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## Traditional Obstacles to Learning English: Challenges and Strategies in a Globalized World

<sup>1</sup>Mr. K. Anil Kumar

Lecturer in English, Subharam Govt. Degree College Punganur

<sup>2</sup>Dr. R. Venkatesh Babu

Lecturer in Commerce, SVCR Govt. Degree College Palamaner

### Abstract

English has turned out to be a prominent lingua franca both nationally and internationally. It has become a major source of knowledge dissemination in education, business, science and technology, medicine and international relations. Despite its global importance, learners across different cultural contexts continue to face significant challenges in gaining English proficiency. These challenges extend beyond linguistic difficulties and are deeply rooted in cultural differences, sociocultural values, identity formation, religious beliefs, methodological traditions and psychological factors. This article explores major cultural barriers to learning English which includes struggle for identity, ideological resistance, methodological deficits and irrelevances, sociocultural norms and affective hindrances. Based on recent empirical studies and theoretical perspectives, the paper also look into the strategies for overcoming these barriers through the pedagogy that considers cultural matters, intercultural competence development, inclusive curriculum design and supportive language policies. This is high time to address cultural matters that impact the adversity of language in the rural areas primarily as the areas still treat English as a foreign language and as threat for the existence of many other languages nationally and internationally. Owing to the fears raised due to the issue, people have started to be scared that the beliefs, languages and customs will be influenced negatively. But the study argues that English should be taught not as a cultural replacement but as an additional input and enhancement for communicative trajectories that respect learners' religious and linguistic beliefs and entities while emphasizing and nurturing global inclusivity. This paper affirms that culture of the diverse societies is presented preserved in association with English.

**Keywords:** English language learning, culture, intercultural competence, identity, EFL, cultural barriers

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**Introduction:**

English language learning (ELL) has become a global characteristic, with millions of learners working hard to attain English for academic betterment, employment opportunities, social mobility and international communication. As globalization is at its high speed, English has its advancement as the language of opportunities. It has provided access to the global opportunities and it is for technology and economic issues. Despite widespread exposure and institutional backup, facing problems to achieve communicative competence in English is found in many learners. While linguistic factors such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary are often emphasized, cultural matters also hinder to learn and acquire mastery of the language. But the importance of culture in the inclusion of language learning has been ignored but it is crucial.

Culture drastically affects the people who wish to learn language, interpret meaning and engage in communication. Language is not merely a neutral system of rules but a transformative carrier of cultural values, ideologies and worldviews. As Hossain (2024) asserts, “language and culture are inseparable; teaching one without the other leads to incomplete learning” (p. 3). When English is taught without understanding the learners’ cultural backgrounds, it can generate resistance, anxiety, strangeness and identity disturbances.

This paper investigates cultural barriers to learning English. It concentrated on how cultural recognition, traditions, beliefs and educational norms combine with language acquisition. It leverages theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to illustrate how cultural challenges give a shape in diverse contexts, including religious institutions, universities and rural societies. To eradicate these obstructions through culturally responsive and inclusive approaches, the paper also brings forward pragmatic solutions for teachers and educational administrators.

**2. The overlapping of Language and Culture:****2.1 Language - A Cultural Outcome:**

Language is the result of socio- cultural occurrences supported by historical, political and ideological forces. Basically, English carries cultural norms associated with Western societies, such as individualism, directness, critical inquiry and informality. These issues are conveyed through idioms, joviality, discourse patterns and communicative manners. For learners from non-Western backgrounds, to be accurate in English, it involves going through some queer cultural beliefs alongside linguistic forms.

Kramsch (1998) emphasizes that language learning entails entering a “third space” where learners negotiate meanings between their native culture and the target culture.

Without guidance, this negotiation can be threatening, particularly when English is a culturally important or ideologically penetrative.

### **2.2 Cultural Inclusivity and Meaning:**

Some words cannot be converted into other languages literally since they have meanings ingrained culturally. Then the direct use of English is suggestible to use. Some concepts such as freedom, privacy, individualism or self-expression may have vivid ideas in divergent cultures. People who illustrate the concepts specified may interpret differently when they understand the practical purpose or communicative relevance.

