

Language, Culture and Society in ELT: Perspectives of University Students and Teachers in Myanmar and India

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Abstract

In English language classrooms, exploring the interplay of language, culture, and society highlights the vital role of cultural fluency in enabling accurate interpretation of spoken expressions, crafting culturally and socially appropriate statements, and minimizing communication breakdowns for university-level students. The objectives of this research are to investigate how university students in Myanmar and India perceive English language learning and to gauge the perspectives of English language teachers regarding the importance of cultural background knowledge in language teaching. The questionnaire, distributed to language classes in selected universities in Myanmar and India, yielded responses from 124 students in Myanmar and 151 students in India out of the 300 questionnaires sent out, while the interview survey, conducted through convenience sampling, involved 44 teachers from Myanmar and 51 teachers from India. Quantitative data analysis is conducted using statistics such as percentages, means, and standard deviations. The findings reveal that cultural fluency, signifying a deep understanding of culture and society, plays a pivotal role in enhancing language learners' comprehension and proficiency in the target language. This study implies that its findings contribute to boosting language learners' communication skills and self-confidence, essential attributes for navigating various societal, travel, and occupational situations with practical relevance.

Keywords: language, culture, society, English language teaching

Introduction

Familiarity with the culture of the native speakers of the target language is essential for language learners. Emphasizing "cultural fluency" is pivotal in this context, as it aids students in developing the communication skills and self-assurance needed for various social, travel, and business scenarios. The interplay between language, culture, and society lies at the heart of sociolinguistics. Holmes (2013) and Fasold (1990) say: 'Sociolinguists study the relationship between language and society. They are interested in explaining why we speak differently in different social contexts, and they are concerned with identifying the social functions of language and the ways it is used to convey social meaning.' People live in societies that have a strong influence on their lives, opinions, and beliefs.

Lee (2016) and Wardaugh (2021) define a ‘society’ as ‘any group of people who are drawn together for a certain purpose or purposes. He stresses that, in this definition ‘society’ is necessarily brief in order to be comprehensive, as ‘society’ is a broad concept, given the many different societies that exist. Wardaugh says on definition of ‘language’ as ‘is what the members of a particular society speak,’ but notes that ‘speech in almost any society can take many very different forms’ and hence ‘... our definitions of language and society are not independent: the definition of language includes in it a reference to society’. Culture is also linked to society and language, and can have different meanings depending on how it is viewed, for example, aesthetically, sociologically, semantically, and pragmatically (Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi, 1990).

A well-known definition by Goodenough (1957, 167, cited by Wardaugh, 1998, p. 217) views culture as: “whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves”. Culture emphasizes its group characteristic that unites itself as a distinct entity against other groups, as Roebel and Bragg (2016) notes: ‘Culture is those tools, practices, assumptions, and behavioural patterns that members of a group use to communicate with one another and to demarcate themselves from other groups.’

Cultural Fluency

Cultural fluency means familiarity with cultures: their natures, how they work, and ways they intertwine with our relationships in times of conflict and harmony. It also means awareness of several dimensions of culture, including communication.

Importance of Culture in EFL

In more traditional societies, English as a Foreign language (EFL) teachers are hardly aware of the importance of cultural orientation. They consider communication as merely the application of grammatical rules in oral and written practice. In some cases, learning about the target culture is seen as a threat to the native values, and the importance of linguistically relevant information is neglected. Since having a close contact with the target culture and its speakers is a rare opportunity for all language learners in countries from outer and expanding circles (Kachru, 1992), learners cannot appreciate the importance of learning the cultural aspects of communication unless they visit a foreign country and experience the difficulties. Nonverbal aspects of target culture are sometimes acquired from movies and TV serials, which are far from being helpful for communicative purposes or may sometimes develop misconceptions or stereotypes. McKay (2003) claims that culture influences language teaching in two important ways: linguistically and pedagogically. Linguistically, culture is significant in the linguistic dimension of the language itself, affecting the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of the language. Pedagogically, it influences the choice of language materials because cultural content of the language materials and the cultural basis of the teaching methodology are to be taken into consideration while deciding upon the language materials. He argues that in order to master a language, students have to learn both, its linguistic and cultural norms.

