

# CONSTRUING EFL STUDENTS' BELIEFS ON THE INCLUSION OF INNER CIRCLE CULTURES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## Abstract

This study was an attempt to uncover EFL students' beliefs of inner circle (IC) cultures in their English language classes. Thirty-four English department students (henceforth, participants) were recruited by means of convenience sampling technique. They were asked to fill out a set of questionnaires and provided reasons of the answers. The results of this study yielded that the participants' belief systems were seen complex. It is proven from three varied voices of the inner circle inclusion in their English language classes; 65 % of the participants agreed to include inner circle culture, 21 of them refused it, and 15% of them held a neutral belief. Suggestions for future research are offered at the end of this paper.

*Keywords: student beliefs, inner circle culture, English language teaching*

## I INTRODUCTION

Without any doubt, English language has altered its position from a native speaker-based communicative tool to becoming a lingua franca communication (Jenkins, 2003; Kirpatrick, 2007). This has opened the fact that interactions among non-native speakers can occur through this international language in many areas of life such as education, business and commerce, politics, economic, and culture (Floris, 2013). If compared to the past time, English was only used as a means of communication by English speaking countries. This, to some extent, results in the extreme use of their cultures when English is brought to non-English speaking countries. The problem then becomes more serious since, in fact, non-English speaking countries rest their tenet on cultures which are irrelevant to their daily lives. The practiced Inner Circle cultures keep living in EFL curricula as this is supported by the fact that the speakers who are native are seen as the most perfect users of English.

For instance, in light of the development of English around the world, an assumption that still rests on native speaker fallacy may continue to become a hindrance for competent English users. The reason is because, when English shifts as the most spoken language by international speakers, native speaker norms may not be suitable to apply to these people. One visible problem brought by native speakers, which in our mind is not appropriate to non-native ones, is cultural values.

On another case, the practice of English language teaching in EFL countries (i.e., Indonesia) has been linked to the issue of culture from the Inner Circle (IC, for short) countries. The tenet held is not without any reasons. For instance, one representative idea on this is because language and culture are "closely intertwined" (Zacharias, 2014) and inseparable (Dornyei, 2005). On a further explanation, Zacharias continued to argue that language learners cannot communicate the target language well, unless they are well informed with the culture of the language per se. This statement has even been popularized previously by Kramch, stating that "one cannot learn to use a language without knowing the culture of the people who speak that language" (Kramsch 1988:63)".

In the case of English, which is now shifted to be an international language spoken by multicultural people around the world (Crystal, 2003), the inclusion of IC cultures and its teaching practices somewhat is not easy to do; albeit it has an ease to discuss. Since it is a global language and thus, is categorized as "de-nationalized" language (McKay, 2003), the teaching of its culture remains unnecessary. This assumption is derived from the fact that an international language should concern with the culture of "...the numerous English speakers around the world" (Alptekin, 1996, cited in Zacharias, 2003:39). Pertaining to this, Richard (2002) asserted that:

.... The cultural values of Britain and the US are often seen as irrelevant to language teaching, except in situation where the learner has a pragmatic need for such information. The language teacher needs no longer be an expert on British and American culture and a literature specialist as well (p.3).

In relation to the explanations above, English language teaching in EFL countries, particularly in Indonesia still keeps the traditional map of teaching approaches and principles toward the English-speaking countries. This fact has been introduced by Brown (2012), arguing that pre-service teachers education programs holds the beliefs that (a) communicative language teaching (CLT) is seen as the best teaching method; (b) the culture of American and British should be included in the classroom; (c) the best model of speakers are from those who are native; (d) the English learned is what native speakers have. It can be concluded that strongly held belief toward the power of English-speaking countries exists in EFL countries.

Concerning the need for including local culture in EFL contexts, Ubaidillah, Sari, and Hidayah (2014) focused on approaches that EFL teachers can take during teaching English in the class. In speaking class, for example, they suggested teachers to insert students' local culture when presenting materials such as stories in the class. This indeed is a helpful way to do since both teachers and students are interacting to frame local asset activity.

