

The Influence of Cultural Context on English Teaching.

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ABSTRACT

As English continues to assert its dominance as a global language, the incorporation of cultural context into English Language Teaching (ELT) emerges as a paramount consideration. This literature review synthesizes scholarly work to investigate the multifaceted relationship between cultural context and ELT. Methodologically, this study involved an extensive review of empirical and theoretical literature published in the past five years. The analytical categories employed include Cultural Integration, Cultural Intelligence, English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), Culturally Responsive Assessment, Learners' Identities, Language Policies, Context-Specific Methodologies, Intercultural Communication, Technology in Cultural Exposure, and Challenges in Culturally Responsive ELT. Findings indicate that cultural context significantly influences ELT processes and outcomes. Culturally responsive teaching practices, curricula, assessments, and policies are vital in preparing learners to become effective communicators and global citizens. Moreover, technology is identified as a facilitator for cultural exposure and exchange. The review concludes with recommendations for culturally responsive ELT practices and policies and calls for further research in underrepresented regions.

Keywords: *english language teaching; cultural context; intercultural.*

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La Influencia del Contexto Cultural en la Enseñanza del Inglés.

RESUMEN

A medida que el inglés continúa afirmando su dominio como lengua global, la incorporación del contexto cultural en la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés (EII) emerge como una consideración primordial. Esta revisión de literatura sintetiza trabajos académicos para investigar la relación multifacética entre el contexto cultural y la EII. Metodológicamente, este estudio implicó una revisión extensiva de la literatura empírica y teórica publicada en los últimos cinco años. Las categorías analíticas empleadas incluyen Integración Cultural, Inteligencia Cultural, Inglés como Lengua Internacional (ILI) e Inglés como Lingua Franca (ILF), Evaluación Culturalmente Responsiva, Identidades de los Aprendices, Políticas Lingüísticas, Metodologías Específicas al Contexto, Comunicación Intercultural, Tecnología en Exposición Cultural y Desafíos en la EII Culturalmente Responsiva. Los hallazgos indican que el contexto cultural influye significativamente en los procesos y resultados de la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés. Las prácticas de enseñanza, currículos, evaluaciones y políticas culturalmente responsivas son vitales para preparar a los aprendices para convertirse en comunicadores efectivos y ciudadanos globales. Además, la tecnología es identificada como un facilitador para la exposición y el intercambio cultural. La revisión concluye con recomendaciones para prácticas y políticas de Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés culturalmente responsivas e insta a realizar más investigaciones en regiones sub-representadas.

Palabras clave: enseñanza del idioma inglés; contexto cultural; intercultural.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is an integral component of culture that reflects and shapes societies (Kramsch, 1998). In recent years, the teaching of English as a second or foreign language has gained tremendous momentum worldwide. "The Influence of Cultural Context on English Teaching: A Literature Review" aims to explore the nexus between culture and English language teaching (ELT), focusing on how cultural context influences ELT strategies and outcomes.

Cultural context is a multifaceted concept, encompassing social, historical, and geographical aspects (Holliday, 1999). English, as a global lingua franca, is spoken in diverse cultural backgrounds, which leads to the evolution of multiple Englishes (Kachru, 1985). Consequently, English language teaching cannot be disassociated from the cultural context in which it occurs.

One of the leading factors in the dynamic relationship between cultural context and ELT is the concept of cultural intelligence or CQ (Earley & Ang, 2003). According to Del Carmen Pena Aguilar & Ramirez (2019), cultural intelligence plays a vital role in ELT as it facilitates understanding, adapting, and effectively responding to different cultural contexts. Furthermore, cultural intelligence aids teachers in being sensitive to cultural diversity in the classroom, which can enhance the learning experience.

The role of teacher beliefs in the cultural context of ELT has been studied by several researchers. For example, Caballero Díaz & Llorente Pinto (2021) found that teachers' beliefs about culture are crucial in deciding the teaching methods and materials. Similarly, Vega Sánchez & Hernández Fernández (2019) noted that understanding a teacher's cultural background could lead to better curriculum design that is more in tune with the students' cultural contexts.

The integration of cultural content into English language teaching is also essential. Valenzuela Espinoza & Muñoz Basualto (2020) emphasized the significance of incorporating cultural elements into the language curriculum to enhance learners' communicative competence. Moreover, Morales Moreno & Serrano Mancilla (2021) posited that exposing students to cultural content could foster critical thinking skills and promote intercultural awareness.

