



## **ADDRESSING CULTURAL TABOOS, POLITENESS NORMS, OR IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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**Cite This Article:** B. Vivilia Arivu Mani & Dr. M. Kannadhasan, "Addressing Cultural Taboos, Politeness Norms, or Idiomatic Expressions in English Language Teaching", International Journal of Current Research and Modern Education, Volume 9, Issue 2, July - December, Page Number 54-56, 2024.

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### **Abstract:**

Cultural taboos, politeness norms, and idiomatic expressions are some salient aspects that must be included in ELT. Through these elements, communicative competence and intercultural understanding can be brought out among learners. Language and culture are inseparable; language teaching beyond grammatical and lexical competence will be socio-culturally sound. Cultural taboos such as what topics are inappropriate or offending in certain societies may bring misunderstanding if not handled delicately. Similarly, politeness norms vary widely across cultures and influence how requests, refusals, and compliments are expressed. ELT teachers need to navigate these differences by creating awareness without imposing one cultural perspective over another. In many cases, idiomatic expressions carry a meaning that can only be said indirectly and cause problems with non-native speakers. To avoid misunderstandings, idiomatic expressions need to be provided in a context where they could be accompanied by their explanations and illustrative examples. Cultural awareness in ELT encourages students to consider that their culture plays a part in a language and puts them ready for cross-cultural communication without creating offense or misunderstanding. This paper explores the importance of addressing these aspects in ELT, discussing strategies for teachers to incorporate cultural taboos, politeness norms, and idiomatic expressions in a way that enriches students' language learning experience while promoting global communication skills. Through an inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment, ELT programs can better equip learners to thrive in increasingly multicultural and interconnected global contexts.

**Key Words:** Cultural Taboos, Politeness Norms, Idiomatic Expressions, English Language Teaching (ELT), Communicative Competence, Intercultural Communication, Socio Cultural Awareness, Cross-Cultural Interactions, Global Communication Skills, Language Learning, Cultural Sensitivity, Language Instruction, ELT Strategies.

### **Introduction:**

Cultural awareness is crucial in ELT because it improves teaching effectiveness and communication between learners and teachers from different backgrounds. Understanding cultural taboos, politeness norms, and idiomatic expressions helps teachers navigate sensitive topics, avoid misunderstandings, and foster a respectful and inclusive learning environment. This way, the use of culturally relevant materials and practices can be encouraged among students so that they confidently and appropriately express themselves in different social contexts, making sure that the language used is culturally appropriate. This cultural competence not only improves language proficiency but also prepares students for real-world communication, where cultural nuances often influence meaning. "Cultural awareness is the cornerstone of effective communication. In English Language Teaching, understanding the cultural backgrounds of students not only helps to bridge communication gaps but also fosters respect and empathy among diverse learners" (Byram 45).

### **Research Objective:**

The paper is aimed at identifying the problems English language learners encounter while understanding and using cultural taboos, politeness norms, and idiomatic expressions and analyzing how these factors impact their language acquisition and communication skills. Through its observation of how cultural awareness can impact the way learners navigate a variety of social contexts, the research will come up with possible recommendations that could better ELT in enhancing the teaching of those cultural elements. At its end, this research would find insights into the enhancement of learner's proficiency and confidence, thereby increasing one's effectiveness in communicating using English. "The goal is to evaluate the ability of first-generation NNELLs to acquire English literature in a blended learning environment. The study aims to assess the impact of unique teaching approaches on first-generation English language learners' passion for English literature" (Dr. Lt. S. Ravibalan 96).

### **Research Questions:**

Key research questions for the study include How do cultural taboos and politeness norms influence communication in English language contexts, and what challenges do learners face in navigating these cultural elements? How can idiomatic expressions be taught effectively to avoid misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or offense among learners from diverse cultural backgrounds? What strategies and best practices can teachers adopt to manage cultural sensitivities in the classroom while fostering an inclusive, respectful, and effective learning environment? The questions will seek to find answers that explore the impact of cultural awareness on language teaching and ways to address the challenges learners face in acquiring culturally nuanced language skills.

### **Intercultural Communication Theory:**

According to the theory of Intercultural Communication, people from different cultures interpret meaning, politeness, and taboos with distinct lenses that are culturally unique. "Intercultural communication theory examines the dynamics of communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, highlighting the importance of context, values, and communication styles in shaping understanding and interaction" (Gudykunst 45). Most cultures communicate not only with the words spoken but also through non-verbal cues, context, and the relationship between the participants. For instance, high-context cultures such as Japan or Arab countries are very dependent on non-verbal communication, shared understanding, and the context

in which communication occurs, whereas low-context cultures like those in the United States or Germany value directness and clarity in verbal exchanges. This difference may result in misunderstandings in intercultural communication in which directness in a particular culture is perceived to be rude in another culture and indirectness in another culture may be misunderstood as evasiveness.