Kustati et al. (2023) argue that pragmatic competence—knowing how language is used appropriately in social contexts—requires cultural awareness. Having grammatical calibre alone cannot yield the appropriate meaning in the communication without cultural blend in language. Communication is the combination of socio-cultural, political and historical production as defined by Raymond Williams in his work of Cultural Materialism.

### **2.3 Cross-Cultural Awareness in English Learning:**

Cross-culturalism means understanding, comparing, contrasting and communicating with different cultures and bringing them together to nullify the gaps existing in the same. This awareness is essential for the learners to identify cultural differences without treating them as drawbacks. This knowledge is the reason that creates the connotation, universality of English and its attribution to and by different cultures. To achieve the understanding, a clear instructional support is needed. But it is often absent in traditional EFL classrooms.

## **3. Prominent Cultural Hindrances to Learning English:**

### **3.1 Recognition and Cultural Resistance:**

A major important cultural obstacle to learn English is identity conflict. Language a close entity is adhered to individual and societal identity. It is commonly found that learning a foreign language augments concerns about different segments of a culture and creates a threat to the existing identities. It is prevalent in the matter of English. If English is learnt the language may affect local languages and cultural retention to the generations to come according to some assumptions. This view is also one of the cultural impediments to learn English.

In the writings of Post colonial authors, English is shown as the language that diminishes the value of local languages, enhances social inequalities and historical domination. Owing to this perspective, avoiding English would be a way protecting the native culture as instructed by some communities. For example, in parts of South Asia and Africa, English is often viewed as the language of the elite, enhancer of social differences, builder of psychological walls among the learners from marginalized or rural backgrounds.

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Even in our country, many people from various backgrounds treat it is not fit for the cultural identities and they believe that it is an obstacle for the innate confidence and possible progress. People treat the proficiency of English as a parameter for internal division rather than their up gradation.

### **3.2 Religious and Ideological Reasons:**

Religious beliefs and traditions also shape the attitudes of learners towards learning English. Sometimes the material may have some controversial issues, elaborations or sketches which oppose the beliefs of the learners. These issues impact and motivate the learners negatively towards English materials and make them not to inculcate the habit of pursuing English.

Kustati et al. (2023) found that students in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia struggled with Western cultural references embedded in English learning materials, particularly those related to dating, alcohol consumption or individualistic lifestyles. Learners expressed concern that such content contradicted Islamic values, leading to reluctance in participation.

The above cited situations underscore the effect of contextualizing English instruction within learners' ideological and religious environments rather than imposing culturally incompatible materials.

### **3.3 Incompatible Methods:**

Cultural barriers also come from incompatibilities between pedagogical approaches and learners' educational traditions. Western teaching methods often prioritize student-centred learning, open discussion, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. While these methods are widely promoted in EFL teaching, they may be opposite with stratification, teacher-centred traditions in many Asian, Middle Eastern, and African contexts.

Students got habituated to rote memorization and teachers' dominative instruction may feel uncomfortable environment for speaking freely, approaching teachers or expressing personal opinions in English. Owing to this, passive participation in classroom rather than active speaking is discharged by the students.

Hossain (2024) notes that when pedagogical practices ignore cultural expectations, learners may interpret interactive methods as disrespectful or inappropriate, leading to disengagement.

### **3.4 Sociocultural Norms and Communication Styles:**

Traditions followed in the society such as the roles played by gender, humility and formalism present in the society and fear adversely exacerbate English attainment. Female students are confined to express their opinions in a conventional classroom. Students may

avoid speaking in English in order to have association and good relations with their peer students.

Differences in politeness strategies and levels of directness can lead to pragmatic misunderstandings in English communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hall, 1976).

Learners from high-context cultures may find the direct discourse style of English uncomfortable or inappropriate (Hall, 1976; Tannen, 1984).

Additionally, English communication often values directness and explicit expression, which may conflict with indirect, high-context communication styles common in many Asian cultures. Learners may perceive English discourse as rude or overly assertive, while native English speakers may misinterpret indirectness as lack of confidence or competence.

### **3.5 Psychological and Affective Barriers:**

Learners have some most prevalent issues such as apprehension, fear of being mocked by their counterparts and the feeling of humiliation. They have problematic situations while speaking English with mother tongue based accents, fear of being corrected for not maintaining the standard pronunciation. Learners increase their confidence when they feel emotionally safe and supported while learning English.

