The Impact of English Cultural Awareness on Indonesian Advanced EFL Learners' Grammar Knowledge

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Abstract

The current research examined the impacts of English cultural awareness on Indonesian EFL students' grammar knowledge. To achieve this objective, 40 advanced participants were chosen according to their performance on the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). Then, the participants were equally divided into two groups of 20; an experimental and a control group. A grammar pre-test was administered to assess their knowledge of grammar prior to applying the instruction. After conducting the pre-test, the researchers taught the grammar points to the experimental group through using English cultural materials. On the other side, the grammar points were taught to the control group by using a traditional method. The instruction was conducted in 9 sessions of 45 minutes, and in the last session, the post-test of grammar was given to both groups in order to measure the impacts of the instruction on the participants' grammar improvement. The findings revealed that the culture group had better performance than the conventional group after the treatment.

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1. Introduction

Grammar knowledge is defined as knowing the rules, the structures, and the regulations of the language. Grammar refers to the way language users order or arrange vocabularies to build correct and appropriate sentences. There has been a controversy over the impact of grammar on learning English in recent decades (Kumar et al., 2015). In fact, the positive role of grammar in English language learning is undeniable; in other words, grammar has a vital role in learning a second language. Learning a language includes mastering the four main skills of speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Therefore, if the correct grammar is not used, it is not possible for speakers to speak and use English properly or correctly. Canale and Swain (1980) proposed that grammar knowledge is a basic component of our competencies that helps us to communicate properly and successfully. There is no effective communication without knowing sufficient grammar.

All technical and non-technical documentation and writings must be free from grammatical errors. Grammar knowledge helps in correcting errors and improving scripts (Kumar et al., 2015). For acquiring our native language, grammar learning is not a need since we can learn our first language unconsciously. Grammar needs to be learned or mastered while we are learning a second or a foreign language. There are several ways, techniques, and approaches that are used for effective language learning. Some of these methods are Suggestopedia, Audio-lingual method, Bilingual method, Direct method, Reading method, Situational approach, Eclectic approach, Communicative approach, etc. The methodologies and approaches mentioned are based on the competencies of communication. Successful communication means that language users know how to apply the grammatical structures and vocabularies of a language to achieve the goals of communication. Therefore, knowing grammar is vital to meet these purposes.

Having high knowledge of grammar in a target language does not mean that the learners are capable of establishing communication successfully, and simultaneously the learners who are fluent English speakers are not regarded as efficient or successful communicators (Kumar et al., 2015). Speaking accurately is as important as speaking fluently. The learners' fluency in language learning can be enhanced through communication-based methods, while the learners' accuracy can be mastered just by learning and knowing grammatical points. A fundamental method for speaking English fluently, effectively, and accurately is grammar learning. This study aimed to teach grammar to Indonesian EFL learners through applying English cultural materials.

Culture is a term that contains the behavior and social norms found in the people of a society, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, abilities, and habits of individuals (Lu, 2018). Culture is regarded as a central concept in anthropology, including all phenomena conveyed by sociology in human societies. People acquire culture through cultural learning and socialization, exemplified by the diversity of cultures across societies. The interwoven relationship between language and culture always brings scholars to recognize the role culture serves in the teaching-learning milieu (Lambert, 1999). Typically, Bada (2000) confirms that without the implementation of culture teaching in ELT/EFL, learners will lack the knowledge about the target culture and its local inhabitants, which as a grave consequence leads learners to encounter difficulties while communicating, acting, and interacting with native speakers.

Byram (1990) and Byram and Fleming (1998) believe that the incorporation of the British language culture is important in the English teaching-learning environment to acculturate language students into the culture of English-speaking societies. Hence, it is safe to say that language teachers are called to teach the English language in accordance with its culture in order to have these learners get accustomed to the foreign culture way of life and know what to say to whom and on what occasion. To this point, De Jong (1996) notes that learning norms and values are regarded as the components of the learning and the teaching of a language. In fact, learning norms and values show that the teaching and the learning of a language is not merely a mastery of grammar and vocabulary but of pragmatic knowledge as well.

