

Cultural Awareness of Pre-Service EFL Teachers in an Indonesian Higher Education Context

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Abstract. It is not enough to teach a language without acknowledging culture while teaching English as a Foreign Language, so teachers must be culturally conscious of incorporating culture into their teaching activities. This research was conducted to investigate the cultural awareness of pre-service EFL teachers in the higher education context. The aim is to find out the cultural understanding of cultural differences of the pre-service EFL teachers. This research used a qualitative research design. The participants of this research were 20 pre-service EFL teachers who had attended the PPG program in 2018. A questionnaire by [Marx and Moss \(2011\)](#) on My Cultural Awareness Profile (MyCAP) was adopted as an instrument of this research. The study's findings showed that the participants had a significant cultural awareness and understanding of cultural differences. However, due to the limited time and approach employed in the study, the researchers hope that more researchers will be attracted to look further into intercultural understanding in higher education with different subjects and approaches.

Keywords: *Cultural Awareness, Cultural Understanding, Cultural Differences, Pre-Service EFL Teacher*

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INTRODUCTION

It has been argued and understood that language and culture have a close relationship; they cannot be separated. In learning a language, the language user has to pay attention to the culture where it is spoken. That is why in the process of teaching and learning a language, in this case, English, it is not enough to focus only on the language without considering its culture. In a country where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), the role of the teacher is important in promoting students' cultural awareness. [Badrkhani \(2017\)](#) insisted that the EFL teacher should be aware that students are the future's international communicators, so it is essential to teach culture and language simultaneously.

Culture plays an important role in language teaching ([Nguyen, 2017](#)). This is related to the statement made by [Rodrigues \(2000\)](#) that language competence and culture are intimately connected. By teaching culture, the EFL teacher will give the students a deep understanding that they are a part of the global society and will communicate across various cultures and communities.

Teachers should be well prepared before delivering the lessons to the students. They are responsible for preparing themselves as facilitators in the class to make an effective learning process to feel comfortable learning. Effective techniques in teaching foreign languages include more than building linguistic competence. They also build cultural competence and understand foreign language cultures to avoid failing communication ([Abushihab, 2016](#)).

As explained above, language has a close relationship with culture, which means someone is successful in learning a language if he/she can use the language to communicate appropriately, fluently, and acceptably. [Lestari \(2010\)](#) stated that in teaching language, teachers should teach the cultural pattern, which covers values, thoughts, and attitudes in the language they are teaching. So, the students can increase their understanding of other cultures and increase appreciation of their own culture if they can go abroad to use the language they learnt appropriately according to the cultural pattern that prevails in the language. They can increase their motivation to learn a language.

EFL teachers' role is to instill cultural awareness in the students and integrate it into language learning. One of the reasons to integrate culture into language learning is that someone's attitude and speech can be interpreted differently by listeners who have different cultural backgrounds. That is why [Brown \(2001\)](#) argued that by understanding other cultures, understanding their own culture will be increased.

However, EFL teachers nowadays only focus on teaching the skills without considering the importance of culture in learning a foreign language. In this millennial era, communicating with people from different countries and cultural backgrounds may happen easily in spoken or written forms. Teachers have to train students to increase their awareness and understanding of respecting others and interact effectively and comfortably with people from different ethnicities, religions, and cultures. However, the weakness of someone who has less cultural awareness will potentially experience misunderstanding in a society where people with different cultures are mixed. That is why teachers and the teacher candidate must have more

cultural awareness and understanding to be taught and visualize the students in the class even outside the class.

To have and master the competencies, the teacher candidates have to be trained. There is training for preparing the future competent teachers in Indonesia that is PPG training that the trainees are called pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers have finished their bachelor's degree and have passions and interests to be professional teachers. At the end of the training, they will be examined to have the certificate of an experienced teacher (UU No. 20 2003 on National Education System).

The trainees are trained based on their educational background; one is English Education. The EFL pre-service teachers will be trained to educate, teach advice, facilitate, train, assess, and evaluate students' learning English. They have to make sure that their students will be able to use English correctly and grammatically in an appropriate context. Pre-service teacher preparation is an essential part of a teacher's education program because it trains student-teachers to become trained teachers in the future (Ulla, 2016).