Ross and Stuckler (2025) highlight that emotional and socio-cultural barriers significantly affect EFL learners' motivation and persistence, particularly in higher education contexts where English proficiency is closely tied to academic identity.

## **4. Case Studies from Diverse Contexts:**

### **4.1 University Students in Europe:**

Ross and Stuckler's (2025) systematic review of EFL barriers among university students in Europe reveals that socio-cultural and emotional factors play a critical role in improving learning experiences. Students in regular classrooms struggle to communicate in English language as they feel that it is more difficult and superior to compare the vernacular languages. The feeling is reserved for exclusion.

Students have a feeling that they are adequate, have fear of getting negative feedback and cultural eccentricity are found to discourage participation in English-medium instruction (EMI) programs. These findings suggest that even in contexts with high exposure to English, cultural barriers remain significant.

### **4.2 Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia:**

In Islamic boarding schools, English learning is shaped by strong religious and communal values. Kustati et al. (2023) found that learners were not interested in reading English materials that contrasted with Islamic teachings. However, the usage of English

language for the explanation of positive situations which belongs to the religious contexts has motivated the students to learn and communicate in the language.

This case demonstrates that cultural alignment does not weaken English instruction but enhances its relevance and effectiveness.

#### **4.3 Rural Learners in South Asia:**

The rural learners in South Asia believe that English is frequently treated as an insignia of the advantage of urban people. Thus it becomes a social division. Lack of sufficient exposure to language ecosystem, cultural issues that create distance with language are the noticeable causes. Many students have a notion that they may not speak in English properly and it is the language of the people pertinent in ultra modern societies.

### **5. Implications for Educators:**

#### **5.1 Culturally Responsive Methodology:**

To teach English, Culturally supportive pedagogy is needed in such areas. It identifies learners' cultural backgrounds as big features rather than barriers. Teachers should adapt innovative instructional methods, different classroom communication styles and evaluative systems to meet learners' cultural aspirations while gradually introducing new communicative norms.

#### **5.2 Inter-cultural Competence Development:**

Inter-cultural competence has the ability to interact effectively and relevantly across cultural borders. Teachers should conspicuously teach cultural awareness, empathy and reflective skills, enabling learners to navigate cultural differences without compromising their identities (Byram, 1997).

#### **5.3 Customised Syllabus Design:**

English syllabi should have local stories, traditions and values alongside global content. This policy approves learners' requirements and eradicates resistance by demonstrating that English can express different cultural experiences.

#### **5.4 Teacher Education and Training:**

Teacher training programmes should be designed to identify the cultural needs which foster the language habits and the challenges that impact language learning. Teachers should have the resources to concentrate on mitigating cultural tensions and encourage inclusive learning environments.

### **6. Strategies to Overcome Cultural Barriers:**

#### **6.1 Situational Learning:**

Using culturally relevant examples and materials enhances comprehension and motivation. Western idioms can be explained through local examples, simplifying the abstract things through concrete illustrations.

**6.2 Intercultural Dialogue:**

Organizing discussions on cultural differences improves healthy relations among the learners. These discussions navigate them to mutual understandings. Learners should be encouraged to compare cultures rather than prioritize one over another.

**6.3 Policy Reforms:**

Bilingual teaching is also very important to teach English in the areas that have strong influence of culture. By means of this method, the apprehensions of the learners are exposed and resolved.

**6.4 Technology and Globalization:**

Digital platforms and virtual exchanges expose learners to different English users worldwide. They challenge the idea that English pertains to a single culture. Online intercultural interactions flourish global awareness and reduce cultural anguish.

**7. Conclusion:**

Cultural barriers to learning English are complicated and multi faceted. They encircled identity crises, religious and ideological apprehensions, methodological differences, sociocultural policies and psychological control. These hindrances cannot be resolved through linguistic instruction alone. Instead, a holistic approach is required that respects learners' cultural identities while inculcating intercultural calibre.

English should not be taught as a replacement for native languages or cultures but as an additional communicative resource that empowers participation in a globalized world. By adopting culturally supportive methodology, inclusive curricula and flexible language policies can transform cultural diversity from a barrier into a powerful asset in English language learning.

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