

## **A Study of EFL Students' Cultural Awareness in Learning at English Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bone**

**Nurul Ashiqin Binti Larawi**

[shincqine@gmail.com](mailto:shincqine@gmail.com)

Universitas Negeri Makassar

**Haryanto Atmowardoyo\***

[haryanto@unm.ac.id](mailto:haryanto@unm.ac.id)

Universitas Negeri Makassar

\*corresponding author

**Iskandar**

[iskandar@unm.ac.id](mailto:iskandar@unm.ac.id)

Universitas Negeri Makassar

### **Abstract**

*This research aims to find out students' cultural awareness when learning English and the impact of cultural awareness on English language learning. The researcher conducted this research at the Universitas of Muhammadiyah Bone. The method of this research is descriptive-qualitative research. The research instruments employed were an interview and a questionnaire. The data were collected using a questionnaire with a Google Form and interview techniques. The research participants were English Department student at the sixth-semester of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bone. The results of this study indicated that the majority of EFL students have an awareness of their culture during the learning process and students also showed that their reactions to culture are related to cultural knowledge. In addition, students' responses indicated that cultural awareness is very important for developing positive attitudes towards people who have different cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors. The results also showed that the relationship between culture and linguistics is closely intertwined and influences each other, and the findings showed cultural awareness had positive impact to learning English on EFL students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bone.*

**Keywords:** Cultural, awareness, EFL Student.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education enhances a person's capacity to think, feel, and act in ways that are grounded, increase personal fulfillment, and increase happiness in the larger community. Moreover, education can aid in the development of a person's personality, way of thinking, and social abilities. In Indonesia, English education is one of the most important subjects in school because it is the language most widely used on a global scale in various fields such as politics, business, science, and cross-cultural communication. There are several ways to learn English, and one of them is by studying culture, because learning English as a foreign language is intertwined with culture. Because motivation has been found to be the most significant factor affecting one's

decision to study English, culture also plays a significant role in encouraging students to learn a foreign language.

According to Zolyan in Eđmen (2016), language through culture and culture through language offer us fresh opportunities to understand contemporary social processes, and the importance of universal human ideals as well as national and regional cultures always allows us to understand different civilizations. Culture and language are interrelated; students must be aware of this. This is important because learning a language is the first step to understanding culture. To begin with, we are aware of cultural sensitivities. Learning the target language requires understanding how our own culture differs from the culture of others, a process known as cultural awareness. Cornish in Ilyas (2019) stated in mentoring training. To encourage cross-cultural acceptance and tolerance, cultural awareness is essential. Cultural awareness helps us develop a better understanding of our own culture and how others see it.

Ritlyova claims in Kastanakis and Voyer (2014) that learning a foreign language helps pupils better understand both their own culture and other cultures. Nevertheless, due to a variety of factors, such as time constraints, a lack of cultural expertise, or a lack of training on how to teach cultural components, teachers sometimes fall short of covering cultural themes in language schools in their entirety. Students won't be motivated if they don't comprehend their own and other people's cultures. The findings of research on their cultural awareness in language learning, particularly English as a foreign language in a globalized environment, can tell us all of that.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Culture**

Bloch (1991) defined culture as that which people must know in order to function reasonably successfully in their social environment. Culture is a significant topic of ethnographic inquiry. A culture can be said to be the same. The smallest portion of a culture is what we can easily observe, such as conduct, attire, and cuisine. The internal component, which includes beliefs, values, norms, and attitudes, is below the level of consciousness while this is happening.

According to Irmania et al., (2021), The following are a few cultural functions: a) Culture is the behavior of a society living in a certain location, which manifests itself in values and existing norms. And from that point forward, it will be passed down through generations; b) Culture serves as a characteristic that identifies an inhabited community in a given location; c) Culture serves as a means for a particular society to meet its basic needs. These needs can be satisfied by culture in the form of dwellings, weapons, traditional clothing, cuisine, songs, and other things.

