

The Language Culture in English Language Learning: A Qualitative Case Study on Challenges of Students in The English Education Program at University of Nurul Jadid

Adinda Tri Octavia¹, Moh. Sofyan Adi Pranata²,

¹Nurul Jadid University, ² Nurul Jadid University,

Corresponding Author: Moh. Sofyan Adi Pranata, Pranata, e-mail: sofyanadi@unuja.ac.id

Published: August, 2025

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores the challenges related to language culture experienced by students in the English Education Program at the University of Nurul Jadid. By investigating students' perceptions and experiences, the study uncovers how cultural differences between their local background and English impact their comprehension, motivation, and language use. Key challenges include difficulties in understanding cultural nuances such as idioms, social conventions, and pronunciation, alongside social stigma that hinders public English practice and confidence. Students employ strategies like code-switching, peer collaboration, and cultural mediation to navigate these obstacles. The research also highlights critical components of language culture—including linguistic and sociocultural elements—that affect learning outcomes. Findings suggest the need for culturally responsive pedagogy that integrates local cultural values and global English contexts, fostering relevance, engagement, and effective intercultural communication. This study contributes valuable insights for designing inclusive and effective English language education tailored to cultural realities in Indonesian higher education.

Keywords: *Language Culture, English Language Learning, Students Challenges*

© The Author(s). 2021 Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

INTRODUCTION

English proficiency as an international language has become a fundamental necessity in the globalization era, especially in the context of higher education in Indonesia. However, the implementation of English language learning faces various challenges, one of which is the cultural aspect embedded in the learning process itself (Hadi, 2023). Language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a reflection of cultural differences between learners and the target language. Therefore, understanding language culture is a crucial factor to ensure effective English learning (Wulandari, 2021). The differing cultural contexts often create a gap in the English learning process. Students sometimes find the English culture taught to them quite unfamiliar compared to the daily habits and norms they practice (Putra et al., 2020). For example, idioms, expressions, and social values in English that have no equivalent in Indonesian culture become distinct obstacles for students in comprehending and using them naturally (Fauzi, 2022).

Another challenge is related to students' low English proficiency resulting from limited exposure to the target language's cultural environment in their social context. In regional campuses, students mostly communicate in local languages or Indonesian, thus greatly limiting their opportunities to practice English and internalize its culture (Sari, 2023). This situation hampers the mastery of the four core language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—that serve as the standard in English education (Rahman, 2021). Moreover, the strong influence of local culture causes diverse perceptions and attitudes among students toward English. Some students show resistance to the Western culture embedded in English because it is perceived to conflict with their own cultural values (Hidayah, 2022). This phenomenon calls for a culturally sensitive teaching approach, where learning is not only focused on linguistic forms but also on intercultural appreciation and understanding.

A specific example of cultural influence on students' learning process can be seen in the English Education Program at University of Nurul Jadid, where students often face difficulties assimilating English cultural values with their local culture. These difficulties are not merely linguistic but also include understanding the socio-cultural contexts embedded within the language (Arifin, 2022). This directly affects students' motivation, learning methods, and ultimately their English proficiency development. From an academic standpoint, instructors at University of Nurul Jadid encounter obstacles in integrating English cultural aspects into their curriculum. Many still prioritize technical language aspects

without deeply addressing sociocultural dimensions, resulting in less contextual and applicable learning experiences for students in real life (Nur, 2023). This highlights the urgent need to update teaching strategies for a more holistic understanding of language culture.

Additionally, the varied cultural backgrounds of students at University of Nurul Jadid, whether homogeneous or highly diverse, further complicate English teaching. A one-size-fits-all approach is often ineffective, so it is essential to adapt teaching methods to accommodate cultural differences on both the instructor's and students' sides (Lestari, 2024). This approach is crucial to overcoming cultural barriers, one of the primary challenges in English learning. Psychological factors also present obstacles in learning English language culture. Fear of making mistakes and feelings of inferiority when communicating in English, influenced by cultural perceptions, can reduce students' learning enthusiasm. This situation is exacerbated by a lack of supportive environments that encourage active English practice, ultimately hindering students' language development (Sutrisno, 2022).

