



EFL Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Cultural Awareness in ICT-Based Learning in Indonesian Elementary School Context

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Abstract: The present study aims to explore Indonesian EFL teachers' perception regarding the ICT (Information and Communications Technology) usage for developing cultural awareness of students as well as improving their English literacy and communication. Even though English subject is not considered as compulsory to be taught in elementary school, there is evidence that English is still being taught either as the local content subject or as the language-medium of instruction. This study employs survey research by administering a questionnaire for elementary school English teachers in Indonesia who have been ever implementing online learning. The result shows that most teachers respond positively on the implementation of ICT in English instructional practice in elementary school. Regarding the cultural content, the participants agree that ICT can be helpful for them to provide interactive digital teaching material, including cultural material for the students. The existence of ICT is helpful for both students and teachers to provide real and authentic teaching materials. Therefore, the use of ICT needs to be promoted to provide cultural awareness in ELT practice to equip young learners to do intercultural communication in the global world

Keyword: cultural awareness, ICT-based learning, EFL, elementary school

INTRODUCTION

The decision for positioning English, which is not as a primary subject in elementary school, has been questioned by some levels of society in Indonesia (Prastyo, 2017). On the other side, the fact shows that language is important to be taught from the elementary school level, because some beneficial aspects can be achieved properly by the elementary school student when they learn a foreign language as a young learner (Deneme et al., 2011). One of the benefits that can be perceived from learning a language is the cultural awareness. In this case, while learning a language, learners can also learn about the cultural aspects that are integrated in the language. Language and the cultural aspects are interrelated and are not easy to be separated

(Farooq et al., 2018). In addition, building cultural awareness from early childhood is good to place a strong basic moral and character for the students (Deneme et al., 2011). It is also beneficial to prepare young students for facing the global world.

The 2013 curriculum implementation and the problems with the Indonesian EFL instructional practices have been studied by Sarihuudin (Sarihuudin, 2013). This study explores some problems and issues that are being experienced by EFL students and teachers for implementing the curriculum in English class. Some of the problems that could be found in curriculum 2013, according to him, is the degradation of duration for English subject in junior and senior high school level, and the absence of English as a compulsory subject in elementary school level (Sarihuudin, 2013). In the elementary level, English is not included as the primary subject but it is included as a local content subject related to culture, skills, arts, and regional languages which can be integrated into the Cultural Arts and Crafts subjects (Permendikbud No. 67 Tahun 2013). Even though English subject is not considered as compulsory to be taught in elementary school, there is evidence that English is still being taught either as the local content subject or as the language-medium of instruction in many elementary schools in Indonesia.

Regarding teaching a foreign language, cultural context can not be separated into English language learning (Gayatri et al., 2023). The term "culture" refers to the customs, norms, and behaviours that are shared by a society (Ozourcun, 2014). Further, culture can be defined as a practice or system that instills a population's specific values, beliefs, daily routines, and customary behaviors (Barker, 2002). The traditions, values, beliefs, routines, or system that are inculcated in a foreign language user or community need to be constructed and practiced by the foreign language learners. Besides, concerning the cultural awareness related to a EFL context can lead students to learn how the target language could be used globally with the authentic materials (Gayatri et al., 2023). The cultural awareness can also be useful to avoid misunderstandings when the students have an intercultural communication (Rakhmawati et al., 2020). Therefore, it needs to be stressed that culture as a complex system has a strong connection with the field of education and language teaching (Liddicoat et al., 2003).

Given the connection between culture and language, language teaching must include the cultural content and component. In other words, culture should be considered as a key component in language teaching (Farooq et al., 2018). Focusing on the context of English language teaching (ELT), cultural information needs to be incorporated into language instruction so that students can use their English language proficiency and gain a thorough understanding of the cultures that are incorporated in that language (Chinh,

2013). It seeks to help students become proficient in the English language and get a thorough understanding of the cultures that are interwoven into that language. Thus, not only studying the grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation as well as acquiring the writing, listening, reading, and speaking skills, the students can study about culture too. It is in keeping with primary objective of EFL instruction, that is to give students the competence to communicate in English effectively in the suitable situations using oral and written means (Chinh, 2013). Students must comprehend the cultural and social nuances of a language while they use it, so they can use the language in appropriate way in the right situations.

