

## THE ROLE OF CULTURAL AWARENESS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

This article examines the importance of cultural awareness in teaching English as a foreign language. Language acquisition is not limited to the development of grammatical and lexical skills, but also includes understanding the culture of the people who use that language. The formation of cultural awareness increases students' communicative competence, allows them to effectively conduct intercultural communication and overcome language barriers.

The article considers methods for introducing cultural components into the process of teaching a foreign language and analyzes their impact on students' language skills. It also suggests effective approaches aimed at developing cultural awareness in English lessons. This study can be a useful source of information for language teachers and researchers.

**Key words:** cultural awareness, English as a foreign language, intercultural communication, communicative competence, methods of teaching a foreign language, language barriers, cultural component.

### Introduction

Nowadays, English is the main tool for international communication, science and technology, as well as business and cultural exchange. Therefore, teaching English as a foreign language is not limited to grammatical and lexical knowledge alone. Learning a language is getting to know the culture, traditions and values of a particular people. In this regard, the development of cultural awareness is of particular importance in teaching English. Cultural awareness is the ability to understand and accept one's own culture and the cultural characteristics of other peoples and communicate effectively on that basis. This concept helps language learners not only master the language, but also increase their respect for other cultures, overcome language barriers and feel comfortable in intercultural communication. If we do not take culture into account when teaching English, students may have difficulty memorizing only grammatical rules and vocabulary and communicating effectively. For example, although certain idioms and fixed expressions are often used in English, their literal meaning may be unclear in other languages. Also, since cultural norms and etiquette are an integral part of language communication, ignoring them can lead to misunderstandings in communication. The differences between English culture and Kazakh culture are reflected in people's communication styles, levels of politeness, and speech etiquette.

Human values are subject to globalization. This leads to the fact that the world community strives to bring the concepts of categories of being and consciousness to uniformity. The main reason for this process is frequent contacts between representatives of different nationalities. We get to know the French, Germans, Americans not from textbooks and books, but in real communication situations. It should be noted that sometimes our idea of a particular nation does not coincide with the subsequent impression. In this case, knowledge of general behavioral norms will be very useful, which will help representatives of different countries to understand each other and achieve their main goal – productive communication. But not only knowledge in the field of

general behavioral norms helps in effective dialogue, many communicative situations also require cultural knowledge.

The purpose of teaching a foreign language is to obtain certain knowledge and develop certain skills and abilities. A teacher must develop communication skills in students so that they can freely communicate with native speakers of a foreign language, read literature in the original and understand foreign speech. But, unfortunately, this is not always the case; sometimes even senior students and graduates of philological faculties do not speak a foreign language fluently. At the same time, their level of grammar and phonetics is quite high; they can understand their teachers, easily communicate with them, but experience difficulties in communicating with native speakers. This happens, first of all, because the purpose of teaching is precisely the transfer of knowledge and the formation of skills, and not the transfer of cultural characteristics of the language being studied.

### **Materials and methods of research.**

The study analyzed scientific literature, textbooks, and methodological guides to identify the relationship between language and culture. Surveys, interviews, observation, and comparative analysis were used as empirical methods. The opinions of teachers and students were collected, and the effectiveness of lessons with and without a cultural component was studied. These methods allowed us to identify the role of cultural awareness in teaching English and make recommendations for its improvement.

### **Research results and discussion.**

The cultural layer is a reflection and expression of the entire heritage, experience and results of the activities of a particular nation. It is the most generalized, covers many aspects of the life of the people, recorded not only by means of language. It is further divided into the following layers: the linguistic aspect (representing linguistic diversity in the expression of thought), the linguacultural aspect (expressing the uniqueness of the worldview features of the language), and the regional aspect (covering the development of the people and presenting various informational information). It should be noted that the regional aspect is most often presented in modern systems of teaching foreign languages at school. We have analyzed some textbooks of English for children studying in primary and secondary schools, which are included in the school curriculum and recommended by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, such as 'Smiles', 'Excel for Kazakhstan', 'English Plus'. Based on the work carried out, we can conclude that the cultural aspect is presented in these foreign language textbooks. The greatest attention is paid to the history of the country of the studied language, such texts occupy about 20% of the total number, they are found in textbooks of each grade, starting from the second. Acquaintance with the customs of the country, the language being studied occurs less frequently, such texts occupy about 10% of the total number and are not presented in all textbooks. Foreign literary works (stories, fables, poems) appear in some senior school textbooks and occupy about 5% of all texts. Such linguistic phenomena as phraseological units, proverbs and sayings occupy only 1% of all vocabulary presented in the textbook, and in some educational and methodological complexes they are not presented at all [1, 36].