2. Theoretical Framework

Grammar refers to the way the words are studied and how the words can come together. Grammar is defined as the structures of a language usually comprising of syntax and morphology and sometimes including phonology and semantics. All people who speak or write a specific language get cognizant of the grammatical structures and roles of that language consciously or unconsciously (Kumar, 2013). Kumar (2013) explained an amazing example to stress the importance of grammar; he explained that an author is given a pretty analogy to explain the use of grammatical knowledge. Imagine two motorists. The first motorist only knows how to drive, but he knows nothing about how the engine operates or works. He faces some difficulties and problems when the car does not work well. The second motorist knows how to drive, and also, he knows how the engine work. The students who know grammar are similar to the second motorist. In this case, they are uncertain about the correctness of a special sentence. Their grammar knowledge can help them in this doubtful situation (Epoge, 2016; Kohli, 1984). Consequently, to speak clearly and effectively, students need to study grammatical roles. For those people who possess innate grammar knowledge, it is simple to use language appropriately and correctly. But those non-native speakers or people who want to communicate in the target language and produce correct sentences should go for the higher depth of comprehension and proficiency of what the study of grammar suggests (Kumar, 2013; Soodmand Afshar & Moradifar, 2021).

According to the significance of grammar, Richards and Renandyo (2002) found that individuals are aware that grammar is very important and we should not overlook it, and lack of sufficient grammar knowledge makes students' language enhancement seriously restricted. There is not a common consensus that grammar should be taught or not. The main questions are, which grammatical points or roles do students need to learn? Which method is the most effective one in teaching grammatical points or roles? Do we use inductive or deductive approaches in teaching grammatical points or roles? Canale and Swain (1980) recommended that the teaching of the grammatical structures and roles must be specified based on the students' needs. Therefore, the grammatical structures and roles should be instructed according to the students' goals in English learning. Moreover, grammar teaching needs to be based on the standards of acceptability and understanding. Teaching grammar is vital and necessary, but it is neglected in many areas of the universe.

Grammar should be taught in the context; we should not only teach grammar in separate sentences. It should be taught in a familiar culturally-based context. Cultures can usually be assigned to two sorts: Big 'C' cultures and small "c" cultures (Lee 2009; Peterson, 2004). Lee (2009) defined the Big "C" cultures as the cultures that manifest a set of realities and statistics pertaining to arts, history, geography, cooking, education, movies, and the traditions of a target language country. Based on Peterson (2004), the culture pertaining to main issues is categorized under Big "C" culture that contains the issues of geographical places, architecture, musical issues, literature, political issues, society's standards, legal foundations, main values, historical events, and cognitive issues.

Considering small "c" culture, it includes the ordinary aspects of our lives along with our attitudes, feelings, and beliefs (Wintergerst & McVeigh, 2010). Peterson (2004) stated that little "c" culture refers to the culture that focuses on an ordinary or trivial issue. It involves issues like ideas, viewpoints, feelings or tastes, body gestures, postures, styles of wearing clothes, types of foods, favorite music, favorite issues, and specific knowledge.

Since culture and language transmit meanings, they both play a communicative role. On the one hand, language has the duty to transfer the syntactical, the semantical, and the pragmatic functions for language users for the purposes of communications (Brooks, 1997). On the other side, cultural meanings are transmitted by behavioral patterns such as language. In order to communicate successfully across languages and cultures, it is crucially needed to comprehend culturally disparate norms of communications and people's attitudes and beliefs (SavilleTroike, 2003; Schulz, 2007). Integrating cultural content in the EFL syllabus can be effective and useful for the learners. It familiarizes the learners with the target culture, and consequently, this familiarity leads to better

language learning (Bagherzadeh & Tajeddin, 2021; Zhou et al., 2011).

Culture is often overlooked in EFL classes, while it is vital to teach it to the learners. In the EFL classes in Indonesia, instructors ought to expose their pupils to the English culture and other ethnic cultures in Indonesia since Indonesia is a multicultural and multiethnic country (Hendrra Tedjjasuksmana, 2013). As English is the international language and is the bridge of national unity, teachers should familiarize their students with the English culture. Students can benefit from learning the target culture, and English instructors have the primary role in developing mutual comprehension in the multicultural and multiethnic EFL contexts in Indonesia (Hendrra Tedjjasuksmana, 2013).