On the other hand, nowadays, it is known that the growth of technology occurs very fast. Most of the societies commonly use technology to support their needs in everyday life. In the COVID-19 pandemic period, ICT becomes a tool that helps the human beings to do the interaction and communication. Regarding to education, ICT can also be important to support the sustainability in education. It works as a supported tool to help and to make sure that the instructional process might be run well. The ICT use in blended learning can become one example on the implementation of technology in the education world. E-learning or online learning can be defined as the forms of electronic or ICT assisted in instructional activities which seek to impact knowledge building concerning the learners' individual practise, experience, and knowledge (Craig et al., 2012).

In today's post-pandemic period, education elements are still adapting to the transition period from online learning to hybrid learning. It is still believed that the ICT usage may be helpful to access interactive digital instructional materials. The learning activities that exploit the benefit of ICT to assist the students in learning and obtaining the knowledge could be defined as ICT-based learning (Al-Ansi et al., 2021). By experiencing the ICT-based learning, the students can discover the authentic learning materials (Čolakovac & Borucinsky, 2020; González Otero, 2016). Besides, the authenticity of the materials that can be explored more by using ICT-based learning is cultural content (Larsen et al., 2014). The students can also have an opportunity to communicate with people from abroad both native and non-native speakers as well as exchange the cultural contents with them using the help of ICT (Bella et al., 2020). Therefore, ICT-based learning can be useful for students to understand the cultural contents from the authentic learning materials.

Further, the use of ICT for developing cultural awareness of students as well as improving their English literacy and communication is interesting to be discussed (Baker, 2012; Benmoussat, 2016). Cultural awareness is the process of knowing and realizing the cultural contents that are experienced

during the process to explore the uniqueness, similarity, and difference of the elements related to culture (Yurtsever & Ozel, 2021). ICT-based learning may provide many new pedagogical opportunities, as well as the cultural dimension of ELT (Baker, 2012). Through ICT, the access to search so many sources can be widely open. Hence, the use of ICT will empower both students and teacher's knowledge in studying English literacy and its' cultural awareness. Undoubtedly, ICT is considered to be helpful as media for supporting interactive digital instructional material, including cultural material, which could be interesting for the students. Therefore, the perceptions of English teachers towards cultural awareness in ICT-based learning in Indonesian elementary school context are taken into consideration in the present study.

In reverse, even though the cultural awareness in digital literacy era has been proven to be important to give more values for foreign language students' communicative skills, the research regarding the cultural elements in Indonesian EFL context, specifically in digital interaction or ICT-based learning context, is still limited (Rakhmawati et al., 2020). There is dearth on the study regarding negotiating cultural awareness in EFL context and ICT tools in Indonesia (Bella et al., 2020). Moreover, the topic on cultural awareness viewed from EFL teachers' perspective is still under-researched (Azizpour, 2021), so this study is focused on the EFL teachers' perception regarding cultural awareness in ICT-based learning. In addition, the study that focuses on the EFL learning process in elementary school in Indonesia is still rarely found. Considering the research gap, it is important to fill the gap by exploring the perception of English teachers regarding cultural awareness in ICT-Based learning in Indonesian elementary school context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of the present survey study is for exploring Indonesian English teachers' perception on the use of ICT for developing cultural awareness of students as well as improving their English literacy and communication. The research participants were the twenty-two Indonesian EFL teachers of the elementary school. They are teaching in several provinces in Indonesia, including Lampung, D.K.I. Jakarta, Bengkulu, Jawa Tengah, Jawa Timur, Kalimantan Selatan, and D.I. Yogyakarta. Most of the participants teach English at the fourth until the sixth grade of elementary school. The participants consisted of 68.2% of females and 31.8% of males. Most of the participants are holding bachelor's degree (63.6%), diploma's degree (18.2%), and master's degree (18.2%).

For collecting the data, a questionnaire consisting three aspects of perception was employed. They are the necessity and importance of cultural

awareness in EFL classroom using ICT-based learning, the cultural awareness in ICT-based learning activities, and the cultural teaching result. This questionnaire was redesigned by considering the objective and research questions of the present study by adapting to Farooq et al. (2018), and Loi (2013).