It should be noted that a foreign language contains a lot of material for study, so the teacher cannot include it entirely in the educational process. As a result, such phenomena as "proverbs, sayings, phraseological units" are practically not understood by students. However, often ignorance of these phenomena can lead to misunderstandings in communication between native speakers and students. Let us give examples from the English language, there is an idiom "kick the bucket". Literally translated, it means, "kicked the bucket", but in reality, this expression means, "to die". If students translate this idiom literally, they may misunderstand the meaning of the sentence. The next example is "break a leg". If we translate this expression directly, it means,

“break someone’s leg”. But in fact it is used to wish someone good luck. If students do not know its idiomatic meaning, they may perceive it as a statement with negative intentions. Similarly, “spill the beans” in English means to reveal a secret, while “hit the sack” means “to go to sleep.” This problem is not only found in English, but also in other foreign languages. Many idioms are based on the culture and worldview of a particular people. For example, in French, there is an idiom called “avoir le cafard.” Literally translated, it means, “to have a cockroach,” in French culture this expression is used in the sense of “to be sad, to be depressed.” This is due to the symbolism trend in French literature of the 19th century, where “cafard” (cockroach) meant melancholy and sadness. In Chinese, there is a fixed expression called “对牛弹琴” (duì niú tán qín), which literally means, “to play the cow harp,” but the real meaning is “to try to explain something that someone does not understand, to waste time.” This idiom comes from Chinese philosophy, where it is used to describe the futility of teaching a high art to someone who does not understand. There is a Turkish expression “aynı tas aynı hamam,” which, if translated directly, means “same stone, same hammam.” This means in Turkish culture that “nothing has changed, everything is the same.” This expression originated because the bathing ritual in Ottoman hammams was a traditional process that did not change. It is very important for students to be familiar with these phenomena. If students do not know such expressions, they will not be able to correctly interpret the meaning and understand the essence of the conversation. Obviously, during a school course of a foreign language, children will not have time to learn even half of these expressions. It is necessary to introduce them to such a phenomenon in a foreign language, explain that such expressions do not need to be translated word for word, but it is necessary to consult a dictionary to clarify the meaning. Learning the regular expressions in each language not only helps with lexical knowledge, but also helps to understand the culture of that people. [2, 81]

National culture interprets this or that fragment of reality in its own way, and this attitude is reflected in the language. When studying a foreign language, we subconsciously, comparing it with our native language, find deviations from our cultural norm. It is very difficult to realize and accept that thinking in another language has a slightly different expression. Such awareness does not come immediately. In elementary school, you can analyze proverbs and sayings with children. Using their example, children will see that the same phenomena in different languages have different expressions and features. Then children will be able to compare more complex phenomena. For example, why the tense system in English is horizontal, and in Mandarin Chinese it is vertical, why the gender of nouns affects the associations associated with them, why the French language has a multi-level system of verb tenses. We also conducted a survey among foreign language teachers from various comprehensive schools (25 teachers surveyed) and found out that about 25% of teachers include the cultural aspect in their teaching process, about 40% consider it necessary and would like to include it, but the number of class hours does not allow them to do so. The remaining respondents consider it more important to focus on grammar, vocabulary and phonetics.

When studying English, learning the ability to ask questions and communicate information, extract information, express one's own opinion and understand the opinions of others, substantiate one's opinion, etc. is of particular importance. Language learners should also know certain social conventions, have a certain knowledge of culture, which is undoubtedly reflected in communicative behavior. In addition, it is necessary to teach students how to find a way out of situations that may go beyond their linguistic and sociocultural knowledge.

For example, the phrase, "I want to ask a question", which is perfectly acceptable in the learners' native language, is not acceptable in Britain, as it sounds at least impolite from the British point of view, without being preceded by an apology. It should be noted that knowing a list of similar phrases that are acceptable in one culture and unacceptable in another is not a sufficient

guarantee that such mistakes, caused by differences in cultures, will not be made in the future. Researchers of the problem recommend teaching recognition, observation, understanding and participation in situations where, hypothetically, such phrases should be used. It is also necessary to teach appropriate non-verbal behavior. Recognition can be taught by listening to audio materials, as well as watching video materials using suitable texts. Understanding can be taught by watching TV series; followed by discussion and comparison of your findings with the findings of others. Teaching comprehension increases awareness and is completed by developing new skills in oral speech activity, role-playing games, etc. If possible, direct experience of communication with the culture of the target language is indispensable. Authenticity of texts is one of the main principles imposed on reading and listening material. This, in particular, implies compliance with the norms of speech communication accepted by native speakers [3]. It is also assumed that the authenticity of the context in which verbal communication takes place contributes to more successful learning of adequate speech communication in the target foreign language. This means that the communicative situations presented to students studying the language for professional purposes should be relevant, i.e. such that the learners could hypothetically find themselves in, such as “going shopping”, “asking the way”, etc.