### **Culture and Language**

Culture and language are inextricably linked. Culture will also disappear if languages do. You can keep your culture alive by continuously speaking in your original tongue. Thus, learning a foreign language also requires learning about the culture of that language. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the culture of any foreign language. Among the most prominent linguists who research language and culture are these two: Our understanding of the world is based on the categories and distinctions found in our native tongue, and b) due to cultural differences, what is present in one language may not be present in another, according to their thesis, which is commonly known as linguistic relativity. Genc & Bada, (2005).

### **The relationship between language and culture**

According to Sapir in Elmes (2013), given how difficult it is to understand other people's communication patterns, the relationship between language and culture becomes convoluted beyond just knowing certain words, sounds, and sentences. Then, according to Kramsch in Mowlaie & Arasteh, (2017), language is the most crucial means by which we set up our social lives. It is closely tied to culture in many complex ways when it is employed in communication. To begin with, people's words are based on their everyday experience.

### **Cultural Awareness**

Cultural awareness is the capacity to understand cultural context, issues, and connections using conscious awareness and knowledge acquired through the mind and senses. In other words, "cultural awareness is the ability to engage with people, to understand and accept both the positive and negative cultural qualities that others possess, as well as their own cultural characteristics. (Hammami and Esmail, 2013). Furthermore, according to Wunderle (2008) found that there are cultural variations described, such as behaviors, values, and cognition, in the taxonomy of culture of developing cultural awareness. However, values and behavior vary among cultures most frequently. Then, as stated by Tomlinson in Mowlaie & Arasteh (2017), cultural awareness entails a constantly rising inner sense of the equality of cultures, a raised understanding of one's own culture and that of others, and a growing interest about the differences and similarities of cultures. He argues that raising culturally conscious children helps them to be more patient, open-minded, and able to comprehend and empathize with other cultures.

### **Element of cultural awareness**

According to Fox in Dolidze (2017), culture is contextual and ephemeral in space and time. Similar to language, culture may appear to be a phrase that is challenging to define. Then, cultural elements cover things like a society's or a culture's beliefs, values, customs, tools of the trade, and modes of communication. The Standards for Foreign Language Learning (NSFLEP 1999) provide a framework for students to integrate moral values, social norms, and tangible and intangible cultural goods. The three Ps of culture are: a) perspectives (what people within a culture believe, feel, and value); b) practices (how people within a culture interact and communicate with one another). Products are the things that members of a group make, share, and pass on to the following generation. Examples include technology, music, art, food, and literature.

### **The influence of cultural awareness in English language learning**

According to Byram and Roen (2002), cultural context, which takes into account person, circumstance, time, and location, has a substantial impact on how language is employed. Therefore, we must understand the target language and target culture in order to improve our communication and knowledge about the perspectives of native speakers of the target language, as well as their experience of living with them, social behavior, sentiments, beliefs, customs, and religion.

According to Mohamed (2020), culture influences several skills in English such as vocabulary, listening, speaking, and translating as follow:

a. Cultural influence vocabulary

Language is the vehicle for culture, and vocabulary is the essential building block of language. Cultural differences will inexorably be reflected in vocabulary, and vocabulary definitions will also be a reflection of more general national or cultural changes.

b. Cultural influence listening

In listening, you will not be able to understand what is being said about expressions of a foreign culture or something that is unfamiliar to your way of life. But it is much simpler to absorb and immediately grasp the meaning when you are listening to something you are already familiar with.

c. Cultural influence speaking

Along with listening, speaking ability goes beyond simple pronunciation and intonation. To understand the cultural background of the target language, people must read extensively; only then will they be able to interact with others successfully and avoid being misunderstood or misinterpreted. Hence, when teaching oral English, teachers should emphasize the language's usefulness and make an attempt to use examples from daily life

d. Cultural influence translating

There is broad agreement that culture has a big impact on translation. While translating, we should have a solid understanding of both the source and target languages. The most difficult part of translating is comprehending the cultural context. Science, philosophy, history, geography, and the arts are only a few of the subjects covered by cultural background knowledge

### **The Importance of English language learning**

English is incredibly useful in the modern world and plays a significant part in our daily lives. In the corporate world, English is a language that is frequently utilized. For intercultural communication and sustaining correspondence with foreign business partners or experts, English is a requirement. (Richard 2016).

