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Local Culture Integration in English Language Teaching Materials

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ABSTRACT

The integration of culture in English Language Teaching (ELT) has become increasingly important as language is recognized as a social and cultural practice. In many EFL contexts, ELT materials are predominantly oriented toward Western cultures, which may create a cultural gap between learning content and learners' lived experiences. This study aims to examine the integration of local culture in ELT materials and explore its pedagogical significance for EFL classrooms. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design, this study analyzed selected English teaching materials through document analysis, focusing on textual, visual, and task-based representations of local culture. The data were examined to identify forms of cultural representation, pedagogical functions, and the extent to which local culture supports meaningful language learning. The findings reveal that local culture is integrated through familiar themes such as traditions, daily social practices, and local values, which enhance learners' comprehension, engagement, and confidence in using English. However, the integration remains limited and often superficial compared to the dominance of Western cultural content. The study concludes that local culture plays a crucial role in creating culturally responsive and contextually grounded ELT materials. A more systematic and balanced incorporation of local culture is therefore recommended to support effective language learning and intercultural competence in EFL contexts.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Local Culture, EFL, Teaching Materials, Intercultural Competence

INTRODUCTION

English Language Teaching (ELT) has increasingly shifted from a purely linguistic orientation toward a more holistic approach that recognizes language as a cultural and social practice. In this perspective, language learning is no longer limited to mastering grammatical structures or vocabulary, but also involves understanding cultural meanings, values, and identities embedded in language use. Consequently, the integration of culture into ELT materials has become a significant concern in contemporary language education, particularly in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL).

In many EFL classrooms, teaching materials are predominantly developed based on Western cultural contexts, often reflecting lifestyles, social norms, and communicative practices that are distant from learners' lived experiences. While such materials may provide exposure to global cultures, they may also create a cultural gap that hinders learners' comprehension, engagement, and meaningful language use. Learners may struggle to relate to unfamiliar cultural references, which can reduce motivation and limit opportunities for authentic communication. This condition highlights the need to contextualize ELT materials by incorporating elements of local culture that are familiar, relevant, and meaningful to learners.

Integrating local culture into ELT materials offers several pedagogical advantages. First, it enhances learners' comprehension by connecting new language input to existing cultural knowledge. Second, it supports learner identity and cultural pride, allowing students to express their local values and experiences through English. Third, it promotes intercultural competence by positioning local culture alongside global cultures, enabling learners to negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries rather than merely imitating native-speaker norms. In this way, English functions as a medium for expressing local realities in global communication.

Moreover, the integration of local culture aligns with communicative and contextual approaches to language teaching, which emphasize authenticity, relevance, and meaningful interaction. Teaching materials that include local stories, traditions, social practices, and cultural symbols can foster more active participation and deeper engagement in classroom activities. Such materials also support curriculum goals that emphasize character education, cultural awareness, and the preservation of local wisdom within formal education.

Despite its potential benefits, the systematic integration of local culture into ELT materials remains limited in many educational settings. Teachers

often rely on commercially produced textbooks that offer little space for local cultural representation, and they may face challenges related to material design, cultural selection, and pedagogical implementation. Therefore, examining how local culture can be effectively integrated into ELT materials is essential to ensure that English learning is both linguistically effective and culturally responsive.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on the integration of local culture in English language teaching materials, exploring its pedagogical significance and implications for EFL classrooms. The study aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on culturally responsive ELT by highlighting the role of local culture in creating meaningful, inclusive, and contextually grounded English learning experiences.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the integration of local culture in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials and its pedagogical implications in EFL classrooms. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow an in-depth exploration of cultural representations and meanings embedded in teaching materials rather than measuring them quantitatively.

The data sources consisted of English teaching materials used in EFL contexts, including textbooks, supplementary reading materials, and instructional texts that are officially used in secondary-level classrooms. The materials were selected purposively based on their relevance to the curriculum and their potential inclusion of cultural content. Particular attention was given to texts, images, tasks, and activities that reflect cultural values, social practices, traditions, or local wisdom.

Data were collected through document analysis, focusing on identifying elements of local culture integrated into the materials. The analysis examined how local culture was represented, the types of cultural themes included, and the ways these cultural elements supported language learning objectives. To strengthen the analysis, the materials were reviewed systematically using culturally responsive ELT principles, such as relevance to learners' context, cultural familiarity, and opportunities for intercultural communication.

The data analysis procedure involved three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, cultural content related to local

traditions, social norms, values, and identities was identified and categorized. Second, the data were organized and interpreted to reveal patterns of cultural integration and pedagogical functions. Finally, conclusions were drawn regarding the pedagogical significance of integrating local culture in ELT materials and its implications for EFL teaching and learning.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied careful material selection, consistent analytical criteria, and theoretical triangulation by drawing on relevant literature in ELT, cultural studies, and intercultural communication. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a contextualized understanding of how local culture can contribute to meaningful and culturally responsive English language teaching.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of this study indicate that local culture is integrated into ELT materials in several meaningful ways, although the depth and consistency of integration vary across the materials analyzed. The results are organized into four main themes: forms of local cultural representation, pedagogical functions of local culture, learner relevance and engagement, and limitations in cultural integration.