Importance of Cultural Background Knowledge in Language Teaching

Hoebel and Frost (1976) perceived culture as an “integrated system of learned behavior patterns which are characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance”. Cole and Scribner (1974) took a similar stand when they defined culture. In English teaching, teachers should not only pass on knowledge and train learners’ competence of utilizing language, but also enhance teaching relative cultural background knowledge. McGroarty (1993) stated that social environment in which students learn a language is one of the most important factors in the language learning experience. Theory concerning second language acquisition stressed the importance of teacher’s cultural awareness in establishing and maintaining desired social climate for language learning.

Culture and Language Learning

People around the world come from varied cultural backgrounds and speak different languages. While culture and language may seem distinct, there is an entangled mutual relationship between them. Language is a defining characteristic of culture and plays an integral role in its creation. When outsiders interact with a language, they are interacting with its culture. Understanding a person’s culture without knowledge of their language is infeasible. Language is not just a product of culture; it is also an important symbol. Language and culture develop reciprocally, with customs, cognition, and other cultural patterns being overtly coded into language (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Rallis & Casey, 2005). The inability to understand social behaviors and cultural settings of a language may result in breakdowns, errors, misunderstandings, and misinterpretations during communication. Language is not just about receiving or sending information, it also maintains appropriate social behaviors in a culture. Communication and culture are two branches of the same tree. Culture dictates both the path and the form that communication takes – a message cannot be understood without knowledge of one’s culture (Emitt & Komesaroff, 2003; Wang, 2011). Cultural differences involving speakers and listeners may possibly create communication barriers. Such differences comprise variations in vocabulary, accents, confusion regarding roles, and assumptions regarding shared data. Therefore, an effective communicator understands the cultural biases inherent to them. Exercising empathy, a focus on content, and suspending arbitrary judgments can alleviate such biases effectively (Garcia, 2002; Samovar, Porter & Jain, 1981). Lustig and Koester (2010) indicated that cultures have unique communication patterns that restrict effective listening if listeners are unaware of appropriate language patterns. Comprehending culture properly endows every word with the right context and meaning. Knowledge of a language’s sociocultural background makes it easier to learn new expressions, words, and speaking methods. Besides, understanding the role of culture is crucial for successful communication with native speakers. It increases engagement levels and promotes thinking in foreign languages. Understanding the lifestyles of native people personalizes the language, making it easier to learn the language (Diaz, 2001). Knowing your counterpart’s culture enables you to speak eloquently. Instead of translating phrases developed in one’s native language, you can think, speak, use appropriate words within the right context in the foreign language. For instance, certain concepts only make sense in English, which do not translate accordingly into other languages.

But by understanding a language and its sociocultural context, you can develop alternative phrases to express them. Understanding the cultural background of a language, including lifestyle, literature, art, and other factors, makes you proficient in it. Without culture, only garbled machine translations remain, forcing people to use the language mechanically (Hayati, 2009; Namaziandost, Sabzevari & Hashemifardnia, 2018).

Necessity of Cultural Background Knowledge in Aural Comprehension

In teaching of aural comprehension, we find many students complain that much time has been spent in listening, but little achievement has been acquired. What is the reason? On the one hand, maybe some students' English is very poor, and the material is rather difficult. On the other hand, a more important reason is that they are unfamiliar with cultural background of the USA and England. Aural comprehension, which is closely related to the knowledge of American and British culture, politics, and economy, in fact, is an examination of one's comprehensive competence which includes one's English level, range of knowledge, competence of analysis and imaginative power. Maybe we have this experience: when we listen to something familiar to us, no matter what is concerned, usually we are easy to understand. Even if there are some new words in the material, we are able to guess their meanings according to its context. However, when we encounter some unfamiliar material or something closely related to cultural background, we may feel rather difficult. Even if the material is easy, we only know the literal meaning, but cannot understand the connotation, because we lack knowledge of cultural background. Here is a sentence from a report: "The path to November is uphill all the way." "November" literally means "the eleventh month of year". But here refers to "the Presidential election to be held in November". Another example is "red-letter days"- which is a simple phrase and is easy to hear, meaning holidays such as Christmas and other special and important days. But students are often unable to understand them without teacher's explanation. In view of this, the introduction of cultural background is necessary in the teaching of English listening.