Based on the above clarification of the importance of culture in teaching English as a history, the current researcher was interested in conducting a study on pre-service EFL teachers' cultural knowledge in Indonesian higher education. The principal research statement is about the importance of the cultural awareness of the pre-service EFL teacher. Referring to the principal research statement, the researcher intended to find out about the cultural awareness of the pre-service EFL teachers who attended PPG Training. Based on the principal research statement above, the researcher formulated the research question is: How is the cultural understanding of the pre-service EFL teachers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concepts of Language and Culture

Language and culture cannot be separated. Kramsch (2013) stated that both had been hotly debated in foreign language education in terms of relationships, the kind of culture that should be taught, the learners' role, etc. There are so many definitions of language delivered by experts; many of them implied that a language is a communication tool that is used to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Moreover, Scarino and Liddicoat (2009, 15) stated that language is more than just code; it also covers social practices of interpreting and making meanings. According to the statement of Scariono and Liddicoat above, it can be concluded that learning a language is about learning vocabulary and grammar but is more concerned with creating and representing meanings and how to communicate with others appropriately.

Culture is a part of human beings that covers all daily life activities. Experts make many definitions to explain what culture is. Lado (1957, p. 111) defines culture as a structured system of patterned behavior. While Kramch (1993, p. 205) stated that culture is a social construct, the product of self and other perceptions. Furthermore, McCarthy and Carter (1994) define culture as "social awareness and interactive skills needed in addition to language system knowledge, "Based on the definitions

delivered by the experts above, it can be concluded that culture is a structured system and social construct which covers social knowledge and interactive skills.

Language and culture are two inseparable issues; they complement each other. Both language and culture have a function to carry meanings in communication. Language may carry linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic meanings, while culture carries meaning based on cultural context. Sometimes, the sentences are correct linguistically but could cause misunderstanding or confusion in a different cultural context (Schulz, 2007). That is why cultural awareness is an important matter to be had by the EFL learners.

Concept of Cultural Awareness

Modern language education has made cultural understanding a major focus. (Shemshadsara, 2012). It becomes central when people interact with people from other cultures. There are some definitions of cultural awareness revealed by experts. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) pointed out that cultural awareness means becoming aware of members of another cultural group, including their behavior, expectations, perspectives, and values. Moreover, in Sainei (2012), Tomlinson stated that cultural awareness is a gradually developing inner sense of the equality of cultures, an increased understanding of own and other people's cultures, and a positive interest in how cultures both connect and differ. Such awareness can broaden the mind, increase tolerance and facilitate international communication.

According to the experts' meanings, cultural knowledge means understanding cultural differences between themselves and people from other countries or cultures and becoming mindful of various cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes to expand the mind, increase tolerance, and promote international communication.

Concepts of Culture in Language Teaching in Foreign Language Learning

Learning a foreign language entails more than just memorizing the alphabet. According to Yeganeh and Raeesi (2015), teaching a second or foreign language entails improving linguistic and communicative skills in the target language. It also entails passing on information about the target community or nation where the language is spoken.

Learning about culture is a method of perception (Hsin, 2008). Furthermore, according to Kramersch (2003, p.32), culture teaching aims to help students understand why speakers of two different languages behave and respond the way they do, whether in fictional texts or in social interactions what these observations mean for the learner. Furthermore, unlike grammar instruction, culture instruction cannot be generalized. It should concentrate on "exploration and explanation," as opposed to "grammar instruction," since the rules for creating meanings are dynamic (Kramersch, 2003). Considering English as a lingua franca, so the discussion of cultural contents in EFL classroom instruction needs to consider the influences of globalization because it raises the problem of what culture to be taught. Thus, different cultural contents should be assigned in different foreign language learning contexts, depending on what learners need (Hsin, 2008). Moreover, foreign culture teaching should move from passing information of target cultures to teaching the language in context,

giving meanings to foreign language learners, and raising learners' cultural awareness in foreign language learning (Willems, 1996).