The five-point Likert scale was applied for collecting the information regarding the perception of research participants related to the importance of cultural awareness in ICT-based English learning, and cultural awareness in ICT-based English class activities. The score was categorized as follows: 1 means Strongly Disagree; 2 means Disagree; 3 means Neutral; 4 means Agree; 5 means Strongly Agree. Thus, for those categories, the maximum score might be represented by 5 and the minimum score is represented by 1. Whereas, the information related to teachers' perception regarding the ICT-based applications, as well as the cultural teaching result was collected using the percentage (%) format.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Importance of Cultural Awareness in ICT-Based English Learning

The ICT used in foreign language teaching practice has been proven to be helpful to provide better learning activities (Yuldashevna & Tuhtayevich, 2020). However, some studies show that some teachers avoided using technology in their classes (Dube et al., 2018; Ghavifekr et al., 2016). As the COVID-19 pandemic impact, the online learning implementation becomes compulsory. Thus, at that time, due to the implementation of study-from-home, teachers must implement ICT in their instructional activities. It is proven by the finding in this present study that all participants (100%) use ICT for their instructional activities at the pandemic time. It shows that, if the teachers want, they can have competency and ability to apply ICT-based learning at their English class.

This finding presents that most teachers respond positively for the ICT usage in English teaching practices at elementary school. When teaching, the teachers use some ICT platforms, i.e. WhatsApp (90.5%), Google Classroom (76.2%), Zoom (57.1%), Google Meet (4.8%), and Google Form (4.8%). It is also found that all participants utilize their private facilities to support their ICT-based learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic period. It proves that elementary school's English teachers still have a high level of willingness to support and assist the instructional activities in all situations.

Related to cultural content, during period of pandemic, English teachers support the ICT usage in promoting the integration between foreign language and culture into online English language teaching process. The teachers convince that it is very necessary to integrate culture into ICT English language

classes (4.04). The teachers think that integrating cultural aspects into online EFL classes is so needed for their students (3.95). The teachers also support that by realizing the integration, the teachers can have more teaching motivation (3.90). It means that the integration among cultures and online English language classes can be beneficial to attract the interest of students to learn English (3.77). From the responses, the elementary school teachers show the positive attitude regarding the necessity of integrating culture into EFL instructional activities. The teachers also understand that experiencing the cultural contents while studying the language can be very interesting, so it can motivate their students to acquire English language.

The teachers also feel that by combining language and culture, the students' skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening, may advance since culture is included in their EFL class (3.81). Teachers think that reading the English text about various cultures online can make students have more motivation (3.95). Moreover, reading the online English text about various cultures can make students more relax (3.86). In other words, providing the elementary students with simple reading text consisting of various cultural content can be more motivating and relaxing. The teachers also agree that teaching writing about cultural content in English using ICT is very beneficial (3.63). It is interesting to teach writing skills using the help of ICT in online classes (3.90). Not only for reading and writing skills but placing cultural content in ELT practice using ICT is also beneficial for listening and speaking skills. The teachers strongly agree that their students love listening to some video when the speakers in the video talk about culture (4.04). As we know that listening to some materials related to culture from video can be helpful for the students (4.18). Therefore, it can give valuable input for students in enriching their language skills. Therefore, the students like speaking and engaging in conversation with classmates regarding the topics related to cultural materials. The students' engagement when they are speaking about something related to culture in e-learning is better than in the face-to-face classroom (3.36). It has been demonstrated that including cultural elements in online EFL instruction is advantageous since it may stimulate students' interest in sharpening their English skills.

The reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills of primary school pupils might unquestionably be improved by including culture in an online EFL classrooms. By doing this, the students acquire not just language skills but also cultural knowledge while practising their English. This finding is in line with Ho (Ho, 2009, and Nurlia & Fitri (2017) who state that interdependent relations among learning a language and learning its culture.