In the Indonesian context, Herawati (2014) intended to indicate the pieces of evidence that teaching sociolinguistics can assist in teaching learners not only the language itself but also the culture of the language they learn. By using an empirical study, the results revealed that the performances of both classes were almost similar. On the other hand, in the appropriate use of language, the sociolinguistics class indicated better performances. In addition, 79% of the participants stated that they know more about the foreign culture and can apply the language materials suitable to the condition of the foreign culture after learning sociolinguistics.

Hidayati et al. (2017) investigated one of the aspects which affected the students' language skills which were the target-language culture. The participants of this study were the fourth-semester students of the English department in Universitas Mataram. The method of gathering the data used interviews and observations. In the end, for analyzing the data, the interactive model was used. The results indicated that the students' reading and speaking skills were influenced by learning target-language culture.

Shirzadi (2015) studied the influence of cultural background knowledge on developing Iranian intermediate EFL learners' reading skill. To fulfill this objective, 25 male students and 25 female students were chosen as the participants of this study. After selecting the participants, a reading pre-test was administered to them. Four reading passages were used as the pre-test of

the study, two of them contained English cultural contents and issues, and two of them were based on local cultural contents. At the end of each passage, there were four questions that the participants were required to answer. The outcomes of the study showed that those participants who were trained by English cultural contents and issues had better performance on the reading post-test. In addition, the results revealed that there was not a significant difference between males and females in the use of cultural schemas and text familiarity.

Oanh and Minh (2018) surveyed the learners' ideas about teaching intercultural topics and teaching listening comprehension. The data of this investigation were qualitative. To collect the data, a questionnaire was distributed to 30 ESL students who took part in the listening 2 course of the second year of the MBA course of Kien Giang University in Vietnam. In the course, in addition to aiding the participants to develop their language learning and listening comprehension, the teacher also assisted them in developing their cross-cultural skills by describing some cross-cultural issues pertinent to the course contents. After the course finished, the researcher gave a questionnaire to the participants to understand the impacts of integrating intercultural knowledge teaching and listening teaching. The outcomes showed that the learners said that cross-cultural issues were helpful and useful for them in understanding the lesson better. The students found the cultural differences enjoyable to develop their intercultural knowledge and gain useful experiences to expand their world.

In Indonesia, the focus of teaching English is mainly on speaking skill, and little attention is paid to grammar, and there are only a few empirical studies on the role and the importance of grammar. In such a situation, EFL learners cannot develop their grammar knowledge. In addition, after reviewing the literature, the researchers could not find any research related to the effects of English cultural awareness on Indonesian advanced EFL learners' grammar knowledge; therefore, this study posed the following question to cover this gap:

RQ. Does English cultural awareness bear any significant impact on Indonesian advanced EFL students' grammar knowledge?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

To provide an answer to the research question, the researchers chose 40 Indonesian EFL learners from one of the English language institutes in Indonesia country. In fact, the researchers chose the participants among 60 learners on the basis of their scores in the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) which was used as a proficiency test. The participants who gained a band score between 47 and 60 were considered as advanced students. They were females, and their ages ranged from 18 to 27. The researchers assigned the participants to two groups; one experimental (culture) and one control (conventional). Each group contained 20 participants.

3.2. Instruments

The OQPT was employed in the present research as the homogenizing instrument. In other words, this tool was applied in the current study to homogenize the participants. It assisted the researchers in specifying the respondents' English proficiency levels. After conducting this test, the researchers selected those learners who scored between 47 and 60 as the target participants in this research. According to the standards and the norms of the OQPT, the scores between 47 and 60 shows that the students are at the advanced level.

As the second tool in this study, the researchers designed a multiple-choice grammar test which was employed as the pre-test in order to help the researchers determine the culture and the conventional groups' grammar knowledge prior to applying the instruction. The pre-test included 20 items. The items were selected from the students' textbooks. It should be noted that the researchers measured both the reliability and the validity of the pre-test. When the grammar test was made, six English experts (six university instructors) checked it for its content and face validity. To ascertain the Content Validity Index (CVI) of the grammar questions, six knowledgeable English university instructors checked the test and offered several modifications concerning the simplicity, the clarity, and the representativeness of items. The changes were done, then the researcher piloted the test on ten students in another school who were the same as the target groups regarding their coursebook and English proficiency level. Then, the researchers calculated the reliability of the grammar pre-test by applying Cronbach's Alpha formula as (r=.81). The allocated time for answering the grammar test was 20 minutes, and each correct response received one score.