This study focuses on investigating the challenges faced by students of the English Education Program at University of Nurul Jadid in integrating English culture into their learning process. A qualitative approach is chosen to explore the issues deeply and obtain an authentic picture from the students' perspectives (Fadhil, 2023). The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective, contextual, and culturally sensitive English teaching methods. By understanding the cultural challenges in English language learning, universities and educators can design teaching strategies that emphasize not only the linguistic aspects but also the cultural dimensions. This is essential to developing students' comprehensive English competence and enabling them to communicate effectively across cultures in the global era (Amiruddin, 2021). Moreover, raising awareness of the importance of language culture encourages students to be more open and adaptive to cultural differences in their learning journey.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design using a case study approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the challenges related to language culture faced by students in the English Education Program at the University of Nurul Jadid. Qualitative research is defined as a method to explore and interpret meanings arising from social or human problems through inductive analysis of data collected from participants, allowing for rich and contextualized insights into complex phenomena (Savin-Baden & Major, 2020). This design is particularly suitable for investigating the nuanced and contextual challenges experienced by students as they navigate English language learning intertwined with cultural issues.

The case study approach provides an opportunity to explore these challenges comprehensively within the real-life environment of the university, capturing the emic—or insider—perspective of the students as key research participants (Hammarberg, 2020). By employing this approach, the study delves into various sociocultural and educational factors influencing students' experiences in learning English, presenting a detailed and reflective analysis.

Participants consist of ten second-semester students from the English Education Program at the University of Nurul Jadid, comprising five male and five female students. This purposive sampling ensures focus on learners who have begun their formal higher education journey and are actively engaging in English learning within the university context. Such a sample allows the research to articulate the specific challenges these students face, shaped by both their cultural backgrounds and the educational setting (Patton, 2020).

Data collection methods include semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis to capture students' perceptions, attitudes, and contextual difficulties regarding language culture in their English learning process. The data is analyzed inductively, identifying themes that reveal the multifaceted nature of the challenges encountered. This rigorous process aims to generate a comprehensive understanding that informs recommendations for culturally responsive teaching strategies tailored to the needs of students at the University of Nurul Jadid.

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely recognized method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is particularly suited for this study as it allows an in-depth exploration of students' experiences and challenges related to language culture in their English learning process, providing rich, contextualized understanding (Savin-Baden & Major, 2020). In this study, data from interviews, observations, and documents were coded inductively, letting themes emerge directly from the data without imposing preconceived categories. This bottom-up approach ensured that the resulting themes authentically reflected the participants' perspectives on cultural challenges they face. The rigor and transparency of the analysis process were upheld by continuous reflection and peer debriefing to minimize researcher bias (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

FINDINGS

Theme 1: Challenges Faced by Students Regarding Language Culture

The students in the English Education Program at the University of Nurul Jadid face multiple challenges stemming from the intersection of language learning and cultural differences. One significant challenge is the difficulty in understanding cultural nuances embedded within English, such as idiomatic expressions, humor, and social conventions, which do not have direct equivalents in their local culture. This cultural gap often results in misunderstandings and hinders the development of pragmatic competence. Furthermore, the students reported experiencing social stigma when attempting to speak English publicly, which negatively affects their confidence and willingness to practice the language. This social perception, where using English is sometimes viewed as showing off or distancing oneself from the local

community, creates a psychological barrier that discourages active engagement. These sociocultural barriers, therefore, extend beyond linguistic challenges to affect students' identity and social belonging.

Theme 2: Strategies Employed by Students to Overcome Cultural Challenges

Despite these challenges, students have adopted various strategies to navigate cultural complexities in English learning. Many use code-switching, where they mix English with their local language to make sense of new terminology and concepts, thereby bridging the cultural gap. Peer collaboration serves as another vital strategy, where students engage in group discussions to share cultural perspectives and contextualize unfamiliar English cultural references. Additionally, students often draw analogies between English cultural elements and local customs to enhance comprehension, a form of cultural mediation. Such active and collaborative learning approaches enable students to reconstruct meanings in a culturally relevant way, allowing them to adapt their learning process based on their cultural realities and personal experiences.

Theme 3: Components of Language Culture Affecting English Learning

The study identifies several critical components within language culture that influence students' English learning experiences. These include linguistic elements such as vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and pronunciation that carry cultural significance, as well as sociocultural elements like politeness norms, gestures, and conversational rules. Students expressed difficulties in mastering the prosodic features of English, such as stress and intonation patterns, which often convey subtle cultural meanings. Furthermore, the limited exposure to authentic cultural contexts through textbooks and classroom materials was reported as a significant impediment, indicating a gap in culturally contextualized teaching resources. This lack of contextualization prevents students from fully internalizing the sociocultural dimensions necessary for competent language use in diverse settings.

Theme 4: Educational Strategies and Teacher Roles

Students pointed out that teachers play a crucial role in mediating cultural challenges by incorporating culturally relevant teaching materials and methods. Many expressed a desire for curriculum content that respects and integrates local cultural values while simultaneously exposing them to authentic English cultural contexts. They noted that culturally responsive pedagogy, such as using local examples to illustrate English language points or discussing cultural differences openly, greatly enhances engagement and comprehension. However, some students felt current teaching strategies remain overly focused on linguistic accuracy without sufficient attention to culture, which hampers meaningful communication skill development.