The vast majority of books on the English language include information on British culture. In particular, information is given related to the organization of society. Sometimes information about the USA is given, but the rest of the English-speaking world remains outside the educational process. Some information is given about left-hand traffic, attitudes towards sports, school uniforms, education, etc.

Given the appropriate conditions, language learning largely takes place outside the classroom, although the importance of classroom learning in the context of teaching a foreign language as a specialty cannot be underestimated, in particular, in terms of developing writing and speaking skills and increasing the level of linguistic competence. The foreign language teacher should direct and in every way facilitate extracurricular learning, in particular, watching programs in English, watching films, reading books in English, both at home and in the classroom. The great advantage of such activities is the informality and naturalness of the situation, which, in turn, contributes to much more effective learning of adequate speech communication in the context of teaching English as a specialty.

There are two approaches to the cultural aspect of teaching a foreign language. The first is an external point of view, which assumes the obligatory consideration of the role of English on a global scale as the main language of international communication. On the other hand, teaching English as a foreign language is a part of global education, which, accordingly, assumes the reflection of global problems, which may include information about the environment, language rights, etc. The second approach is internal, focused on the relationship between language teaching and culture learning. Naturally, learning a foreign language involves learning culture. Both language teachers and people involved in training teachers should be aware of these relationships, which should be reflected in the program for teaching a foreign language, in our case, English, and the methods of teaching it. There is no doubt that the role that English plays in today's world influences the nature of learning English as a foreign language. Learning a language and learning the culture of the country of the language being studied are closely related. Accordingly, learning a language involves learning a culture. We also consider it necessary to note that a deep study of another culture is possible only through studying the language of the native speakers of this culture. Teaching language as a specialty in general, and teaching speech communication in particular, must be built with the obligatory consideration of this provision [4, 102].

It is noted that the study of culture at the level of learning a foreign language concerns three areas: understanding, knowledge and communicative skills. Including these aspects in the

language course helps prepare students for adequate speech communication with people belonging to other cultures and enriches them in terms of acquired experience and knowledge.

It should be noted with regret that the problems that arise in the process of teaching a language for subsequent communication at the intercultural level are not given sufficient attention. These include the following problems:

Teaching the cultural aspect must necessarily be built taking into account the age of the students and cannot be the same for all age groups.

Various methods can be introduced into the process of teaching English to develop cultural awareness. First of all, the use of authentic materials is one of the effective methods. News, films, books, and podcasts from English-speaking countries allow students to get to know the culture of those countries up close. In addition, by listening to the speech style and intonation of English speakers, language learners learn a natural communication style. Through films and TV series, students get the opportunity to understand not only linguistic features, but also cultural traditions and lifestyles.

Organizing discussions and debates is also important to improve intercultural communication. When students are given the task of comparing politeness norms in English culture with the features of their own culture, they develop their free expression and analytical skills. In addition, the use of role-playing and case study methods is also useful. For example, if students are asked to role-play situations such as “English hospitality etiquette” or “Etiquette at an international conference”, they can prepare for real-life intercultural communication scenarios [5,50].

In addition, project work is also one of the effective methods of increasing cultural awareness. Students conduct research on the culture of a particular English-speaking country and defend it in front of the class in the form of a presentation, thereby gaining information about the traditions, holidays and norms of communication in society of that country. Such project work develops students' critical thinking and prepares them to accept cultural differences.

### **Conclusion**

I would like to note that the issue of the need to study the culture of another people has been repeatedly raised in the methodology of teaching foreign languages. Everyone understands that teaching a foreign language should not be limited to conveying certain basic knowledge about what and how to say. In addition to general information and memorized phrases, a person must also learn how to behave in a particular communicative situation. Therefore, the goal of training is now understood very broadly: from the formation of communicative competence to teaching foreign language culture. However, at the moment, the problem has not yet been solved.

Cultural awareness plays a significant role in teaching English, because it not only increases students' linguistic competence, but also develops their intercultural communication skills. If students understand the culture of a particular country, they will be more willing to speak that language fluently. In addition, intercultural understanding and tolerance are formed, and students' worldview is broadened.

In conclusion, the cultural component cannot be ignored in teaching English. Language and culture are closely related concepts, so in the process of learning a foreign language, students need to master not only words and grammatical rules, but also the culture of that language. This will not only help them master the language, but also increase their interest in other cultures and prepare them for international communication. Therefore, teachers should pay special attention to the development of cultural awareness in language teaching methods. Learning a language is not just about memorizing words, but also about understanding and respecting other cultures.

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