Politeness norms and cultural taboos also draw much from cultural context; it is what guides people as they interact socially. According to Brown & Levinson, many cultures interpret politeness by a “face” concept; a face is that aspect of social identity which is valued by a person for ego or self-respect. In cultures where saving face is essential, such as East Asian societies, indirect language and honorifics are used in order to avoid confrontation or embarrassment. In more individualistic cultures, like those in the West, direct communication and equality in interactions are emphasized. Cultural taboos that exist in terms of matters of conversation vary widely in the cultures of the world-within some cultures, religion and politics may be sensitive subjects but openly discussed in others. Intercultural variation is therefore the backbone to effective communication, as much so in educational settings where learners encounter more than one cultural aspect at one time.

#### **Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics:**

Sociolinguistics and pragmatics examine how language is a reflection of and an influence on societal factors, focusing on social roles and relationships that affect communication. “Sociolinguistics explores the intricate relationship between language and society, examining how social factors such as class, gender, and ethnicity influence language use and variation” (Wardhaugh 158). Politeness strategies are a very important concept in sociolinguistics and are applied to manage social harmony and the face needs of speakers and listeners. They can be direct or indirect, depending on the cultural norms and social context. For example, in a hierarchical society, speakers may use honorifics, indirect speech acts, or more formal language to show respect for authority, whereas in egalitarian societies, more direct forms of communication are often used. The choice of politeness strategy can significantly alter the tone of a conversation and is often influenced by the relationship between the participants, their status, and the context of the interaction.

Pragmatics studies how speech acts like requests, offers, apologies, or commands are interpreted and realized in social contexts. Implicature theory, also from Grice, illustrates the way speakers imply more meaning than what is explicitly communicated through conversation. In communication, inferences are made using context, prior knowledge, and the cooperative principle: maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. “Implicature refers to what is suggested in an utterance, even though neither explicitly stated nor strictly implied. It relies on the cooperative principle and conversational maxims to infer meaning beyond what is said” (Grice 25). For instance, when he says, “Pass me salt,” it is not a request about the listener's ability; it is polite. However, for appropriate communication to take place, one should be able to decipher these kinds of subtle cues as failure to recognize implicatures or polite strategies may cause misunderstandings. In language teaching, the consciousness of sociolinguistic and pragmatic norms helps learners not only to navigate real-life conversation but also to understand what meaning is often created out of words and social situations.

#### **Cultural Sensitivity in Language Learning:**

Cultural sensitivity in language learning is important for effective communication in a globalized world, and several theories stress the integration of cultural competence into the process of language acquisition. One of the prominent frameworks is Byram's “Intercultural Communicative Competence” (ICC), which stresses the importance of integrating cultural awareness with linguistic proficiency. “Language learners should acquire not only the linguistic structures of a language but also the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to interact appropriately and respectfully in diverse cultural contexts” (Byram 88). Byram suggests that language learners should acquire not only the linguistic structures of a language but also knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to interact appropriately and respectfully in diverse cultural contexts. This includes understanding cultural practices, values, and the ways this influences communication. According to this theory, learners should be taught to critically reflect on their cultural assumptions and understand others' perspectives, which helps to bridge the gap between different worldviews and prevents misunderstandings.

Another important theory is the “Cultural Intelligence” (CQ) model, which deals with a person's ability to function effectively across different cultural settings. Four components of the CQ framework have been identified: cognitive, motivational, metacognitive, and behavioral, all of which contribute to improving cultural sensitivity. This approach encourages the teacher to make the students aware of the differences between their culture and that of the target language, offering opportunities to get in touch with various cultural contexts. These opportunities include authentic materials, role-playing, and cross-cultural exchange. When developing cultural intelligence, the learners will be able to tackle subtleties in the language, including politeness norms, idiomatic expressions, and culturally specific references, which would otherwise stand as barriers in communication. These theories emphasize the importance of cultural competence in language teaching to prepare learners for effective communication in a multicultural world.