### **English Foreign Language (EFL)**

The term "English as a Foreign Language" (EFL) refers to a language that is spoken by citizens of another nation or community. According to Patel and Jain, (2008), a foreign language is one that is spoken by members of linguistically other civilizations and in which the secondary environment is not observed.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The researcher uses a descriptive-qualitative approach in this study. It indicates that descriptive and qualitative methods of analysis were used in this study. According to Brumfit and Mitchell in Ummah et al (2016), descriptive research aims to give the most accurate picture of what current practice is, how students learn, how teachers teach, and what a classroom looks like at a specific time and place. Qualitative research is study that relies on descriptive data rather than statistical techniques. Construction of object viewpoints that are precisely sought and generated through words, comprehensive visuals, and elaborate diagrams forms the basis of

qualitative research. The researcher conducts a needs analysis in addition to using descriptive analysis to examine the data and acquire it.

Since the data in this study are expressed in words rather than numbers, it is classified as qualitative research. The key finding of the study is the students' cultural awareness and its impact on their English language learning. The researcher utilized a descriptive method to analyze students' cultural awareness at UNIM Bone.

### **Research Instrument**

#### **a. Interview protocol guide**

The researcher used an interview protocol guide. An interview protocol or interview guide. It provides instructions for executing the data collection procedure and subsequent analysis. The methodology aims to connect the specific conversation to the individual experiences of the research participant. The researcher had interviewed five students to know about cultural awareness and the impact of cultural awareness on their English language learning. The researcher used interviews as an instrument to collect data for analysis. This helped the researcher get data.

#### **b. Questionnaire**

The researcher circulated a questionnaire to gather data about students' cultural awareness and how it impacts their learning of the English language. As a matter of fact, Mahi claims in Rahma et al. (2022) that it takes less time to obtain the information from the study object. Aiming for perception, comprehension, and experience, it is to gather information in accordance with the students' cultural awareness. It means that the data was gathered directly from the students using the provided questionnaire without any help. The choices each item makes are described. The students chose the alternative that, in their opinion, best reflects learning English through cultural awareness.

### **Data Techniques Analysis**

Despite the fact that numbers are described through interpretation, qualitative data consists of words. Therefore, extensive investigation is required to understand and ascertain their meaning. According to Miles et al (2014), the following strategies are used in qualitative study data analysis:

#### **a. Data reduction**

Data reduction is the process of separating the useful data from the irrelevant data once it has been gathered and processed. The researcher gained data through a questionnaire and an audio recording of the interviews with the students to gain more supporting data. All the recording data and questionnaire were collected and transcribed. From the transcription, the researcher acquired the necessary data about students' cultural awareness in learning English and the impact of cultural awareness on their English language learning. It was for providing and emphasizing the primary data.

#### b. Data display

Data display is the information that the researcher finds to be pertinent. The researcher clearly and thoroughly explains the data that was entered into the study. Data presentation in this study was an orderly collection of information that allowed for drawing and action. The researcher presents the results of the study by describing the cultural awareness of students after analyzing the entirety of the data collected from them. At this stage, the researcher displayed the data based on its relevancy to the research focus on the students' cultural awareness and the impact of cultural awareness in English language learning on EFL students.