Necessity of Cultural Background Knowledge in Oral Comprehension

Likewise, speaking is not merely concerned with pronunciation and intonation. Students can only improve their oral English and reach the aim of communication by means of enormous reading, mastering rich language material and acquaintance of western culture. Therefore, in oral training, teachers should lay stress on factuality of language and adopt some material approaching to daily life, such as daily dialogues with tape, magazines, newspapers, and report etc., because the material is from real life, and it helps students to be well acquainted with standard pronunciation and intonation, to speak English appropriate to the occasion, to understand western way of life and customs etc. Otherwise, misunderstanding and displeasure are inevitably aroused. Let's look at some examples. Many fixed English ways of expression cannot be changed randomly. For example, the answer to "How do you do?" is "How do you do?" When asking price, people usually say, "How much, please?" instead of: "How much do you charge me? Or "How much do I owe you"; when paying bill, "Waiter, bill please." Instead of "Excuse me, sir. We're finished eating. How much is it, please?"

When asking the other one's name on the telephone, "Who's speaking, please?" or "Who is it, please?" instead of "Who are you?" "Where are you?" "What's your surname?" or "What is your unit?" During oral communication, speakers need standard pronunciation and intonation, as well as the suitable use of language for the occasion.

Cultural Fluency and Willingness to Communicate

Intracultural communication refers to communication between interactants sharing the *same* cultural background. However, in intercultural communication, interactants come from *different* cultures; during intracultural communication, interactants implicitly share the same ground rule of communication and interaction, but in intercultural communication this is oftentimes not the case (Matsumoto et al. 2005). At the most fundamental level, each individual's interpretation of the world is different, but according to the groups to which people belong (national, regional, local, and professional) they share some interpretations with others. Culture is a system of beliefs and values shared by a particular group of people, and thus, skills described below, which constitute cultural fluency, are essential to become successful global players:

- *tolerance of ambiguity* (the ability to accept lack of clarity and to be able to deal with ambiguous situations constructively)
- *behavior flexibility* (the ability to adapt own behavior to different requirements/situations)
- *knowledge discovery* (the ability to acquire new knowledge in real-time communication)
- *communicative awareness* (the ability to use communicative conventions of people from other cultural backgrounds and to modify own forms of expression correspondingly)
- *respect for otherness* (curiosity and openness, as well as a readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about own cultures)
- *empathy* (the ability to understand intuitively what other people think and how they feel in given situations)

As an example, the quality of teachers' daily social and intellectual interactions is influenced by effective communications and interpersonal skills. When considering the relationships between Japanese and non-Japanese teachers who work together, the quality of their relationships may need to be assessed in terms of their willingness to communicate with persons from different cultures, and the ability to do so while respecting cultural differences (Walker 2005).

Research Objectives

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate how university students in Myanmar and India perceive English language learning
2. To examine the perspectives of English language teachers in Myanmar and India regarding the importance of cultural background knowledge in language teaching

Methodology

This research employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a structured questionnaire survey to systematically investigate the dynamics of language, culture, and society within English language classrooms during the academic year 2021-2022. The survey data collection method aimed to capture quantitative insights into the intricate interplay among these elements, providing a comprehensive understanding of their relationships in the educational context.

Participants

For the exploration of the interplay of language, culture, and society in English language classrooms, this study engaged 124 students from Myanmar and 151 students from India, aged 17 to 22. The participants were selected through a convenience sampling method. Additionally, 44 teachers from Myanmar and 51 teachers from India, aged between 38 to 56 years with 12 to 30 years of university-level teaching experience, were involved in the survey to provide valuable insights into the intercultural dynamics within the educational context.

The Instrument

Instrumental to the study on the interplay of language, culture, and society in English language classrooms, the researcher developed questionnaires encompassing classroom values, including students' perceptions of English language learning and university teachers' perspectives on the significance of cultural background knowledge in language teaching. Each question was assessed using a Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 3. The data collection took place in selected universities in Myanmar and India, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the cultural and societal dimensions within the English language learning environment.