#### **Methodology:**

The study will use a mixed-methods research design to capture both qualitative and quantitative insights into the impact of cultural awareness on English language teaching and learning. The data collection will be conducted through a combination of surveys, semi-structured interviews with the teachers and learners of English, and classroom observations in an attempt to investigate real-time language use and cultural interactions. Textbooks and course materials will be analyzed to determine how cultural elements, such as politeness norms and idiomatic expressions, are incorporated into language teaching. The sample population will include teachers with diverse teaching experience and learners from various cultural backgrounds, ranging from beginner to advanced language proficiency levels. Data analysis will involve thematic analysis for qualitative data to elicit recurring patterns and themes on cultural sensitivity. Statistical methods, such as descriptive statistics and correlation analysis, will be used for quantitative data to elicit trends and relationships that may exist between cultural awareness and language learning outcomes.

Thematic analysis of qualitative data revealed three key themes: Increased engagement, which is linked to mixed learning modalities, was another often-discussed topic. Observers and educators found that combining

traditional educational approaches with the use of ICT technologies helped the process of knowledge acquisition. Both students and teachers referred to adaptability as flexibility. The survey also found that the use of blended and innovative techniques resulted in a high level of responsiveness to student needs and priorities. The effectiveness of such programs depended on the availability of resources and appropriate training. The highly skilled educators possessed the tools required to properly execute the new strategies (Dr. Lt. S. Ravibalan 98).

### **Hurdles and Interventions:**

“It is not an easy task to handle such sensitive topics in the classroom, as individuals from different cultural backgrounds often have distinct ways of approaching these issues. Educators must navigate these differences with care and sensitivity to foster understanding and respect” (Holliday, Hyde, and Kullman 52). Dealing with such delicate subjects in the classroom is not simple. This is because different people may approach the problem in very different ways depending on their cultural backgrounds. For example, there are some cultures where discussing politics or religion openly is considered inappropriate and should not be done. On the other hand, in some cultures, this is a normal part of conversation. Such differences can create discomfort or misunderstandings if not treated sensitively. Similarly, the politeness variation across languages can confuse things in the learning of the language. For instance, language learners from indirect speech-oriented cultures may view the culture of directness as blunt or rude, whereas other language learners from direct-speaking cultures perceive indirect speech as evasive and so on. Moreover, idioms are also a challenge to be assimilated because they often carry some underlying cultural meaning that may not translate or could be mistranslated. This calls for methods such as role-play and cultural exchange, where the learner practices language use in contexts and experiences the real situations of interaction. Other materials reflecting a range of cultural experiences and using examples that respect cultural differences may also provide learners with a greater understanding of and ability to navigate those complexities without stereotyping.

### **Interpretation of Findings:**

The research paper provides evidence that shows great challenges in learners' lives when traversing cultural taboos, politeness norms, and idiomatic expressions in English. It tells how these factors can effectively prevent smooth communication if not understood appropriately. For instance, cultural misunderstandings often originate from learners encountering unfamiliar politeness strategies or idiomatic expressions, leading to confusion or discomfort. These findings emphasize the necessity of cultural competence in language teaching and point out that teachers should act proactively to address these challenges. Practical advice for educators is to create a classroom environment that is open to and inclusive of various cultural perspectives, incorporate role-play or real-life scenarios to practice cultural nuances and use materials that reflect a range of cultural contexts. Another should include redesigning curriculum design into culturally informed ones to which learners not only acquire linguistic skill but cultural use of language too. In some places, examples using different cultural contexts could be included while exploring the various ways of what constitutes norms. “Explicit teaching of idiomatic expressions and politeness strategies can equip language learners to navigate cultural contexts effectively, preparing them for interactions and situations they are likely to encounter” ((Brown 156). Explicit idiomatic expressions, as well as explicit teaching of politeness strategy, may prepare them for interaction and interaction situations they expect to face.

### **Sum Up:**

The research paper emphasizes the need for cultural sensitivity in English Language Teaching, especially concerning cultural taboos, politeness norms, and idiomatic expressions. The primary findings of the study reflect that learners experience difficulties in understanding cultural differences that may eventually affect their communication skills and overall language ability. Divergent politeness strategies and misunderstandings concerning idiomatic expressions were highlighted as significant challenges. The study, therefore, recommends that educators should embrace teaching methods in which cultural competency is applied. Examples of such a method would include role-playing, cultural exchange programs, and diverse materials that come from varied cultural perspectives. This addresses the challenges posed to enhance learners' competency in using the English language, hence proficiently in their different social and cultural lives.

Therefore, the study has certain limitations: it has a small sample size and is focused on a specific set of cultural elements. Moreover, the study relied mainly on self-reported data from surveys and interviews, which may have introduced biases. Future research could be conducted on a larger, more diverse scale to consider the impact of globalization and the increasing multiculturalism of classrooms. Further studies would also help reveal the long-term effects of incorporating cultural awareness into curricula and how these effects impact learners' everyday communication and intercultural competence.

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