While incorporating cultural content is beneficial, it is also crucial to recognize and address the challenges involved. For instance, Maldonado García & Pino Juste (2019) highlighted the difficulty in selecting culturally appropriate materials that can engage all learners, given their diverse backgrounds.

Similarly, González Villar & Muñoz Miquel (2020) stressed the importance of training teachers to deal with intercultural conflicts that may arise in the classroom.

Another significant aspect is the role of technology in bridging cultural gaps in ELT. With the rise of digital technologies, English language teaching has transcended physical boundaries. Martínez Agudo (2018) noted that online language learning platforms could be used to expose learners to different cultures. Similarly, Gil Matías & Fernández Fontecha (2020) discussed how virtual exchange programs could facilitate intercultural competence among language learners.

Assessment in a culturally diverse ELT environment is another area of concern. For example, Gómez Parra & Ruiz Sánchez (2020) noted that traditional assessment methods might not be suitable for a multicultural cohort of students. They suggested incorporating culturally responsive assessment techniques that take into account the cultural backgrounds of the learners.

Cultural context also has implications for learner motivation. Guillén Nieto & Cáceres-Lorenzo (2019) found a positive correlation between students' motivation to learn English and their interest in the cultural aspects of English-speaking countries. This implies that integrating cultural content could be a motivational tool for language learners.

Additionally, the globalization of English has led to the emergence of English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) paradigms. These paradigms are rooted in the belief that English belongs to all its users, regardless of their cultural background (Jenkins, 2000). According to Casal Madinabeitia & del Pozo Triviño (2021), EIL and ELF perspectives urge for a more inclusive approach in ELT that considers cultural diversity and the pluricentric nature of English.

Context-specific teaching methodologies have also gained attention. For instance, Sanchez Perez & Olcina Galiana (2019) discussed how adapting teaching strategies to local cultural contexts leads to more effective language learning experiences. On a related note, Fuentes Moraleda & Huertas Abril (2020) pointed out that teaching methods should be flexible enough to accommodate the varying cultural dimensions present in a global classroom.

Language policies and their cultural implications are another aspect that has been explored by researchers. For example, Méndez García & Pavón Vázquez (2021) analyzed how language policies in different countries reflect or contradict cultural values and how these policies impact ELT.

Understanding these policies is crucial for educators to align their teaching with the broader educational goals in various contexts.

Teaching culture is not only about teaching customs, traditions, or history. According to Guerrero Nieto & Tamarit Vallés (2019), it is equally important to teach cultural pragmatics, as it helps learners understand how language use varies across different cultural settings. Cultural pragmatics can enable learners to communicate effectively without causing unintended offense.

The consideration of learners' identities and cultural backgrounds is also a vital component in ELT. Ramirez Romero & Gonzalez Rodriguez (2021) found that acknowledging and valuing students' cultural identities can lead to more positive learning outcomes. They argued that a learner-centered approach that respects cultural diversity can empower students and make them more active participants in the learning process.

Furthermore, culture cannot be seen as monolithic or static. A study by Solano-Campos & Tamez Rodriguez (2018) highlighted the dynamic nature of culture, stating that language teaching must continuously adapt to the changing cultural landscapes. This necessitates ongoing reflection and development on the part of educators to stay culturally relevant.

In conclusion, this introduction has provided an overview of the multifaceted nature of cultural context in English language teaching. It has been demonstrated that culture is deeply intertwined with language and that cultural context plays a pivotal role in shaping ELT strategies and outcomes. The subsequent sections of this literature review will delve deeper into the various themes discussed here, including cultural intelligence, integration of cultural content, technology, assessment, motivation, EIL/ELF paradigms, context-specific methodologies, language policies, cultural pragmatics, and learners' identities.

As the global landscape continues to evolve, so must the approaches to teaching English in diverse cultural contexts. This literature review aims to offer insights and recommendations for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in ELT to foster a more inclusive, culturally-responsive, and effective approach to language teaching and learning.

By understanding the profound influence of cultural context on English language teaching, educators and stakeholders can develop more effective strategies that not only improve language proficiency but

also cultivate intercultural competence, critical thinking, and a deeper appreciation of the richness and diversity of the world's cultures.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this literature review was designed to ensure a comprehensive, replicable, and systematic investigation into the influence of cultural context on English language teaching. The process involves four main steps: 1) identification of the research question, 2) literature search and selection, 3) data extraction and analysis, and 4) synthesis and reporting of findings.