Results

In unravelling the intricate dynamics of language, culture, and society within English language classrooms, the results of this study shed light on key insights garnered from both student and teacher perspectives. The survey, administered to 124 students in Myanmar and 151 students in India, aged between 17 to 22, aimed to discern their perceptions of English language learning and the role of cultural background knowledge. Concurrently, the viewpoints of 44 teachers from Myanmar and 51 teachers from India, ranging in age from 38 to 56 with a teaching tenure of 12 to 30 years, were explored to provide a nuanced understanding of the importance assigned to cultural factors in language teaching. The quantitative data, measured on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 3, offers a comprehensive snapshot of the participants' responses. The ensuing analysis provides valuable insights into the interplay between language, culture, and society, offering a deeper comprehension of how these factors manifest in the English language classrooms of selected universities in Myanmar and India.

Phase 1: Questionnaire

Table 1

Myanmar Students' Perceptions on English Language Learning (n=124)

Sr No	Statements	Responses			Calculation		Interpretation
		No	Not Sure	Yes	Mean	SD	
1	I like learning English.	5%	11%	84%	2.79	0.52	Positive
2	I like to talk with foreigners in English.	26%	17%	57%	2.31	0.86	Moderately positive
3	I don't think that English is an important subject at university.	54%	17%	29%	1.75	0.88	Moderately positive
4	I think that English may be important in future.	7%	12%	81%	2.74	0.58	Positive
5	My parents think that English may be important in future.	13%	33%	54%	2.41	0.71	Positive
6	English is not important in the world.	81%	7%	12%	1.31	0.67	Slightly positive
7	It is easy for me to learn English.	30%	37%	33%	2.03	0.79	Moderately positive
8	My family does not think that English is an important subject at university.	58%	24%	18%	1.60	0.77	Moderately positive
9	Learning English is fun.	16%	15%	69%	2.53	0.75	Moderately positive
10	I can travel around the world if I can speak English well.	3%	17%	80%	2.77	0.49	Moderately positive
11	I always like to attend English classes.	24%	12%	64%	2.40	0.85	Positive
12	English will be useful if I travel abroad.	9%	4%	87%	2.78	0.59	Positive
13	I learn English just to pass exams.	49%	19%	32%	1.83	0.88	Moderately positive
14	I am happy to attend English activities if there are any.	21%	14%	65%	2.44	0.82	Moderately positive
15	I think that games and related class activities are an important part of English teaching.	16%	14%	70%	2.54	0.75	Positive
16	I think that many of the games and activities that are often used in class are silly and a waste of time.	68%	17%	15%	1.47	0.74	Slightly positive
17	I think that we should learn more grammar in class.	23%	26%	51%	2.28	0.81	Moderately positive

Table 1 (Continued)

Sr No	Statements	Responses			Calculation		Interpretation
		No	Not Sure	Yes	Mean	SD	
18	I think that we should have more reading in class.	30%	22%	48%	2.18	0.86	Moderately positive
19	I think that English teaching should focus on language that is close to our chosen subjects and professions.	12%	19%	69%	2.57	0.70	Positive
20	I think that we need to be taught only by native speaking teachers at university.	32%	30%	38%	2.06	0.83	Moderately positive
21	I think that we need to be taught only by local teachers at university.	48%	35%	17%	1.69	250.00	Moderately positive
22	I think that we need to be taught by both native speaking teachers and local teachers at university.	5%	14%	81%	2.76	0.53	Positive
23	I think that learning English can help me understand Western culture.	7%	12%	81%	2.74	0.58	Positive
24	I enjoy listening to English language songs.	23%	22%	55%	2.32	0.82	Moderately positive
25	I visit English language websites when I surf the internet.	18%	22%	60%	2.42	0.78	Moderately positive
26	I like to read English language readers.	21%	18%	61%	2.40	0.81	Positive
27	I watch English language television shows.	21%	20%	59%	2.38	0.81	Positive
28	I like to watch English language news shows.	17%	28%	55%	2.38	0.76	Positive
29	I enjoy singing English songs.	17%	28%	55%	2.38	0.76	Positive
30	I like to read English newspapers.	16%	31%	53%	2.37	0.74	Positive
31	I like to look at job opportunities in English speaking countries.	27%	23%	50%	2.23	0.85	Moderately positive
32	I like to write emails in English.	12%	29%	59%	2.47	0.70	Positive
33	I think that all western countries and cultures are similar.	47%	44%	9%	1.62	0.64	Slightly positive

Table 1 (Continued)