#### c. Conclusion

In the conclusion, the researcher intends to provide a resolution to the problem as it has been formulated. These processes involved checking the data reduction and data display again before drawing any conclusions. The researcher began to draw and develop conclusions concerning cultural awareness, how students' cultural awareness affects learning English, and the impacts of cultural awareness on English language learning. In order to confirm that the data was accurate, verification was also done by looking at the data condensation and data display.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The implications of the findings from the descriptive study, which includes data from interviews and questionnaires, are discussed in this section. Students' cultural awareness and the impact of learning English as a foreign language are discussed by the researchers in this study.

#### **The students' cultural awareness in learning English**

The researcher discovered that Universitas Muhammadiyah Bone students' cultural awareness in learning English was based on research findings. According to Bolch in Sidabutar (2020), culture is a significant topic of ethnographic inquiry. A culture can be said to be the same. The smallest portion of a culture is what we can easily observe, such as conduct, attire, and cuisine. The internal components include beliefs, values, norms, and attitudes. The researcher looked at two sections. In the first section, it is discussed how to understand culture and students' cultural awareness when learning English. Based on the results, the students provided a precise definition of culture, gave their explanation, and mentioned an example of culture.

The first, before extending it into the target language culture, the researcher assesses students' grasp of culture. Students are well-versed in cultural matters, including cultural facets. This is due to the fact that culture is a vast and complicated idea that encompasses the common attitudes, values, traditions, mannerisms, and artifacts that define a certain group or community. This is evident when students provide instances of different cultures based on their cultural knowledge, the culture they are a part of, or the culture in which they now reside. Students can better understand culture with information and experience

The second, after the researcher knows the students' cultural knowledge, the researcher investigates regarding their cultural awareness where cultural awareness has an understanding of their own culture and other people's cultures, and especially an understanding of foreign cultures in order to be able to understand the target language through good knowledge of their culture. According to Tomlinson in Mowlaie & Arasteh (2017) cultural awareness requires a growing sense of inner cultural equality, a better understanding of one's own culture and the culture of

others and an increased interest in differences and similarities between cultures. Students understand that appreciating existing cultural variations is a key component to understanding a culture. So, their cultural awareness can be seen from the analysis of this item, where cultural awareness is something that is very important to understand correctly in various cultures.

The third, successful communication focusing on the main objective of providing cultural information in language schools can increase cultural awareness. According to Stephanie and Cantatore in (Ilyas, 2019) cultural awareness is the cornerstone of communication. This necessitates the capacity to experience feelings of inferiority as well as awareness of existing cultural norms, values, and viewpoints. It is deeply connected to culture in numerous ways when it is employed in communication contexts. They establish a connection to a repository of information about the world that other people have and disseminate facts, ideas, or occasions that can be used to interact with others. Thus, EFL students have a comprehension of the target culture and the purpose of imparting cultural information. It also revealed that students had positive view toward cultural awareness is created through the purpose for which cultural information.

The fourth, the elements of the target culture where it is located include things such as people's culture or beliefs, values, practices, products, and communication techniques. Thus, students understand that elements of the target culture must be included in language learning to develop cultural awareness. Whereas in the most significant aspect of culture, understanding how students understand culture is important because culture involves various components, including art, language, religion, traditions, customs, habits, literature, behavior, moral values, daily life, relationships, communication, and ethical ideals. Students describe how they understand culture from a holistic perspective.

The fifth is how to behave in a certain cultural context when learning English in the class. This allows us to investigate the students' cultural awareness. According to Irmania et al. (2021), culture is the behavior of a society living in a certain location, which manifests itself in values and existing norms. And from that point forward, it will be passed down through generations. Therefore, EFL students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bone realize that cultural awareness influences behavior, and as ethnically Buginese students, the Buginese community places cultural values and teachings as a top priority. They even understand how to behave when they are different from their own culture and understand the target culture.