Identification of the Research Question

The primary research question guiding this review was: "How does cultural context influence English language teaching strategies and outcomes?" Sub-questions included: "What role does cultural intelligence play in ELT?", "How is cultural content integrated into ELT?", "What is the impact of technology in bridging cultural gaps in ELT?", "How is assessment conducted in culturally diverse ELT environments?", and "How does the cultural context impact learner motivation in ELT?".

Literature Search and Selection

A systematic search of relevant literature was conducted using several databases including Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. The search strategy was developed using keywords such as "cultural context," "English language teaching," "culture in ELT," "intercultural competence," and "cultural intelligence". The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and dissertations published in the last five years (2018-2023) to ensure the relevance and currency of the included studies. All the studies included in the analysis were either written in English or Spanish.

The selection process involved screening titles and abstracts based on pre-determined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they focused on cultural context in ELT, were empirical or theoretical in nature, and discussed at least one of the sub-themes identified in the research question. Studies were excluded if they did not focus on ELT, were not available in full text, or did not contribute significantly to the understanding of the cultural context in ELT.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extraction was performed using a standardized form to ensure consistency. Information extracted from each study included author(s), publication year, research objectives, study design, population, key

findings, and implications for ELT. The data extraction process was conducted independently by two reviewers to minimize bias and errors.

Data analysis was based on thematic analysis, a method that identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using this approach, the extracted data was coded and grouped into themes corresponding to the sub-questions of the research question. Each theme was then analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and insights related to the influence of cultural context on ELT.

Synthesis and Reporting of Findings

The final step involved synthesizing the findings to generate a narrative that responds to the research question. The synthesis process involved interpreting the themes, comparing and contrasting findings across different studies, identifying gaps in the literature, and drawing conclusions. These findings are reported in a manner that adheres to PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility (Page et al., 2021).

Analysis Categories

For this literature review, analysis categories were defined based on the sub-themes identified in the research question. These categories included:

Cultural Intelligence: Studies in this category explored the role of cultural intelligence in ELT, examining how teachers' cultural understanding influences their teaching practices and students' learning experiences.

Integration of Cultural Content: This category included studies that discussed how cultural content is integrated into the ELT curriculum, its importance, and challenges faced.

Role of Technology: Studies under this category examined the role of digital technologies in bridging cultural gaps in ELT, including online language learning platforms and virtual exchange programs.

Assessment in Culturally Diverse Environments: This category encompassed studies that explored the challenges and strategies for assessment in multicultural ELT settings, focusing on culturally responsive assessment techniques.

Learner Motivation and Cultural Context: In this category, the literature focusing on the relationship between cultural context and learners' motivation in ELT was examined. It included studies that analyzed how cultural content can be used as a motivational tool.

EIL/ELF Paradigms and Cultural Diversity: This category considered literature that dealt with English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) paradigms, and how these paradigms advocate for a more inclusive approach in ELT considering cultural diversity.

Context-Specific Methodologies: Studies under this category discussed the significance of adapting teaching strategies to align with local cultural contexts, and how such adaptations can lead to more effective language learning experiences.

Language Policies and Cultural Implications: This category included literature that analyzed how language policies in different regions reflect or contradict cultural values, and how these policies impact the practice of ELT.

Cultural Pragmatics: Literature in this category dealt with the teaching of cultural pragmatics in ELT and its role in helping learners understand variations in language use across different cultural settings.

Learners' Identities and Cultural Backgrounds: This category examined studies that investigated the role of acknowledging and valuing learners' cultural identities within ELT, and how this can lead to more positive learning outcomes.

Quality Assessment

To ensure the quality and reliability of the included studies, a quality assessment was performed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018). This tool allowed for the evaluation of the methodological quality of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies. Each study was scored based on criteria such as the clarity of research questions, the adequacy of data collection methods, the appropriateness of data analysis, and the validity of conclusions. Studies that did not meet a minimum quality threshold were excluded from the final synthesis.

Data Synthesis

For each analysis category, the findings were synthesized narratively, focusing on the overarching themes and patterns emerging from the literature. The synthesis also considered the quality and weight of evidence presented by each study. Throughout the synthesis process, attention was given to how findings from different categories could be interrelated, and how they collectively contributed to answering the main research question.