The third instrument employed in this research was a grammar post-test. The researchers of this study modified the version of the pre-test as the grammar post-test. The same as the pre-test, the post-test contained 20 multiple-choice items. The allocated time for responding to the grammar post-test was 20 minutes, and each correct response received one score. The only difference between the grammar post-test and the grammar pre-test was that the researchers consciously changed the order of the items and the order of the alternatives in order to prevent the learners' possible recall of the grammar pre-test items. The post-test was given in order to aid the researchers in finding out the possible influences of the instruction on the participants' grammar improvement at the end of the treatment in both groups. As the grammar post-test was the modified version of the grammar pre-test, it was regarded as a reliable and valid instrument.

3.3. Procedures of Data Collection

For carrying out the current empirical research, 40 homogenous (advanced) participants were selected among 60 students. After the selection step, the participants were equally assigned to two groups of 20; an experimental and a control group. Then, the pre-test of grammar was administered to assess the learners' grammar knowledge prior to conducting the instruction. After the pre-testing process, the researchers taught the grammar points (e.g., relative clauses, compound, and complex sentences) to the experimental group through English cultural materials. On the other side, the conventional group was taught grammar traditionally. The whole treatment lasted nine sessions of 50 minutes. The objectives of the research were clarified for the participants in the first session, and then they were asked to answer the OQPT. In the next session, the grammar pre-test was administered to the students. In sessions three to eight, the instruction was practiced. In the ninth session, the grammar post-test was administered to the participants of both groups in order to measure the impacts of the instruction on their grammar

improvement. When we collected adequate data by applying the mentioned procedures, we conducted the data analysis by following the section below.

3.4. Data Analysis

For supplying an answer to the question raised in this study, a few steps were taken to analyze the data. Firstly, we used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test to examine the normality distribution of the collected data. Secondly, we

run the paired samples t-test and the independent samples t-test to find out the effects of the treatment on Indonesian advanced students' grammar learning.

4. Results

When all data were collected through the mentioned procedures, the researchers performed the statistical analyses to gain the final outcomes. The details of the results are shown in the following tables.

Table 1

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		Culture Pre	Control Pre	Culture Post	Control Post
N		20	20	20	20
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	13.48	13.32	17.00	14.44
	Std. Deviation	4.55	4.51	2.10	2.95
	Absolute	.21	.18	.18	.18
Most Extreme Differences	Positive	.14	.15	.18	.16
	Negative	-.21	-.18	-.13	-.18
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.06	.91	.94	.90
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.20	.36	.33	.38

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

In the above table, the results reveal that the scores statistics seem normal as the results gained by utilizing the SPSS 22. Therefore, the

parametric statistics such as the independent samples t-test and the paired samples t-test were run to gain the final findings.

Table 2

Group Statistics (Pre-test of the Culture and the Conventional Groups)

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Culture	20	13.45	4.59	1.02
	Conventional	20	13.95	4.86	1.08

The descriptive statistics (e.g., means and standard deviation) of the culture and the conventional groups are displayed in the above table. The culture participants' mean score is 13.45, and the conventional participants' mean score is 13.95. It seems that both groups have

almost the same mean scores on the grammar pre-test. This implies that the culture and the conventional groups had the same grammar knowledge before the researchers conducted the treatment.

Table 3
Interracial Statistics (Pre-test of the Culture and the Conventional Groups)

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.75	.39	.67	38	.08	-5.50	1.49	-8.52	-2.47
Equal variances not assumed			.67	37.87	.08	-5.50	1.49	-8.52	-2.47

To see if there was any statistically significant difference between the grammar pre-tests of the culture and the conventional groups, an independent samples t-test was employed in the above table. As Sig (.08) is higher than 0.05, we can say that there is not a significant difference between the grammar pre-tests of the culture and the conventional groups. Actually, both groups had the same performance in the pre-test of grammar.

Table 4
Group Statistics (Post-test of the Culture and the Conventional Groups)

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test	Experimental	20	18.95	4.86	1.08
	Control	20	14.61	5.46	1.22

In the table above, the descriptive statistics of the grammar post-tests of the culture and the conventional groups are shown. The mean scores of the two groups seem different. The mean scores of the culture and the conventional groups are 18.95 and 14.61, respectively. Based on this table, we can say that the culture group outflanked the conventional group.