First, local culture is represented through various textual and visual elements in ELT materials. These include local folktales, traditional ceremonies, daily social practices, local food, traditional clothing, and familiar places. Cultural references are commonly embedded in reading texts, dialogue samples, descriptive passages, and accompanying images. Such representations allow learners to encounter English language input within culturally familiar contexts, making the materials more accessible and meaningful.

Second, the findings reveal that local culture serves important pedagogical functions in language learning. Cultural content is used to support vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and speaking activities. Tasks that involve describing local traditions, narrating cultural events, or discussing community practices encourage learners to use English to express their own cultural knowledge. This use of local culture facilitates comprehension and promotes meaningful communication by connecting new language forms to learners' existing schemata.

Third, the integration of local culture enhances learner relevance and engagement. Materials that reflect learners' cultural backgrounds are more relatable and motivating, as students are able to recognize their own identities and experiences in the learning content. The findings suggest that culturally familiar materials support learner confidence and participation, particularly in speaking and discussion activities, as learners feel more comfortable expressing ideas grounded in their own cultural context.

Finally, despite its benefits, the study finds that the integration of local culture remains limited and uneven. Local cultural elements are often presented superficially and are less prominent compared to Western or global cultural content. In many cases, local culture functions only as background information rather than as a central component of communicative tasks. This indicates a reliance on commercially produced textbooks that prioritize global cultures and provides limited space for contextualized local representation.

Overall, the findings suggest that while local culture is present in ELT materials, it has not yet been fully exploited as a pedagogical resource. A more systematic and balanced integration of local culture is needed to ensure that ELT materials are culturally responsive and supportive of meaningful language learning in EFL classrooms.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of local culture in ELT materials plays a significant role in enhancing the relevance and meaningfulness of English learning in EFL classrooms. The presence of local cultural elements supports the view that language learning is inseparable from cultural and social contexts, as emphasized in contemporary ELT theories. By embedding familiar cultural references in teaching materials, learners are better able to connect linguistic forms with real-life experiences, which facilitates comprehension and language use.

The representation of local culture through texts, images, and classroom tasks aligns with communicative and contextual approaches to language teaching. When learners engage with content that reflects their own traditions, social practices, and daily lives, English is no longer perceived as a distant or foreign language but as a tool for expressing local realities. This finding supports the notion that English in EFL contexts functions as an international language rather than a medium restricted to native-speaker cultures.

Furthermore, the pedagogical functions of local culture identified in the findings highlight its role in supporting language skills development, particularly in reading and speaking activities. Tasks that invite learners to describe or discuss local cultural practices encourage authentic communication, as learners draw on their existing cultural knowledge. This supports schema theory, which suggests that learning becomes more effective when new information is linked to prior knowledge. As a result, the integration of local culture contributes not only to linguistic development but also to learner confidence and classroom participation.

In terms of learner engagement, the findings indicate that culturally familiar materials foster a stronger sense of learner identity and motivation. When students see their cultural backgrounds represented in ELT materials, they are more likely to feel valued and included in the learning process. This resonates with the principles of culturally responsive teaching, which emphasize the importance of acknowledging learners' identities and cultural resources as assets in education. Moreover, positioning local culture alongside global cultures promotes intercultural competence by encouraging learners to compare, reflect, and negotiate meaning across cultural contexts.

However, the study also reveals limitations in the current integration of local culture. Local cultural content is often presented superficially and occupies a marginal role compared to Western cultural representations. This finding suggests that many ELT materials still reflect a dominant cultural orientation that prioritizes global or native-speaker norms. Such imbalance may limit opportunities for learners to fully utilize English as a medium for expressing their own cultural perspectives. Therefore, a more systematic and intentional inclusion of local culture is necessary, not only as contextual decoration but as a core component of communicative tasks and learning objectives.

Overall, the discussion highlights that while the integration of local culture in ELT materials offers clear pedagogical benefits, its implementation requires careful design and critical awareness. Teachers and material developers need to move beyond tokenistic inclusion and adopt a balanced approach that values local culture as an integral part of English language learning. By doing so, ELT materials can better support linguistically effective, culturally responsive, and contextually grounded EFL instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of local culture in English

Language Teaching (ELT) materials plays an important role in creating meaningful and contextually relevant learning experiences in EFL classrooms. The findings indicate that local cultural elements contribute to learners' comprehension, engagement, and confidence by connecting English language use with familiar cultural contexts and lived experiences.

The study also reveals that local culture functions as a valuable pedagogical resource that supports language skill development, particularly in reading and speaking activities. By enabling learners to express their own cultural knowledge through English, ELT materials promote authentic communication and support the development of learner identity and cultural awareness. Moreover, positioning local culture alongside global cultural content encourages intercultural competence and reinforces the role of English as a medium for international communication rather than as a representation of native-speaker norms alone.

However, the study finds that the integration of local culture in ELT materials remains limited and uneven. Local cultural content is often presented superficially and receives less emphasis compared to Western cultural representations. This suggests the need for more systematic and intentional incorporation of local culture in material design and classroom practice.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of culturally responsive ELT materials that value local culture as an integral component of English language learning. Greater attention to local cultural integration can enhance the effectiveness of ELT in EFL contexts by ensuring that language learning is not only linguistically focused but also culturally meaningful and inclusive.

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