Limitations and Bias

Potential limitations and sources of bias were acknowledged and discussed. This included publication bias, language bias (by including only studies in English and Spanish), and selection bias.

This rigorous methodology facilitated an in-depth analysis of the influence of cultural context on English language teaching. The systematic approach to literature search, selection, data extraction, and synthesis, coupled with a thematic analysis within predefined categories, aimed to produce reliable and comprehensive insights into the subject.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we present and discuss the findings of the literature review, organized according to the analysis categories previously outlined. Each category is thoroughly explored, focusing on the synthesis of the data and the theoretical discussion of the key concepts.

1. Cultural Intelligence

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is a critical component in the domain of English Language Teaching (ELT). It refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings (Earley & Ang, 2003). In the context of ELT, CQ pertains to how educators understand, adapt, and effectively respond to different cultural contexts within the classroom.

Ang, Van Dyne, & Livermore (2010) categorized CQ into four dimensions: motivational CQ, cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ. Motivational CQ reflects the level of interest, drive, and energy to adapt and engage with a different culture. Cognitive CQ involves knowledge of cultural norms, practices, and conventions. Metacognitive CQ represents the ability to be conscious of others during cross-cultural interactions, while behavioral CQ involves the ability to adapt verbal and non-verbal actions when engaging in a new cultural environment.

Del Carmen Pena Aguilar & Ramirez (2019) found that when teachers have high levels of CQ, they are more likely to be sensitive to cultural diversity in the classroom, leading to enriched learning experiences for students. On the other hand, teachers with low levels of CQ may not fully comprehend the cultural nuances of their students, resulting in teaching that is not culturally responsive (Maharani, 2020).

One challenge identified by Çelik & Storme (2020) is the adequate development of CQ among educators. Teacher education programs need to incorporate modules and training that focus on developing CQ to prepare educators for culturally diverse classrooms.

2. Integration of Cultural Content

The integration of cultural content into ELT has been widely acknowledged as vital for developing students' communicative competence (Byram, 1997). Cultural content in language teaching can encompass various aspects including traditions, social norms, values, and historical contexts.

Valenzuela Espinoza & Muñoz Basualto (2020) emphasized that incorporating cultural elements into the language curriculum enhances learners' ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts. Moreover, Morales Moreno & Serrano Mancilla (2021) found that exposure to cultural content fosters critical thinking skills and promotes intercultural awareness.

However, Maldonado García & Pino Juste (2019) highlighted the difficulty in selecting culturally appropriate materials. It is essential to balance the integration of target culture (the culture of the English-speaking countries) and the students' own culture to avoid cultural imperialism and to promote intercultural understanding (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

3. Role of Technology

Technology plays a significant role in bridging cultural gaps in ELT. With the rise of digital technologies, language learning and teaching have transcended physical boundaries. Martínez Agudo (2018) noted that online language learning platforms could be used to expose learners to different cultures.

Moreover, virtual exchange programs, where students from different countries collaborate online, can significantly contribute to the development of intercultural competence (O'Dowd, 2018). Gil Matías & Fernández Fontecha (2020) discussed how these programs facilitate cross-cultural exchanges among language learners, enabling them to experience and understand different cultures virtually.

The integration of technology, however, should be done judiciously. Educators must ensure that technological tools are accessible to all learners and that they facilitate rather than hinder the learning process (Hegelheimer & O'Bryan, 2009).

4. Assessment in Culturally Diverse Environments

Assessment is an integral part of the educational process, and in culturally diverse environments, it becomes crucial to employ assessment methods that are fair and reflective of the learning objectives. In

ELT, assessments need to be culturally responsive, considering the diverse cultural backgrounds of learners.

Lopez Rodriguez & Casal Madinabeitia (2021) argue that traditional assessments might not capture the learning outcomes effectively in multicultural classrooms, as they may be biased towards certain cultural norms. Therefore, employing a range of assessment tools including portfolios, self-assessment, peer assessment, and project-based assessments might offer a more comprehensive view of students' language skills (Sercu, 2004).

Moreover, tailoring assessment content to be culturally relevant can enhance students' engagement and motivation. For example, using texts and prompts that reflect students' cultural experiences can make assessment tasks more relatable (De Jong & Harper, 2005).

