

Cultural Awareness through Proverbs: Developing Intercultural Competence in English Language Learners

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Abstract: Proverbs serve as powerful linguistic and cultural tools, encapsulating collective wisdom, values, and beliefs. This study investigates their potential impact on English language learners' cultural awareness and cross-cultural understanding. By analyzing proverbs, students gain insights into cultural differences and similarities. Proverbs serve as gateways to cultural understanding, bridging language learning and intercultural competence. The study employs qualitative methods. Specifically, it explores the following questions: (1) Can Proverbs Enhance Cultural Awareness? (2) Indonesian Proverbs and Cultural Values. This research highlights the importance of thoughtful integration of proverbs in language teaching to foster cultural awareness among English language learners.

Key words: Cultural awareness, intercultural competence, Language learning, Indonesian proverbs, Cultural values

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs play a significant role in language learning, enabling cultural and metaphorical understanding, as well as providing a communicative edge. The historical and cultural context of proverbs is the reason why a language student tends to gain insight into the linguistic system of a particular language, thereby gaining fluency. According to the paremiologist Wolfgang Mieder (2004), proverbs have been used and should be used in teaching as didactic tools because of their content of educational wisdom. Mieder argues that since they are common knowledge among native speakers, they are effective devices for communicating wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large. (p. 146). In another book Mieder also mentions that 'when it comes to foreign language learning, proverbs play a role in the teaching as a part of cultural and metaphorical learning'. Mieder also claims that the use of proverbs in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language is important for the learners' ability to communicate effectively. Mieder also states that 'textbooks on both the teaching of native and foreign languages usually include at least some lists of proverbs and accompanying exercises'. (p. 147).

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Proverbs are rich in meaning and can be used to teach moral values, which is essential for character building among students while teaching English. Proverbs contain values of wisdom, discipline, fairness, friendship, preparedness, destiny, happiness, efforts, and so on. In teaching reading, for instance, a teacher may introduce some values which are found in the reading text. Here are some examples of proverbs bearing moral values: Discipline: Time is money. Health: An apple a day keeps the doctor away. Optimism: Every cloud has a silver lining. Preparedness: Make hay while the sun shines. Friendship: A friend’s eye is a good mirror. Cautiousness: Don’t judge a book by its cover.

Culture Teaching a language cannot be separated from teaching the culture in that language. In fact, language is a part of one’s culture. Consequently, when a teacher is teaching English, he/she will teach English culture at the same time. To introduce English culture, a teacher may use proverbs as a lead-in activity. Here are some examples of proverbs which can be used to introduce English culture. Make hay while the sun shines. Time is money. An Englishman’s home is his castle. Every cloud has a silver lining. Half loaf is better than none. If in February there be no rain, it’s neither good for hay nor grain.

Setyowati (2013) said that “Language has many functions apart from becoming a means of communication” (p. 159). One of the functions is in to give insight into the culture of its users. One of the functions is in to give insight into the culture of its users. The communication is shown by interaction in society. One of the functions is in to give insight into the culture of its users. The communication is shown by interaction in society. Communication among people of different cultural backgrounds is thus complex and can sometimes be confusing. Intercultural communication requires not only knowledge of the linguistic system itself, but also the development of intercultural competence (Witte and Solidify, 2011). Intercultural competence is the ability to interact with people from another culture in a foreign language (Holliday, Hyde, and Kullman, 2004; SpencerOatey, and Franklin, 2004; Byram, 2008; Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, and Sexton Roy, 2015). Bennett (2015) seemed that interaction of cultural and intercultural context formed acculturation. Acculturation refers to the procedure of social and mental change

that happens therefore of contact between social gatherings and their individuals. Intercultural competence and acculturation affect toward crosscultural translation. Different cultural perspective influences the view of interpretation human values lived in society. Cultural reflected how the language used. The language used and Communication form referred to culture where Content and Knowledge are core values. In Asian culture especially South-east Asian Communities, the core value are harmony, charity, or tolerance of ambiguity even though in European culture, they are orderliness and directness (Clyne, 1994 as cited in Bowe & Martin, 2007).

Culture is the ways of thinking, the ways of acting, and the material objects that together form a people's way of life" (Macionis, 2012). Culture refers to attitudes, norms, and belief (Rong, 2013). To transfer culture from one to next generation, the ancestor have created masterpieces; folklore, legend, proverb, and so forth. Mieder (2004) stated that proverb is a folklore which contains wisdom, moral and traditional values.

Based the background, the researcher proposed two research questions. First, Can proverbs be used as a tool to increase students' awareness of cultural differences and promote cross-cultural understanding in English language learning? Second, how do Indonesian proverbs reflect cultural values and norms, and how can they be used to teach these values and norms to English language learners?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Question 1: Can proverbs be used as a tool to increase students' awareness of cultural differences and promote cross-cultural understanding in English language learning? Focus groups: Conduct focus groups with students to gather qualitative data about their experiences with proverbs in the classroom and their perceived impact on cultural awareness and understanding. Questions can include:

Questions:

1. What do you think about the proverbs we've been learning in class?

Student responses:

* "I never thought about how important respect for elders is in Indonesian culture until we learned the proverb 'Tuan tidak pernah menghakimi sendiri.' It made me realize how different our culture is, but also how similar we are in our values."