Language and culture are inextricably linked and cannot be separated since language is a culture in and of itself. Teaching culture is inextricably linked to language teaching. According to Salim (2017), teaching language automatically involves teaching culture. Culture teaching helps students better understand the target culture's way of life, behaviors, views, and values. Evidence suggests that if teachers incorporate culture into a language classroom, learners will be more effective in language learning because they will be immersed in the entire culture of the target language.

Concepts of Pre-Service EFL Teacher

Pre-service teachers have participated in a teacher training program and are pursuing certification as a teacher (Goulette & Swanson, 2018). According to Gonzalez and Balderas (2019), pre-service teachers are students who have been admitted into a teacher education program but have not yet completed the criteria for full certification as a teacher. Furthermore, according to Rahimi (2015), pre-service teachers are students who have completed pre-service training or education. A "course or program of study completed by student teachers before they begin teaching". According to the above explanations, pre-service EFL teachers are English students who have completed their undergraduate program but are not yet qualified as skilled teachers, so they participate in pre-service teaching training to obtain the credential.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative research design describing data in more detail in a broader sentence explanation of the pre-service EFL teachers' cultural awareness. It had a single variable that was pre-service EFL teachers' cultural awareness. To prevent bias interpretation, cultural awareness means understanding cultural differences between themselves and people from other countries or backgrounds and being aware of different cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions to broaden the mind, increase tolerance, and facilitate international communication. Pre-service EFL teachers are English students who have finished their undergraduate program but are still not certified as professional teachers, so they enroll themselves in the pre-service teaching training to get the certificate.

The data resource of this research was the pre-service EFL teachers that had attended the PPG program in 2018. There were 20 participants in this research. The researcher adopted the questionnaire developed by Marx and Moss (2011), My Cultural Awareness Profile (MyCAP) Questionnaire. MyCAP is a tool that teachers and educators can use to start critical discussions with students about their cultural and global knowledge. There are four dimensions of cultural awareness provided in MyCAP: global perspectives, cultural understanding, perspective consciousness, and intercultural communication. However, the researcher only used the cultural understanding dimension. The questionnaire was divided into two forms; they are multiple-choice and open-ended questionnaires.

The data gathered from multiple-choice questions were automatically scored using the Google Form application. Besides, the most common responses to the open-ended questions were categorized based on their theme and the subject to obtain accurate statistical results for each question. The data from multiple-choice questions were analyzed manually based on the result scores provided by the Google Form application. However, the data from open-ended questions were categorized and analyzed based on their theme and the subject to obtain accurate statistical results for each question. Descriptive statistics would be separately used to describe the cultural awareness of pre-service EFL teachers based on each dimension in the questionnaire.

This section should provide sufficient details of the experiment, simulation, statistical test, or analysis to generate the results so that another researcher can repeat the method.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the result of data analysis based on the research questions. The data was collected from 20 pre-service EFL teachers that attended PPG training during 2018. The data was collected through a questionnaire adapted from [Marx and Moss \(2011\)](#). The following are the description of data gathered from the participants.

Table 1. Concept of Culture

No.	Questions	Responses (%)			
		Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	Talking about common cultural characteristics is different from stereotyping	0	10	60	30
2	Culture is more about traditions, celebrations, and history than about core values	5	25	30	40

[Table 1](#) above shows the frequency and percentage of the pre-service EFL teachers' insights and understanding of the concept of culture and how it can influence their perception and behavior. In question number 1, there were 6 participants (30%) who agreed that common cultural characteristics are different from stereotyping, while 12 of 20 (60%) pre-service EFL teachers were categorized to somewhat agree, 2 (10%) somewhat disagreed, and there are no participants were disagree. Moreover, in question number 12, there were 8 (40%) participants who chose to agree, 6 (30%) for somewhat agree, 5 (25%) for somewhat disagree, and 1

(5%) participant who opposed the statement. Based on the description above, it can be concluded that most of the participants have good levels of cultural understanding. They understand that culture is a broader topic in this world.