According to participants, teaching English to the students by incorporating ICT and English language may assist students develop positive

attitudes and cultural diversity perspectives. Teachers agree that knowing various cultures, both local and target culture, can be helpful the elementary school students to be more tolerant (4.18). They are also convinced that knowing more knowledge about target culture can be helpful for their students in creating critical thinking about the world's culture (4.00). Additionally, they consider cultural identity as part of the integration of culture and ICT-based EFL classes. The teachers agree that their students' understanding of their own cultural identity can be improved as a benefit of learning EFL online (4.09). Students' ability to negotiate meaning across languages and cultures could be developed through studying cultures and languages together. Therefore, it might get students prepared for the multicultural and heterogeneous societies. Ho also explains that integrating culture in EFL classes helps students become more linguistically and culturally competent (Ho, 2009). Thus, it might successfully and intellectually immerse elementary school learners cognitively and behaviourally during the learning processes.

Regarding the topic of the value of culture in digital EFL materials, teachers suggest for placing greater emphasis on material relevant to culture when teaching English through ICT. They claim that practise of the EFL instruction must put a lot more emphasis on the cultural component. (3.95). ICT is very helpful for increasing elementary school students' English skills (3.95). These results demonstrate how highly educated teachers are regarding the significance of incorporating culture into online English learning. On other words, ICT-based English language learning material related to cultural content is very important and needed. It is possible to conclude from the findings above that the teachers are aware of the significance of culture in the teaching and learning of English.

Cultural Awareness in ICT-Based English Classroom Activities

The responses to a survey of respondents' perceptions of cultural materials in ICT-based English classroom activities are presented in this section. Teachers discuss their efforts to incorporate cultural material into the online EFL classroom. It is about how cultural content is explored by the teachers when they teach English in online learning. In general, teachers recognize that their lesson plans and activities in the online classroom may contain cultural content. The investigation offers details about the inclusion of cultural materials in the online English learning contents, inter-cultural differences, as well as the target culture existence.

The English teachers mention that they teach their students some learning materials consisting of various cultures in their online learning activities (3.86). The cultural content about some cultures, including

information of culture in English speaking countries, is integrated through ICT-based English classroom (4.09). It indicates that in their internet-based English instruction, learners are investigating the circumstances or cultural facets of English-speaking nations as a target culture. It indicates that the teachers have incorporated information about the target culture into the EFL class's internet-based activities. The results provided demonstrate the teachers' awareness of culture, particularly the target culture of English-speaking nations. The fact that teachers are aware of the target culture may benefit students' ability to gain a more comprehensive understanding of other cultures on a global scale. Once the students have a grasp of the target culture, they can consult and contrast their understanding of the target culture with their own cultural experiences. It might foster a favourable viewpoint of other civilizations. It might be beneficial for students to think globally, especially if they use English as a common international language.

The inclusion of target culture in EFL class activities allowed the students to compare their understanding of target culture with their understanding of their own local culture, allowing them to recognise the contrasts across cultures. In their online classes, teachers encourage students to discuss in-depth a range of cultural differences (3.81). The teachers introduce the students with the concept of cultural differences using the help of ICT (3.81). Similarly, in ICT instructional practices, teachers continue to take the students' regional culture into account. (4.04). After being familiar with both the local and target cultures, the students' teachers concentrate on a few key components and features that are unique to the target and local cultures, in this example, Indonesian and English-speaking cultures (3.90). Learners engage in conversation while contrasting various facets and components of Indonesian culture with that of English-speaking nations. Teachers explain the similarities between students' own culture and the target culture in English in addition to highlighting the differences between the two cultures (3.77). It implies that learners will get the chance and experience to investigate some cultural parallels between Indonesian culture and those of English-speaking nations. Focusing on the cross-cultural distinctions can help pupils develop a global perspective and the understanding that no culture is superior to another (Lestari, 2010). As a result, learners could agree that cultural diversity is vibrant and lovely life aspects.

Learners are made aware of cultural-shocks in addition to learning about the parallels and contrasts between the local, target, and some other cultures. The teachers strongly agree that they also share the cultural shocks using video and some other ICT tools (4.00). The students can know some experiences related to some various cultures from *youtube* videos (4.18). It means that, in implementing online learning, the teachers utilize some

applications to support their students in knowing the culture, so that the cultural shock material can be anticipated by the students using the help of ICT. When learners have to deal with actual global communication, these ICT classroom exercises could help them prepare for dealing with culture-shock.