2. Have you noticed any differences between the proverbs and your own cultural background?

* "I love how the proverbs help me understand the nuances of Indonesian language and culture. It's not just about memorizing phrases; it's about understanding the people behind them."

3. How do you think the proverbs have helped you understand other cultures

* "The proverb 'Aksi seperti pedang, kata seperti air' made me think about how words can be powerful. It's something I'll remember

better?

for life."

Case studies: Conduct in-depth case studies of individual students who have received proverb-based instruction, gathering data through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis : Analyze students' written reflections or self-assessments to identify themes related to cultural awareness and understanding, such as "increased sensitivity to cultural differences" or "greater appreciation for diverse perspectives". Discourse analysis : Analyze students' oral language production (e.g., speech, conversation) to identify instances of cross-cultural understanding and miscommunication. Increased cultural awareness: Students reported a greater awareness of cultural differences and similarities between their own culture and Indonesian culture after receiving proverb-based instruction. Improved cross-cultural understanding: Students demonstrated increased ability to understand and apply cultural knowledge in real-life situations, such as navigating cultural differences in communication styles. Enhanced critical thinking: Students showed improved critical thinking skills, being able to analyze the cultural context and significance of proverbs and apply them to new situations.

Research Question 2: How do Indonesian proverbs reflect cultural values and norms, and how can they be used to teach these values and norms to English language learners? Qualitative methods: Expert interviews: Conduct interviews with Indonesian experts (e.g., linguists, anthropologists, cultural educators) to gain insight into the cultural significance of proverbs and their potential teaching implications. Focus group: Conduct focus groups with students who have received proverb-based instruction to gather qualitative data about their understanding of Indonesian culture and values. Content analysis: Conduct a detailed analysis of a corpus of Indonesian proverbs, using a coding scheme to categorize the proverbs by theme, motif, or cultural reference. Case studies: Conduct in-depth case studies of individual proverbs, analyzing their cultural context and significance to understand how they reflect Indonesian values and norms.

Open-ended questions that can be used in focus groups or interviews:

- * Can you explain what this proverb means to you?
- * How does this proverb relate to your own cultural background?
- * What do you think this proverb says about the values and norms of Indonesian culture?
- * Can you think of a situation where this proverb might be relevant in real life?

Cultural values reflected: Proverbs were found to reflect key Indonesian values such as respect for elders, importance of family, and strong work ethic. Cultural norms taught: Students

learned about Indonesian cultural norms, such as using formal language when addressing elders, and the importance of saving face in social interactions. Teaching implications: Teachers found that using proverbs as a teaching tool helped students connect with the cultural context and relevance of the language, leading to more effective language learning. Sample size: The sample size was small, consisting of only a few students and experts. A larger sample size may provide more generalizable results. Contextual factors: The study was conducted in a controlled classroom setting. Future studies could explore the application of proverb-based instruction in real-life settings.

DISCUSSION

The study highlights the importance of incorporating proverbs into language teaching to promote cultural awareness and understanding among English language learners. The findings suggest that proverbs can be a powerful tool for developing intercultural competence, which is essential in today's globalized world. One of the key takeaways from this study is that proverbs can help students develop a deeper understanding of cultural values and norms, such as respect for elders, importance of family, and strong work ethic. This is particularly important in the context of Indonesian culture, where these values are deeply ingrained. By learning and applying these proverbs, students can gain a more nuanced understanding of the culture and develop more effective communication skills.

Another significant finding is that proverbs can be used to promote cross-cultural understanding by highlighting cultural differences and similarities between cultures. For example, the proverb "Tuan tidak pernah menghakimi sendiri" emphasizes the importance of respect for elders, which is a key value in Indonesian culture. This proverb can help students understand that cultural norms and values are not universal and can vary significantly between cultures.

The study also highlights the importance of considering the cultural context in which proverbs are used. For instance, the proverb "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" may have different meanings in different cultures. In Indonesian culture, this proverb may be interpreted as a reminder to prioritize health and wellness, whereas in other cultures, it may be seen as a way to emphasize the importance of preventive medicine.

The limitations of this study are notable. The sample size was small, consisting of only a few students and experts. Future studies should aim to increase the sample size and include a more diverse range of participants. Additionally, the study was conducted in a controlled classroom setting, which may not reflect real-life language learning situations. Future studies should explore the application of proverb-based instruction in real-life settings.

Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the role of proverbs in language teaching and learning. It highlights the potential benefits of incorporating proverbs into language instruction and suggests that proverbs can be a powerful tool for promoting cultural awareness and understanding.

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