Table 2. Cultural Diversity

No.	Questions	Responses (%)			
		Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	The best way to come to find out about other cultural groups is through international travel	5	25	40	30
		Rarely	Not Often	Sometimes	Often
2	I go to cultural events on campus or in my community	20	20	35	25

Table 2 above shows the insight into the extent to which pre-service EFL teachers respect cultural diversity, understand that cultural diversity can be found both locally and globally, and are curious and willing to explore diverse cultural contexts. In statement number 13, there were 6 (30%) participants who agree to the statement, 8 (40%) participants for somewhat agree, 5 (25%) participants for somewhat disagree, and 1 (5 %) for disagree with the statement. Furthermore, in statement number 15, there were 5 (25%) participants who often go to cultural events on their campus or in their community, 7 (35%) was sometimes, 4 (20%) for not often, and 4 (20%) were rarely.

Based on the description above, it can be seen that most of the participants find it easier to find out about other cultural groups through international travel. However, in different ways, they also attend the cultural events on their campus and community to experience the cross-cultural process.

Table 3. Cultural General Category

No.	Questions	Responses (%)			
		Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	I find it hard to see both similarities and differences when I consider various cultures	5	55	30	10
		Rarely	Not Often	Sometimes	Often

2	I will actively promote cultural awareness in my teaching	5	10	45	40
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Table 3 above shows the insight into the pre-service EFL teachers' knowledge of another culture group and the degree to which they can use general cultural categories to discuss cultural practices. In questionnaire number 14, 2 (10%) participants agree to find it hard to see both similarities and differences when considering various cultures. In comparison, there were 6 (30%) who somewhat agree, 11 (55%) who somewhat disagree, and 1 (5%) who disagree with the statement. Moreover, for questionnaire number 16, 8 (40%) will often actively promote cultural awareness in their teaching. While 9 (45%) will sometimes enable it, 2 (10%) not often, and 1 (5%) rarely.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the participants who agree and disagree with statement number 14 are almost equal, even though most of them disagree with the statement. Moreover, to encourage learning about other cultures, most participants will promote cultural awareness in their teaching activity, which means that they have enough cultural understanding to be discussed in their teaching process.

Table 4. The Role of Culture Within Education

No.	Questions	Responses (%)			
		Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	I am not very familiar with a culture group other than my own	15	45	35	5
2	Curriculum should be culturally neutral, so it appeals to all children	0	15	30	55

Table 4 above shows the frequency and percentage of pre-service EFL teachers' insight into the role of culture within education and how they might integrate cultural understandings within their teaching. From questionnaire number 17, 3 (15%) participants disagree that they are not very familiar with a culture group other than their own. While there were 9 (45%) participants who somewhat disagree, 7 (35%) somewhat agree, and 1 (5%) agreed. Moreover, in questionnaire number 18, there were no participants who disagree with the statement, 3 (15%) for somewhat disagree, 6 (30%) participants were somewhat agree, and 11 (55%) were agree that curriculum should be neutral, so it appeals to all children.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that most of the participants have a broader understanding of their culture and other cultural groups, which makes them easier to put culture into their teaching. Moreover, most participants agree that the curriculum should be culturally neutral to involve all students.

Table 5. Characteristics of Cultural Groups

Question	Category Label	Opinion
Describe three categories/characteristics commonly used to compare cultural groups	Language	Language: Every cultural group has different kinds of culture that can describe things in its own language.
	Belief	People's social life will compare between different cultural groups by taking a look at their way of life.
	Physical appearance	Skin color
	Art	Traditional Art: Every group has its traditional art, which contains its identity.
	Cultural Ceremony	The way a community celebrates their important events/big day

Based on [Table 5](#) above, some responses of the participants can be seen in the open-ended questionnaire. Most of the participants categorized that language, belief, physical appearance, art, and cultural ceremony are commonly used to compare cultural groups.

Table 6. Incorporate Cultural Awareness into Teaching

Question	Category Label	Opinion
How might you incorporate cultural awareness into your teaching?	Teaching Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It should be considered with the material taught. Sometimes, certain topic gives a chance to explore a particular culture - In 2013 Curriculum gave teachers Some space to incorporate cultural awareness and teaching, especially in English; every teaching material has to contain Cultural materials - I will ask the student to read Indonesian folklore or fairy tale story from outside Indonesia
	Teaching Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I will teach my student and describe it by showing them a video or text of

	the cultural awareness they need to introduce.
	- I might include a video of a certain culture to compose a descriptive or report text
Research	- Encourage students to research and share information about their ethnic background.