Furthermore, issue of foreign language culture in ELT has been investigated for years by language professionals. Two of which are carried out in teacher education program examining their tenet on this issue. Ubaidillah (2018a), for instance, studied fifty student-teachers at the English department of a private university in East Java, Indonesia. Conducted in a cross-sectional survey method, his study documented that the participants preferred teaching English with the inclusion of IC cultures. The reason mostly cited is because language and culture are bound each other. Another earlier research is done by Zacharias (2003). Participated by teacher educators from universities in Central Java, she learned that the interlink between culture and language has served as a prominent belief why most of the participants agree to the question. Many even argue that speakers from the IC are 'the sole owner of English' and thus, they believe that students should be exposed to learn the IC speakers' cultures (Ubaidillah, 2018b).

The studies above may have been contributive to the existing knowledge of IC culture in English language teaching. However, the studies examined the belief systems of scholars who have taught English for years (Zacharias, 2003) and did teaching practices offered by the department of the university (Ubaidillah, 2015). On this fact, little attentive action is addressed to freshmen of English Language Teaching Program in universities. Their beliefs systems may become a prior knowledge that they will bring during the study at the university program. It is with this reason that the present study is designed to convey the belief systems of EFL students on the inclusion of IC culture in English language teaching.

In relation to the review of literature above, this study has an attempt to reveal how EFL students' beliefs on the inclusion of Inner Circle culture in English language teaching are held. The importance of studying belief of students have been explained in much literature (e.g., Floris, 2013; Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Yesilbursa, 2009; Zacharias, 2003). These publications are concerned with the effect of belief which can influence one's performance in his or her circumstances. This finally has been made as the objective of this study.

## II MATERIALS AND METHOD

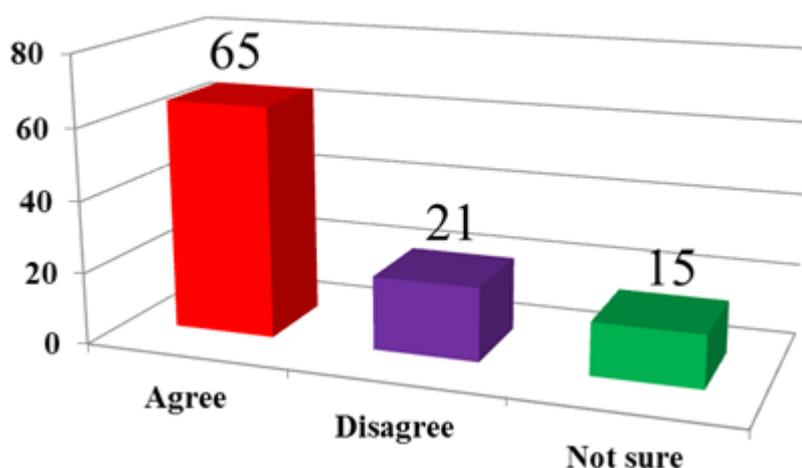
A small-scale survey design was employed in this study. Thirty-four English department students from one private university in Malang, Indonesia were recruited by means of convenience sampling technique. They were asked to fill out a set questionnaire asking their beliefs of inner circle cultures inclusion in their English language classes.

The data were obtained from a set of questionnaires adopted from Zacharias (2003) work. It contained one main question, "*do you think that teaching English should include the cultures of English-speaking countries such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, and the like.*" The question was also accomplished with a space for reasons of the opted choices, "Agree, Disagree, and Not Sure". The data then were analyzed in percentage and the results were presented in tables.

## III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Question: "Do you think that teaching English should include the cultures of English-speaking countries such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, and the like?"

Thirty-four participants were asked to answer this question on a piece of paper followed by their reason. Below outlined the result in the form of percentage.

**Figure 1. Survey Result**

The data revealed a dominance belief on the inclusion of IC culture held by the participants with 65% agree, 21% disagree, and 15% not sure, respectively. This shows us that many EFL students still rest their preference to the use on Western-based culture when teaching English in the class. Some reasons for favoring agreement on it are summarized as follows (the statements are taken directly from the questionnaire):

Student 1 (S1): We as English university students should know their habitual like Halloween party or anything else which can improve our knowledge in speaking English. We don't just study the theory only.

Student 2 (S2): To provide our knowledge about the culture, not only theory but also practice that event can be place to improve our theory and all that we got before.

Student 3 (S3): I am agree, because in teaching English it will be better that the culture of English should include in teaching English. It can give more information not only in teaching but in culture of English also.

Student 4 (S4): The relationship between culture and language has function that influence to develop our ability.