### **The impact of cultural awareness on English language learning**

After discussing students' cultural awareness in learning English, the researcher After discussing students' cultural awareness in learning English, the researcher explained the extent to which their cultural awareness had an impact on their English learning. Byram in Roen (2002), notes that cultural context, taking into account contextual aspects such as people, circumstances, time, and location, has a major impact on how language is used. Therefore, we must learn the target language and target culture to improve our ability to communicate with them and gain insight into their viewpoints and interactions, social behavior, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and religion.

The first is the importance of culture in learning. Students understand that it can provide several benefits when culture is included in language learning. According to Gilmore in Ilyas (2019), through learning, culture enhances the standard of living and general wellbeing of both

individuals and society. Additionally, more tolerance opens doors for social interaction. If the emphasis is on learning, then culture affects language learning in general.

The researcher found that the majority of students understood the importance of culture in learning English. This is because an understanding of good culture can increase knowledge and motivation for learning English. Therefore, cultural awareness is a crucial component of learning English as it can help learners communicate more effectively, avoid misunderstandings, and deepen their understanding and appreciation of the language. Understanding the cultural background, art, literature, and lifestyle can help to achieve language proficiency.

The second is the influence of foreign cultural awareness increases linguistic knowledge. According to Hesar et al in Belli (2018), to fully learn the target language, one must also understand the target culture in addition to language abilities, patterns and regulations. From the influence obtained by students that cultural awareness helps improve their intellectual development and cultural knowledge because English is the target language where the culture studied in class is how the culture of native speakers is.

This is because cultural context has a significant influence on how language is used and skills in learning are very important as in listening students know how culture plays a role in listening. This can be seen in student 4 who stated "*Well, I think the most important thing that should be pay attention to is listening skill because in listening skill for example we can't accept news clearly for human as a speaker.*" Meanwhile, the students understand the cultural approach when translating English words. This can be seen in student 2 who stated "*Different goes people who have a translator or interpreter job, so they need to be culturally competent for each target audience there looking with by developing through understanding of cultural background, awareness, sensitively in order to effectively communicate messages from the source language to the target language audience*". Furthermore, students know the culture of English when speaking because it can help them communicate more effectively and avoid cultural misunderstandings. We can see in student 1 who stated "*impact cultural awareness in speaking. Cultural awareness plays a crucial in improving speaking skill there are some positive impact like number one misunderstanding and miss interpretation*". Thus, culture influences several skills in English, such as vocabulary, listening, speaking, and translating to improve linguistics.

The third is the advantages of learning cultural information in EFL class. From these results, the researcher found that students benefit from learning cultural information in the EFL class because there are several advantages that the EFL class can improve language learning in improving communication, fostering cultural sensitivity, developing awareness and improving some skills in English. This is because English syntax and vocabulary are related to culture. The process of learning a culture occurs simultaneously with the advancement of one's linguistic abilities. In addition, exposing students to diverse cultures piques their curiosity about the very different environments of the host countries. English learners are more interested in learning about the people and nations in which the language is spoken than just hearing the sounds of the language. These results indicate that cultural learning in the EFL class has a positive impact on EFL students at Muhammadiyah Universitas of Bone.

## CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, the purpose of this research is to find out about cultural awareness and the impact of cultural awareness on learning English as a foreign

language. In this chapter, the researcher wants to conclude the data obtained in the previous chapters. There are several things that can be concluded in this chapter, as follows:

- a. The majority of EFL students have an awareness of their culture during the learning process and students also showed that their reactions to culture are related to cultural knowledge. In addition, students' responses indicated that cultural awareness is very important for developing positive attitudes towards people who have different cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors. The majority of EFL students recognize the importance of understanding the target culture in order to interact with people from other cultures.
- b. This research has shown that cultural awareness influences learning English for EFL students where the students understand the culture and linguistics is closely intertwined and influences each other that help to improve their English language learning. It causes the developing cultural awareness along with language proficiency can significantly improve English proficiency in variety of contexts, and the findings also showed cultural awareness had positive impact to learning English on EFL students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bone.

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