Based on [table 6](#) above, some participants' responses towards the open-ended questionnaire can be seen. Most participants categorized that the participants use teaching materials, teaching media, and research to incorporate cultural awareness into their teaching.

Discussion

This section presents the interpretations of the findings of the research. The research objectives were to find out the cultural understanding, the perspective of the cultural differences, and the ability to communicate across cultural differences of the pre-service EFL teachers. The first objective of this research is to find out the cultural understanding of pre-service teachers. According to [Badrkhani \(2017\)](#), the term understanding refers to how a person perceives and understands some matters, in this case, culture. As stated in the findings above, it can be seen that most of the participants have good levels of cultural understanding. They understand that culture is a broader topic in this world. Understanding culture means being aware of the differences between human beings around the world, especially in terms of attitudes and values, and value their own culture, language, and beliefs.

There are many ways to understand other people's culture, for example, traveling, talking to people from another cultural group, research, etc. Based on the description at the findings above, it can be seen that most of the participants find it easier to find out about other cultural groups through international travel. But in different ways, they also attend the cultural events on their campus and community to experience the cross-cultural process. This indicates that they are interested in directly gaining information from different backgrounds by living among them.

Canale and Swain, 1980 in [Nguyen, 2017](#) stated that if the main aim of communicative language teaching is to provide learners with meaningful experiences in authentic situations with native or like-native speakers of the target language, it is important to teach about culture so that learners can understand how to achieve their communicative objectives. Reflecting on the findings above that encourage learning about other cultures, most participants will promote cultural awareness in their teaching activity, which means they have enough cultural understanding to be discussed in their teaching process. To help students understand the cultural differences among people worldwide, the teachers must share their insights into the cultural differences with their students.

In terms of creating a class that considers culture in the teaching and learning process, [Marx and Moss \(2011\)](#) stated that teachers need to become more aware of

their cultural selves and uncover the dynamic and complex ways their cultural perspectives influence their relationships with students and the curriculum. Thus, they are more able to create culturally responsive classrooms. This is related to the findings above that most of the participants have a broader understanding of their culture and other cultural groups, making it easier to put culture into their teaching. Moreover, most participants agree that the curriculum should be culturally neutral to involve all students.

So, it can be concluded that the participants in this research have a well cultural understanding as they are aware of the differences between human beings around the world, especially in terms of attitudes and values, and value their own culture, language, and beliefs. Moreover, they must have a broader understanding of their own and other cultures if they want to be easier putting culture into their teaching activity.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the pre-service EFL teachers' cultural awareness in the Indonesian Higher Education context. The focus of this study was to find out the cultural understanding of the pre-service EFL teachers. The data were collected using a questionnaire adopted from [Marx and Moss \(2011\)](#), My Cultural Awareness Profile (MyCAP) Questionnaire. Based on the findings and discussion of the previous chapter, the researcher concluded that the participants in this research have a well cultural understanding as they are aware of the differences between human beings around the world, especially in terms of attitudes and values, at the same time, value their own culture, language and beliefs. Moreover, they must have a broader understanding of their own and other cultures if they want to be easier putting culture into their teaching activity.

The researchers propose some suggestions in this study. In teaching English, the teachers are suggested to put culture into the process of teaching to make students aware and understand the culture of English they are learned so misunderstanding and misinterpretation could be reduced when the students apply their English in the context of English-speaking countries or others which has different cultural backgrounds. Teachers should deepen and broaden their understanding of their own and other's cultural backgrounds if they want to be easier putting culture into their teaching activity. Teachers should understand that their students and every person are unique with their cultural backgrounds to make their students respect each other. Due to the limited time and approach employed in the study, the researchers hope that more researchers will be attracted to look further into intercultural understanding in higher education with different subjects and different approaches.

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