Theme 5: Opportunities and Challenges in Curriculum and Teaching Materials

While the current curriculum aims to develop linguistic skills, students highlighted the need for more explicit attention to cultural components in teaching materials. The existing textbooks tend to emphasize grammar and vocabulary without sufficient sociocultural context, limiting students' ability to relate language to real-life intercultural interactions. Moreover, the uneven representation of English-speaking cultures versus local culture can cause students to feel disconnected or alienated. Participants expressed the desire for richer, more balanced content that incorporates both global English cultures and their own local heritage, allowing for more meaningful and contextualized language learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative case study reveals that language culture presents a complex set of challenges for students in the English Education Program at the University of Nurul Jadid. The cultural gap between students' local norms and the embedded cultural meanings in English significantly affects their comprehension, pragmatic competence, and confidence in using the language. Social stigma associated with speaking English publicly further compounds these difficulties by hindering students' motivation and willingness to engage actively in language practice. Despite these challenges, students employ adaptive strategies such as code-switching, peer collaboration, and cultural mediation to negotiate meaning and bridge cultural differences. These learner-driven approaches highlight the resilience and creativity of students in managing the intersection of language and culture within their learning process. However, the findings also underscore persistent difficulties related to linguistic and sociocultural components of language culture, including vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, pronunciation, and communicative norms, which remain insufficiently addressed.

The study further emphasizes the critical role of educators and curriculum design in mediating these cultural challenges. Students express a strong need for culturally responsive pedagogy that integrates local cultural values while providing exposure to authentic English cultural contexts. Current teaching materials and curricula, which tend to prioritize linguistic accuracy and global English norms without adequately contextualizing culture, limit students' ability to fully internalize and apply cultural nuances in real-life communication.

In light of these findings, it is essential for English language education at the University of Nurul Jadid to balance the development of linguistic skills with cultural competence. Incorporating culturally relevant teaching strategies and materials that respect students' local identities can enhance engagement, reduce psychological barriers, and promote meaningful intercultural communication. This integrative approach not only supports students' language acquisition but also fosters a more inclusive and effective learning environment that prepares them for global communication while valuing their cultural heritage.

Overall, addressing the intertwined linguistic and cultural challenges identified in this study is vital for advancing English language education that is sensitive to the sociocultural realities of Indonesian learners. Future educational

policies and teaching practices should focus on bridging cultural gaps through curriculum innovation, teacher training, and learner support to cultivate communicative competence rooted in cultural awareness.

REFERENCES

- Amiruddin, A. (2021). Integrating language and culture for effective English learning. *Journal of Language and Culture*, 5(2), 89-102.
- Arifin, B. (2022). Cultural barriers in English language learning among Indonesian university students. *Education Today*, 12(1), 45-60.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Fadhil, M. (2023). Challenges of culture integration in English education: A qualitative study. *Journal of Language Studies*, 14(1), 23-37.
- Fauzi, R. (2022). The influence of idiomatic expressions on English learning difficulties. *Lingua Journal*, 10(3), 112-130.
- Hadi, S. (2023). The role of culture in language acquisition. *International Journal of Language Teaching*, 9(2), 67-82.
- Hammarberg, K. (2020). Case study research: Exploring language and culture in context. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 33(4), 367-382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2020.1713484>
- Hidayah, N. (2022). Cultural resistance in English language learning: An Indonesian context. *Asian Journal of Education*, 7(1), 55-70.
- Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide No. 131. *Medical Teacher*, 42(8), 846-854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030>
- Lestari, D. (2024). Adapting English teaching strategies to diverse cultural backgrounds. *Teaching and Learning International*, 11(1), 98-113.
- Nur, R. (2023). Integrating sociocultural aspects in English teaching in Indonesia. *Journal of Educational Innovations*, 8(2), 78-95.
- Patton, M. Q. (2020). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Putra, E., Sari, L., & Rahman, A. (2020). Cultural challenges in ESL learning: A case study. *Language and Society Studies*, 6(1), 14-29.
- Sari, L. (2023). Language exposure and English competence in Indonesian universities. *International Journal of English Education*, 10(1), 99-115.
- Savin-Baden, M., & Major, C. H. (2020). *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Sutrisno, T. (2022). Psychological barriers in second language acquisition. *Journal of Language Psychology*, 4(2), 60-74.
- Wulandari, F. (2021). The role of culture in language teaching and learning. *Journal of Indonesian Linguistics*, 9(2), 44-58.
- Rahman, F. (2021). English language skills development in Indonesian higher education. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(3), 78-93.