Sr No	Statements	Responses			Calculation		Interpretation
		No	Not Sure	Yes	Mean	SD	
34	I think that TV shows and films can give us an accurate idea of western culture.	7%	41%	52%	2.45	0.62	Positive
35	I would like to study in an English-speaking country.	17%	14%	69%	2.52	0.77	Positive
36	I enjoy reading about western countries.	27%	15%	58%	2.31	0.87	Moderately positive
37	I enjoy watching documentaries of western countries.	24%	19%	57%	2.33	0.84	Moderately positive
38	As so many books, films and television shows are available in English, I think that it is important for me learn English.	15%	6%	79%	2.64	0.73	Positive
39	I am interested in western myths and other stories.	34%	22%	44%	2.10	0.88	Moderately positive
40	I am interested in western music and artists.	26%	15%	59%	2.33	0.86	Moderately positive
Average		25.15%	20.63%	54.23%	2.29	0.84	Moderately positive

NOTE:

1.00-1.80=Slightly positive

1.81-2.60=Moderately positive

2.61-3.40=Positive

3.41-4.20=Very positive

4.21-5.00= Completely positive

Table 1 reveals that Myanmar students held moderately positive on English language learning with the average mean score 2.29. They are willing to learn English as they agree that English language is necessary to communicate with different societies when they travel abroad. They claimed that they can travel around the world if they can speak English well so they like learning English with the highest mean score (Mean=2.78).

Phase 2: Questionnaire

Table 2

Indian Students' Perceptions on English Language Learning (n=151)

Sr No	Statements	Responses			Calculation		Interpretation
		No	Not Sure	Yes	Mean	SD	
1	I like learning English.	23%	26%	51%	2.28	0.81	Moderately positive
2	I like to talk with foreigners in English.	20%	13%	67%	2.47	0.81	Moderately positive
3	I don't think that English is an important subject at university.	34%	22%	44%	2.10	0.88	Moderately positive
4	I think that English may be important in future.	34%	16%	50%	2.16	0.90	Moderately positive
5	My parents think that English may be important in future.	43%	35%	22%	1.79	0.78	Moderately positive
6	English is not important in the world.	33%	37%	30%	1.97	0.79	Moderately positive
7	It is easy for me to learn English.	36%	22%	42%	2.06	0.88	Moderately positive
8	My family does not think that English is an important subject at university.	18%	38%	44%	2.26	0.74	Moderately positive
9	Learning English is fun.	31%	29%	40%	2.09	0.84	Moderately positive
10	I can travel around the world if I can speak English well.	26%	27%	47%	2.21	0.83	Moderately positive
11	I always like to attend English classes.	33%	35%	32%	1.99	0.81	Moderately positive
12	English will be useful if I travel abroad.	21%	21%	58%	2.37	0.81	Moderately positive
13	I learn English just to pass exams.	34%	17%	49%	2.15	0.90	Moderately positive
14	I am happy to attend English activities if there are any.	49%	25%	26%	1.77	0.83	Moderately positive
15	I think that games and related class activities are an important part of English teaching.	9%	24%	67%	2.58	0.65	Moderately positive
16	I think that many of the games and activities that are often used in class are silly and a waste of time.	52%	13%	35%	1.83	0.92	Moderately positive
17	I think that we should learn more grammar in class.	36%	22%	42%	2.06	0.88	Moderately positive
18	I think that we should have more reading in class.	31%	19%	50%	2.19	0.88	Moderately positive

Table 2 (Continued)