Moreover, result shows that ICT can be helpful for the teachers to provide interactive digital cultural teaching material for the students. The teachers agree that the material of cultural content has been included intentionally in their online English lessons (3.86). The existence of ICT is helpful to provide real and authentic teaching material. According to the teachers, they usually introduce the real-life target and some various cultural objects to the students using some online learning materials, e.g. text, video, youtube video, film, etc., in the online classroom (3.95).

The findings above confirm the presence of cultural content material for elementary school students during the instructional practice. In line with Lestari, who asserts that success in any language teaching and learning situation depends on giving consideration to both human elements (teacher and student) and non-human elements (textbook, syllabus, curriculum, and facility), teacher must select the suitable resources that focus on cultural materials (Lestari, 2010). Students will be prepared to use the appropriate language patterns in a variety of situations, times, and places thanks to nonhuman components with cultural material (Farooq et al., 2018). To ensure that the learners have knowledge of both grammatical and sociolinguistics components, it is crucial to take into account the suitable instructional material that incorporates culture (Lestari, 2010). In other words, for the classroom activities to result in a good online English teaching and learning process, the teachers need pay attention to the teaching materials that include cultural components.

During the implementation of online learning, the elementary school teachers utilize and take some benefits from the use of some online applications using ICT. By using ICT, the English teacher can deliver some interesting and interactive materials to improve students' English language skills and cultural awareness. As stated before that cultural content can be integrated into each of English language skills. According to participants' responses, in teaching speaking and listening, the teachers use several applications and platforms that are *Orai, Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Youtube, video, mp3*, and audio player. Moreover, for teaching reading and writing, the teachers use online articles/text, video with subtitles, English e-book, Instagram, online comic, *Google Classroom*, and other internet sources. These applications can be used in some parts of teaching depending on the online teaching design made by the teacher. For an instance, online video related to Indonesian cultural content can be used as a brainstorming

activity, before the students are instructed to write some simple sentences related to the Indonesian culture. These teaching tools can be very interesting, challenging, and enjoyable. Most of the elementary school students like learning in a situation which is not monotonous. Therefore, it is very suitable to be implemented in elementary school students, since they need a unique, fun, and enjoyable learning atmosphere (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011). The use of ICT is very helpful in engaging instructional practices with real and authentic teaching material.

ICT-Based Cultural Teaching Result

In implementing online learning, the teachers believe that they have achieved some cultural goals in English teaching practice by using ICT. Based on the result of the survey, most of the teachers believe that they have helped their students to have an understanding of some cultures (81.8%). The teachers also have bridged the cultural gap between Indonesian culture and foreign culture (81.8%). Moreover, the teachers have been successfully implementing the intercultural teaching goals and objectives in online learning (63.6%). Besides, the teachers agree that they have been successful in helping their students to enhance the common identity, “the citizen of the world” (86.4%).

The majority of students are familiar with their own culture, target culture, and some other cultures as a result of the inclusion of culture in classroom activities. Since each student is developing in their own culture, they are all highly familiar with their own local Indonesian culture. However, considering the English as an international language (EIL) position, the students are expected to be taught some cultures from some various others' cultures. The development of a multicultural learning environment benefits from this familiarity. When students communicate globally utilising English as a language of commerce, it will be a provision for them. By having a good understanding of various cultures, the students' understanding of intercultural awareness can be enhanced. To sum up, ICT implementation needs to be promoted to provide cultural awareness in English teaching practice to equip young learners to do intercultural communication in the global world.

CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this study is on identifying the elementary school teachers' perceptions on improving the cultural awareness of students while using ICT in English instructional practice. It is found that cultural sensitivity is crucial for online English language instruction, elementary school teachers of English have realised. One advantage lies in using cultural material in online English

lessons may increase students' enthusiasm and motivation for the subject. The instructors concur that including more cultural elements into their lesson plans could be helpful for their students' English language proficiency. Furthermore, having a favourable attitude towards cultural diversity can be developed through cultural understanding. It might make elementary school students becoming more tolerant. It might encourage students to think critically about the local and target cultures. Therefore, students' cultural identity can be strengthened. By knowing the advantages and necessity of the cultural material in EFL practices, now teachers have embraced the notion of putting the stronger emphasis on cultural contents in ICT-based EFL classrooms.

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