Table 5
Interracial Statistics (Post-test of the Culture and the Conventional Groups)

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.00	.94	2.63	38	.01	4.30	1.63	.99	7.60
Equal variances not assumed			2.63	37.49	.01	4.30	1.63	.98	7.61

To figure out whether there was any statistically significant difference between the grammar post-tests of the culture and the conventional groups, an independent samples t-test was

utilized in the above table. Because Sig (.01) is smaller than 0.05, it can be said that there is a significant difference between the grammar post-tests of the culture and the conventional groups in favor of the culture group.

Table 6
Paired Samples T-test (Pre and Post-tests of the Culture and the Conventional Groups)

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Experimental	-5.50	5.49	1.22	-8.07	-2.92	-4.47	19	.00
Pair 2	Control	-1.75	5.55	1.24	-4.34	.84	-1.41	19	.11

The researchers used a paired samples t-test in the above table for comparing the pre-test and the post-test of each culture group. The results of this test show that Sig (.00) is less than 0.05; accordingly, we can say that the culture groups' performances on the pre-test and the post-test differ greatly. In addition, the researchers used another paired samples t-test for comparing the pre-test and the post-test of each control or conventional group. The findings indicate that Sig (.11) is higher than 0.05; therefore, it can be claimed that there was not a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test of this group.

5. Discussion

After analyzing the data and gaining the outcomes, the researchers tried to provide an answer for the question posed in this study, then they compared and contrasted the findings with the previous results in other studies. Thus, the researchers answered the question of the current study in the following paragraphs:

RQ. Does English cultural awareness bear any significant impact on Indonesian advanced EFL students' grammar knowledge?

When we analyzed the collected data, we figured out that both the culture group and conventional group had equal grammar knowledge at the beginning of the instruction. The results indicated that at the end of the grammar instruction, the culture group had better performance than the conventional group on the grammar post-test. The improvement of the culture group was observed on their post-tests. English cultural awareness could assist the culture group in boosting their grammar knowledge.

The outcomes of this investigation are in agreement with Namaziandost et al. (2019), who scrutinized the influences of employing the cultural materials on Iranian male and female learners' listening skill development. Their findings indicated that the participants who were trained by cultural materials outperformed those students who were trained by free cultural materials.

Also, the results of this investigation are the same as the results of Hidayati et al. (2017), who revealed that learning target-language culture developed EFL learners' reading and speaking skills. Furthermore, this study is advocated by Mekheimer (2011), who investigated the effects of the target culture foreign language teaching in Saudi Arabia and revealed that the students who were subjected to target-culture got higher scores in tests.

Having cultural knowledge is a must for the students, as Hayati (2009) stated that cultural knowledge of students is the basis for learning a language. He kept on that a language is only professionally learned when students obtain enough cultural knowledge of the target language. Supporters of the background knowledge believe that activating background knowledge and linking new information to the old information can lead to enhanced comprehension. If students do not possess relevant knowledge about different topics in

their minds, they cannot comprehend the new passages successfully (Bilokcuoglu, 2014).

Language learners can enhance their English learning by being more exposed to certain cultural materials and issues. Being subjected to diverse cultures assists the students to embrace and appreciate people that are different from them. Further, the more we interact with other people from diverse cultures, the more they respect and value us (Yang & Li, 2015). One of the main rationales beyond teaching the English language nowadays is to boost the cross-cultural communication skills of EFL pupils, which is the capability to communicate successfully and effectively with native speakers of a language and other cultures (Gulbinskienė & Lasauskienė, 2014). Therefore, teaching culture is as important as teaching the language.

In summary, the two concepts of language and culture are so interrelated that one cannot separate them from each other. If one of them is segregated, the other will remain imperfect or deficient. Therefore, in EFL contexts, both English language and culture should be instructed to the EFL learners to help them use language communicatively in different situations. It is a fact that Indonesian EFL classes encompass several diverse cultural groups. And English should be treated as a bridge for those multiethnic groups to enhance the political education goal for national unity (Hendrra Tedjjasuksmana, 2013).

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