O'Brien, 1993; Theobald, 2008; Nguyen, 2013).

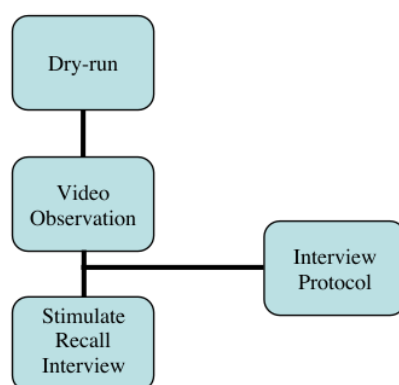


FIGURE 2. The procedure of using recall interview (Nguyen et al. 2013)

Figure 2 shows how SRI works, how student teachers prepared (teaching material) in the classroom, and how they felt. The researchers sincerely did this activity with protocol to collect more information. The aim was to encourage changes in student teachers' behavior. The most distinguishable was think-aloud protocols as a reflection to gather data on student teachers' development in designing teaching materials. It involved them describing the experience of how they did the activities or re-correct the mistakes. Thus, they explored the mistake during activities or after the decision. Finally, the researchers did debrief and transcription into analysis steps.

To be included in this study, participants had to meet the following criteria: college-educated (student teacher), are at school, have less experience in teaching, and are good enough in knowledge of teaching and learning. The researchers used the essential elements of digital literacies in a questionnaire and in-depth interviews to measure the student teachers' motivation in designing teaching materials.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier that the objectives of this study were to find out problems and challenges faced by the teacher in teaching culture for EYL, as well as the effective methods used to teach culture for EYL. Therefore, this study is reflecting on the importance and problems of teaching culture to EYL.

Firstly, the researchers met a problem with students' perspectives while teaching in preschool. He was so surprised the first time came to the school. He said hello to the students, such as "Good Morning, class," and they said, "Good Morning, Teacher." It was a big problem in understanding foreign cultures. Considering the importance of incorporating the cultural aspects in English language teaching, the most important prerequisite is for language teachers to make them familiar with the culture of the language they are teaching (Turkan, 2009). One of the problems with English language teaching in Indonesia is that sometimes the English teachers are not qualified to teach the subject. However, some of them graduated from the English department. Possibly there is a perception that teaching English only teaches grammar and vocabulary. The lack of competent resources available may also be another reason. In addition, teachers' lack of target cultural knowledge may result in inappropriate use of English, which will be transferred to the students, who will bring the error to a later stage.

Secondly, the researchers had more challenges in finding out other problems. He met some teachers in *KB TK Hj Isriati Baiturrahman 2*. Besides, that school applies English as the main subject in their curriculum; the researchers want to know more about preschool as the basis of students' learning. He asked them to share their experience and problems in teaching especially teaching culture, by using questionnaires and discussion.

TABLE 1. Questionnaire result

No	Teachers	Problems
1	A	Teacher A taught the students how to politely ask permission to go to the toilet. She said, "May I wash my hands?" but some students said, "It is different from what they got in private courses." They preferred "Can I go to the toilet?" It confused the teachers about how to teach the culture of EYL. In "Greeting," the teacher has a problem setting her students' mindset. She wants the students always "Greet" to start a conversation, such as "Good Morning, Hello, hi, etc." and say "Bye, See you, Goodbye, etc." at the end of the conversation.
2	B	Teacher B, the problem was funny enough. The teacher wanted to change the students' perspective from saying "Hulk" when they smell a terrible thing to "Eww." He taught the students how to say in asking a friend to repeat their words by using "Sorry" and "Excuse me".
3	C	Teacher C taught saying "Thank you" if someone does a good thing to us. The teacher tried to introduce the part of the table manner (appetizer, main course, dessert). The teacher thought that the government, through the curriculum, tries to protect national values from the impact of western culture. It is one of the reasons that the students know less about culture.

Thirdly, for a sense of adventure, the researchers spun a globe or the wheel of random countries to select a random culture to research. Once the students have selected a culture they are ready to enjoy the fun activities. The researchers asked the students to learn a different language. Other languages can be so fascinating. Learning phrases in another language was easy with the internet at their fingertips. They used Google Translate to translate between English and over 100 other languages. They can even listen to the correct pronunciations. The most exciting part was that they tried to find the culture's customary greetings as a starting point. The words "please" and "thank you" are always helpful. If the culture uses different characters, see if the students can research how their names would be spelled. Can you notice similarities between the other language and their primary language?

On the other hand, the researchers tried to use the methods for teaching about culture in Celik (2012) (1) A Day at Cinema, Television shows and films are valuable tools for learning about culture; they often tell stories that exemplify a particular cultural value or theme, at the same time providing an opportunity for listening practice. Choose an age-appropriate English- language film. If you can, make the experience even more authentic by providing snacks and drinks during the show as a treat. (2) Videos of Cultural Events show recordings of special occasions such as birthday celebrations, anniversary parties, or other gatherings; have students think these events are similar to those in their own culture. (3) Native Speakers, the best way to bring culture into the classroom is to engage a native guest speaker to talk to the class. The target culture becomes much more personal and real. In addition, Mardiana (2008) identified at least three problems:

1. There is confrontation among the students when the EFL teachers introduce foreign cultures through some materials from original textbooks of the English language. We know that most students in Indonesia are Muslims whose religious culture does not always accept samples of cultural practices such as having parties, drugs, sexism, and the like.
2. The government, through the curriculum, tries to protect national values from the impact of western culture. Maintaining national identity, especially for the young generation, is one of the objectives of Indonesian education.
3. It is still being determined what the cultures attached to the English language are because nowadays, English belongs to the international language without necessarily characterizing the culture of people in a particular country.

Language is a powerful tool for learning about foreign cultures. By learning a new language, you can gain insight into the history, customs, beliefs, and values of the people who speak that language. Here are some ways to use language learning as a tool for exploring foreign cultures; 1) Study the language in context: As you learn the language, immerse yourself in the culture through literature, music, films, and TV shows. This will give you a better understanding of the culture's values and beliefs. 2) Connect with native speakers: Find language exchange partners or join online communities where you can connect with native speakers of the language you are learning. This will give you the opportunity to ask questions and learn firsthand about the culture. 3) Travel to a country where the language is spoken: Traveling to a country where the language is spoken is one of the best ways to learn about the culture. You can explore the country, try local foods, and interact with local people. 4) Learn about cultural norms: As you learn the language, take the time to learn about the cultural norms and customs of the people who speak that language. This will help you avoid cultural faux pas and show respect for the culture.

Overall, language learning can be a great way to learn about foreign cultures. By taking the time to explore a culture through its language, you can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of that culture.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the teachers should be concerned with this case because there is a tendency for students to transfer expression used in their home culture into the target language, which is only sometimes appropriate. This condition needs changing since the trend has been achieving intercultural communicative competence as the objective of foreign language learning.



Thus, teaching English in Indonesia should also consider this aspect because to communicate functionally using the language, someone has to be familiar with the target cultures. Teaching culture should be included in the classroom. Make talking about different backgrounds, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and racial differences part of the conversation at home became the novelty of this study. This includes talking about our own cultural identity. Aside from the activities in class, some other memorable ways to learn about other cultures include traveling to other places, visiting museums, and attending cultural events and festivals. Those become the recommendation for the further researchers.

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