Sr No	Statements	Responses			Calculation		Interpretation
		No	Not Sure	Yes	Mean	SD	
19	I think that English teaching should focus on language that is close to our chosen subjects and professions.	21%	31%	48%	2.27	0.79	Moderately positive
20	I think that we need to be taught only by native speaking teachers at university.	9%	22%	69%	2.60	0.65	Moderately positive
21	I think that we need to be taught only by local teachers at university.	43%	31%	26%	1.83	250.00	Moderately positive
22	I think that we need to be taught by both native speaking teachers and local teachers at university.	13%	16%	71%	2.58	0.71	Moderately positive
23	I think that learning English can help me understand Western culture.	35%	18%	47%	2.12	0.90	Moderately positive
24	I enjoy listening to English language songs.	47%	20%	33%	1.86	0.88	Moderately positive
25	I visit English language websites when I surf the internet.	13%	36%	51%	2.38	0.70	Moderately positive
26	I like to read English language readers.	32%	22%	46%	2.14	0.87	Moderately positive
27	I watch English language television shows.	34%	31%	35%	2.01	0.83	Moderately positive
28	I like to watch English language news shows.	10%	35%	55%	2.45	0.67	Moderately positive
29	I enjoy singing English songs.	44%	17%	39%	1.95	0.91	Moderately positive
30	I like to read English newspapers.	61%	25%	14%	1.53	0.73	Slightly positive
31	I like to look at job opportunities in English speaking countries.	23%	31%	46%	2.23	0.80	Moderately positive
32	I like to write emails in English.	31%	34%	35%	2.04	0.81	Moderately positive
33	I think that all western countries and cultures are similar.	9%	36%	55%	2.46	0.65	Moderately positive

Table 2 (Continued)

Sr No	Statements	Responses			Calculation		Interpretation
		No	Not Sure	Yes	Mean	SD	
34	I think that TV shows and films can give us an accurate idea of western culture.	42%	22%	36%	1.94	0.88	Moderately positive
35	I would like to study in an English-speaking country.	9%	24%	67%	2.58	0.65	Moderately positive
36	I enjoy reading about western countries.	11%	27%	62%	2.51	0.69	Moderately positive
37	I enjoy watching documentaries of western countries.	23%	20%	57%	2.34	0.83	Moderately positive
38	As so many books, films and television shows are available in English, I think that it is important for me learn English.	11%	30%	59%	2.48	0.69	Moderately positive
39	I am interested in western myths and other stories.	34%	29%	37%	2.03	0.84	Moderately positive
40	I am interested in western music and artists.	11%	27%	62%	2.51	0.69	Moderately positive
Average		28.23%	25.63%	46.15%	2.18	0.84	Moderately positive

NOTE:

1.00-1.80=Slightly positive

1.81-2.60=Moderately positive

2.61-3.40=Positive

3.41-4.20=Very positive

4.21-5.00= Completely positive

As shown in Table 2, Indian students held moderately positive on English language learning with the average mean score (Mean=2.18). They would like to study in an English-speaking country with the highest mean score 2.58. And they also would like to teach with native speakers more than non-native speakers.

Phase 3: Questionnaire Survey

Table 3

Myanmar University Teachers' Perceptions on Importance of Cultural Background Knowledge in Language Teaching

Sr No	Statements	Responses			Calculation		Interpretation
		Important	More important	Most important	Mean	SD	
1	Cultural background knowledge in aural comprehension	46%	33%	21%	1.75	0.78	More important
2	Cultural background knowledge in oral comprehension	34%	41%	25%	1.91	0.76	More important
3	Cultural background knowledge in reading	32%	33%	35%	2.03	0.82	More important
4	Cultural Background Knowledge in Writing and Translating	30%	38%	32%	2.02	0.79	More important
Average		35.50%	36.25%	28.25%	1.93	0.80	More important

NOTE:

1.00-1.66=Important

1.67-2.33=More important

2.34-3.00=Most important

As shown in Table 3, Myanmar university teachers think that cultural background knowledge is more important in language teaching with the average mean score 1.93. Culture is therefore a crucial facet of teaching English as a Foreign Language. The goal behind teaching culture in EFL should be inculcating intercultural communicative competence among learners, rather than propagating or showing superiority of the target culture over native culture. The foreign culture should provide the mirror to the learners in which he can see his own culture reflected. It provides an outside to our inside.

Phase 4: Questionnaire Survey

Table 4

Indian University Teachers' Perceptions on Importance of Cultural Background Knowledge in Language Teaching

Sr No	Statements	Responses			Calculation		Interpretation
		Important	More important	Most important	Mean	SD	
1	Cultural background knowledge in aural comprehension	23%	25%	52%	2.29	0.82	More important
2	Cultural background knowledge in oral comprehension	24%	30%	46%	2.22	0.81	More important
3	Cultural background knowledge in reading	12%	36%	52%	2.40	0.69	Most important
4	Cultural Background Knowledge in Writing and Translating	23%	30%	47%	2.24	0.80	More important
Average		20.50%	30.25%	49.25%	2.29	0.78	More important

NOTE:

1.00-1.66=Important

1.67-2.33=More important

2.34-3.00=Most important

Table 4 reveals Indian university teachers' perceptions on importance of cultural background knowledge in language teaching. Like Myanmar teachers, Indian teachers also think that cultural background knowledge is more important in language teaching with the average mean score 2.29. In addition, they also claimed that cultural background knowledge is the most important in reading with the highest mean score 2.40.