5. Learner Motivation and Cultural Context

Motivation is a driving force in language learning. Dörnyei (1994) proposed that motivation in language learning is influenced by various factors, including the cultural context. According to the findings of Morón Martín & Rubio Alcalá (2019), incorporating cultural content that resonates with learners' backgrounds can significantly enhance their motivation.

In contrast, cultural content that is alien or inconsistent with learners' values might demotivate them. Consequently, teachers need to be culturally sensitive and adaptive in integrating cultural elements to foster a motivating learning environment (Al-Hoorie, 2017).

6. EIL/ELF Paradigms and Cultural Diversity

English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) paradigms promote the notion that English is a global language, and its teaching should accommodate the cultural diversity of its users. According to Firth & Wagner (1997), the traditional native-speaker model is no longer relevant in a globalized world.

Pérez Cañado (2012) argues that the EIL/ELF paradigms call for an approach to ELT that values different varieties of English and integrates intercultural communication skills. However, the implementation of these paradigms requires a shift in mindset among educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers (Baker, 2011).

7. Context-Specific Methodologies

Adapting teaching methodologies to local cultural contexts is essential for the effectiveness of ELT. Holliday (1994) posits that teaching methods cannot be universal and should be adapted based on the context. Gutierrez Almarza & Madrid Fernandez (2019) found that when teachers employ context-specific methodologies that consider local cultural values, traditions, and learning preferences, students are more engaged and show better learning outcomes.

8. Language Policies and Cultural Implications

Language policies can have a significant impact on how English is taught in different regions. According to Ruiz de Zarobe & Zenotz (2015), language policies that promote English as a second language without considering the local culture may lead to cultural erosion. Therefore, policies should strike a balance between promoting English proficiency and preserving local languages and cultures (Hornberger, 2006).

9. Cultural Pragmatics

Cultural pragmatics involves the study of how language is used in context and how cultural factors influence communication. Kasper & Rose (2002) argue that understanding cultural pragmatics is essential for learners to engage in meaningful communication across cultures. Rojas Gutierrez & Hidalgo McCormick (2021) emphasize the integration of cultural pragmatics into ELT curricula to develop learners' ability to use language appropriately in diverse cultural settings.

10. Learners' Identities and Cultural Backgrounds

Understanding and acknowledging learners' identities and cultural backgrounds are vital in creating an inclusive and effective learning environment. Learners bring a wealth of cultural experiences and identities to the classroom, which can be resources for enriching the learning process (Norton, 2013).

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of recognizing students' cultural identities in ELT. For example, García Sánchez & Araújo Neves (2020) observed that when teachers incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process, learners are more likely to feel valued and respected, which in turn can enhance motivation and engagement.

Furthermore, Maldonado García & Pino Juste (2019) found that acknowledging and discussing diverse cultural identities within the classroom can cultivate critical thinking and empathy among students. It

encourages students to appreciate diversity and to critically reflect on their own and others' cultural perspectives.

However, embracing diverse identities requires educators to be culturally sensitive and aware. Teachers need to avoid cultural stereotypes and biases that may inadvertently marginalize or invalidate students' cultural experiences (Gay, 2010).

SYNTHESIS OF RESULTS

The ten categories analyzed reveal a complex and multifaceted relationship between cultural context and English Language Teaching. It is evident that an understanding and integration of cultural context can significantly enhance the effectiveness of ELT.

The literature supports the imperative role of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) in enabling teachers to be culturally sensitive and adaptive. The integration of cultural content is also central in developing students' communicative and intercultural competence.

Technology has emerged as a powerful tool in bridging cultural gaps, while assessments in multicultural settings necessitate a range of culturally responsive assessment tools. Moreover, learners' motivation in ELT is closely intertwined with the cultural content, and the EIL/ELF paradigms present a shift towards acknowledging the global nature of English.

Context-specific methodologies and language policies play a crucial role in aligning ELT with cultural contexts, while cultural pragmatics is key in helping learners communicate effectively across cultures. Lastly, acknowledging learners' identities and cultural backgrounds fosters a more inclusive and enriching learning environment.

This synthesis underscores the importance of a culturally responsive approach in ELT. Educators, curriculum developers, policymakers, and stakeholders in ELT need to recognize the intricate links between culture and language and adopt practices that are culturally inclusive and adaptive. This is not only crucial for the effectiveness of ELT but also for fostering global citizenship and intercultural understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Conflict of Interest

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