Student 5 (S5): As I know about language it to express what we are thinking and doing, and its so much related toward culture. Means that, if a teacher implement culture inside of English language teaching, it's good for students to know & understand that western culture not totally bad for Indonesia. It will probably minimize the misunderstanding of English uses.

The comments highlight that, in term of teaching a language, the culture associated within the language per se should also be introduced for the sake of knowledge-driven that learners can expose. This encloses the importance of relation between language and its culture such as what S4 has emphasized, "the relationship between culture and language has function that influence to develop our ability". This finding finally is in a way the same as what Zacharias (2014) and Dornyei (2005) argued previously, stating that language and culture are intertwined and inseparable.

By reviewing the survey result, it can be concluded that there is a domination in accepting the Western cultures as being superior in language teaching. Furthermore, the complex system of the participants' belief results the degradation of the local culture. If this is the case, a mismatch will occur between students' local culture and the IC culture taught in the class (Poedjiastutie. 2009). Then, this gap may cause students trapped in difficulties to understand their own culture as this is slowly replaced by foreign culture. Shahed (2013) added that the balancing act by teachers with cultural items issue shows the fact of today students' cultural problem in understanding their own culture.

Answered differently from the first explanation, there is also refusal of the given case about cultural education in ELT with 21% who voiced it. In average, the arguments of the second results show high appreciation toward the local culture. Sariçoban and Çaliskan (2011) emphasized that this action leads a good balance on ELT if that means to limit the cultural conflicts. As a result, they also added that this limitation may avoid the language learning from being more obstructed by the cultural over-influence. More, the intensive guidance is also needed while having language learning which also has a cultural filter on it. It is suggested that the autonomy of ELT activity is to show the students the local

context of their own circumstance (Lamb, 2009:229). The participants' reasons for opting 'disagree' on this issue are reflected in their questionnaire as follows:

Because I think Indonesian people have own culture self. So, we are as the Indonesia people should defend our culture

I disagree with it because I think we have better culture than following their cultures. But we can know their culture in order to make improve our knowledge.

Well I'm really disagree because we are as a modern generation, we have to proud of our Islamic culture specially in this case. If we also celebrate the culture of English to influence to in its culture and follow their religion.

Because some cultures of English-speaking countries are not good for our country, and it can make the citizen of Indonesia more interesting about other cultures than our cultures especially for young generation. It can make our cultures are forgot.

We as Indonesian have to be proud of Indonesia cultures and keep it from other countries claim it. Even though we learn English which is EIL, we have to learn it by our own way based on Indonesia culture.

The final session includes the answers of those who are neutral with the issue (15%). Albeit they are small in number, the voices yield intriguing facts. The neutralresponse indicates that western cultural teaching should be put as necessary for only an additional source of knowledge materials. Guilani et al (2012) mentioned that this necessity could be beneficial for the students to learn about any life aspects such as geography, history, and the cultures of the target language. This evidence is portrayed from their remarks written on the questionnaire below:

Because the culture of English-speaking countries such as Halloween party, Thanksgiving, etc is not suitable for Islamic school such as MI, MTs or MA. If just for addition information is oke.

We just need to know their culture, without include them in our life. Because we have our own culture.

To conclude, the findings indicate that most of the participants favor the IC cultures when teaching English as these are contributive to their knowledge refinement of the target language. In other case, some in contrast view IC culture as a mismatching element if included in English language teaching. Two most cited reasons lie on the fact that Western cultures are not all good for EFL learners and also, the 'pride' of learners' local cultures are of important to consider. Lastly, neutral voices are raised by the respondents. Those who are 'not sure' judge the IC culture as an additional element in English language teaching of EFL countries.

#### IV CONCLUSION

The current study learns that preference on Inner Circle cultures in English language teaching held by EFL students exists. The dominance tenet voiced is because, based on the questionnaire result, this culture is bound with the English language and due to its position, the teaching of this language even becomes crucial to include its cultural values. When asked to clarify the answer, most of the participants stated that the inclusion of Inner Circle cultures can assist them improve the ability to understand the language. Differently held, the opposing beliefs are also worth-noting. Those who refused consider the own local culture as the most important value to teach and learn in EFL classrooms. The last b is those who are neutral. These participants favored to use Inner Circle cultures as an additional information or knowledge for EFL students. Based on these findings, future research on local cultures norms in English language teaching is plausibly necessary.

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