Discussion

Research on the interplay of language, culture, and society in English language classrooms focuses on enhancing the teaching of university-level students by emphasizing the importance of cultural fluency, which enables learners to interpret spoken expressions accurately, craft culturally and socially appropriate statements, and minimize communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. In summary, both Myanmar and Indian students held moderately positive attitude on English language learning. The results of the questionnaires revealed that both the teachers and students considered teaching of culture important. Both have a strong interest in Western culture and see learning English as a key to getting to know Western culture better, however the students from Myanmar appear to be more interested in engaging themselves in Western culture. Myanmar students held positive attitude more than Indian students in every aspect of learning English language. One culture or language is unique and differs from another. Cultural differences can be viewed as the way in which other groups, societies or countries are socially organized, developed, and communicated which have customs, laws and lifestyles from other ethnographic groups. Therefore, understanding the target language is not quite easy and it is very important to be aware of cultural differences, only with that will someone knows how to respect other cultures and how to use their languages well.

In addition, both Indian and Myanmar teachers also think that cultural background knowledge is very important in language teaching. This is further emphasized by the students from both countries showing that they see learning English as very important and acknowledging that English is important in the world today. This view is supported by their families. The respondents suggest that teachers need to spend more time on teaching Grammar and Reading, and also try to incorporate games and activities into their lessons. Whilst Myanmar university students see the value in using games as a teaching tool, they are not as passionate about it as Indian students. The need for a mixture of both native and local teachers was highlighted by students from both universities. To reinforce their learning, student participants should be encouraged to write more, including emails, and also try to follow English.

This research aligns with the findings of a study by Jourdan and Tuite from 2006. They emphasize that culture is very important in foreign language teaching and learning, and this is widely accepted. Language is the main way we communicate culture, and just knowing facts isn't enough – it's more valuable to increase people's cultural awareness because it promotes deeper thinking. Many students are good at grammar and vocabulary but have trouble using the language well because they don't understand the culture linked to it.

To sum up, teachers should let learners not only pay attention to cultural differences but also try to understand and study the differences to avoid misunderstanding in study and communication. It is necessary for students to be taught directly and develop their awareness of cultural background knowledge in order to overcome the obstacles produced by cultural differences. English language teaching professionals should always try to encourage their students to express matters that are important to their lives and how effectively to communicate their concerns, cultural viewpoints, and personal interests by using English as a meaningful interchange with people of other countries, and to relate what it means to be a member of their specific societies and cultures in a positive way to others globally.

All in all, cultural factors play an important role in English teaching and learning. The aim of English teaching is to foster students' comprehensive English capability by learning language and its culture. In successful teaching and study of both language and cultural background knowledge, cultural introduction contributes to foster students' cultural consciousness of target language. By doing so, students can improve their English comprehensive capacity and cultural communication of the target language. This accomplishes the target of foreign language teaching.

Recommendations

In order to enrich the comprehensiveness and impact of this research, several recommendations are proposed. Firstly, expanding the geographic scope beyond Myanmar and India could offer a more holistic view of how cultural fluency influences English language learning in diverse settings. Additionally, the inclusion of qualitative data, such as interviews or open-ended surveys, would provide deeper insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of students and teachers. A longitudinal study could also be considered to assess the long-term effects of cultural fluency on language proficiency. The research might also investigate the availability and efficacy of teacher training programs in imparting cultural knowledge. Providing practical guidance for curriculum developers on integrating cultural fluency into teaching materials and methods is crucial. Further comparative analyses and exploration of effective pedagogical approaches should be explored. The ethical considerations related to participants from various cultural backgrounds should be addressed, and the research findings should be widely disseminated to benefit language educators and institutions. Lastly, future research directions, such as the impact of cultural fluency on specific language skills or comparisons across different language learning settings, could be suggested to guide subsequent studies.

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