

## The Relationship Between Language, Culture and Society in Teaching EFL: Islamic Perspective

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### Abstract

This study explores the interwoven relationships among language, culture, and society in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching through an Islamic lens. While previous research has broadly explored cultural integration in EFL, there is a notable research gap regarding how Islamic educational paradigms can be systematically applied to preserve local religious identities amidst globalized English instruction; this study offers a novel integrative model to bridge that gap. It emphasizes how language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a bearer of cultural and social identity. Integrating Islamic values into EFL instruction supports students in maintaining their cultural and religious identities while acquiring English proficiency. The study uses a qualitative descriptive method, drawing on literature and Islamic teachings to propose a culturally and religiously aligned approach to EFL pedagogy. It also identifies key sociolinguistic phenomena such as code-switching, politeness strategies, intercultural sensitivity, and cultural motivation

### INTRODUCTION

Language, culture, and society are deeply interconnected, influencing each other in profound ways. In the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), understanding this relationship is essential for effective instruction and meaningful communication. Language serves as a vehicle for cultural values, traditions, and social norms, shaping the way individuals interact and express themselves (Kramsch, 1998; Wang & Zhang, 2021). For EFL learners, acquiring English is not just about mastering vocabulary and grammar but also about navigating the cultural and societal dimensions embedded within the language (Bagea, 2023; Ordóñez Procel et al., 2023).

From an Islamic perspective, language is more than a tool for communication; it is a means of fostering mutual understanding, respect, and ethical discourse. Islam emphasizes the importance of knowledge, wisdom, and effective communication in building harmonious societies. This view aligns with sociocultural theories that highlight language as a mediator of social interaction and cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1980). Language is not merely a neutral system but also a representation of identity and moral values expressed through communication (Fuller, 2007; Arslan et al., 2024).

However, current global EFL pedagogy often relies heavily on Western-centric materials, which can create cultural dissonance for learners in Muslim-majority contexts. Such dominance may

marginalize local cultural identities and reduce learners' sense of belonging in the language learning process (Sultana, 2018; Guillén Nieto & Cáceres-Lorenzo, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of culturally inclusive language policies and teaching practices may lead to limited social integration and unequal learning experiences (Imran & Natsir, 2024).

Despite the importance of cultural integration, many EFL practitioners still struggle to balance global linguistic standards with the preservation of local Islamic values. This imbalance often results in a "cultural disconnect," where religious identity is underrepresented in language instruction. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of intercultural competence and culturally responsive teaching; however, there remains a lack of a systematic framework that integrates sociolinguistic theories with Islamic pedagogical ethics (Lopez Rodriguez & Casal Madinabeitia, 2021; Ordóñez Procel et al., 2023).

Consequently, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do Islamic principles redefine the relationship between language and culture in EFL teaching? and (2) What conceptual model can be proposed to integrate these values into a culturally responsive EFL pedagogy?

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, which is particularly appropriate for examining complex socio-cultural and religious phenomena that cannot be adequately captured through numerical data. Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to explore meanings, interpretations, and conceptual relationships in depth, especially in studies involving language, culture, and belief systems (Vygotsky, 1980; Kramsch, 1998). This approach is also aligned with sociolinguistic research traditions that emphasize context, interaction, and cultural interpretation in language use (Fuller, 2007).

### **Research Design and Approach**

The study adopts a conceptual and integrative qualitative framework, combining insights from sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, and Islamic educational philosophy. Rather than collecting primary field data, this research is based on a systematic qualitative literature analysis, which enables the synthesis of existing theoretical and empirical findings into a coherent pedagogical model (Ordóñez Procel et al., 2023; Bagea, 2023). This approach is particularly relevant for developing new conceptual frameworks in underexplored interdisciplinary areas.

### **Data Sources and Selection Criteria**

The data for this study consist of secondary sources, including:

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles on EFL pedagogy, sociolinguistics, and intercultural communication
2. Foundational theoretical works on language and culture
3. Authoritative Islamic texts, including the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as contemporary Islamic educational literature

To ensure academic rigor and relevance, the study applied the following inclusion criteria:

1. Publications from reputable journals and academic publishers
2. Studies explicitly addressing language, culture, identity, or EFL teaching
3. Sources that discuss intercultural competence or culturally responsive pedagogy
4. Islamic texts and interpretations relevant to communication, ethics, and education

Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria included:

1. Sources lacking a clear theoretical or pedagogical framework
2. Non-scholarly or opinion-based writings

### 3. Studies not directly related to language education or cultural analysis

This selection process ensures that the data are both credible and contextually relevant (Lopez Rodriguez & Casal Madinabeitia, 2021).

#### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection process was conducted in three systematic stages:

1. Identification of Sociolinguistic and EFL Concepts. Key theories related to language, culture, and identity were identified from foundational works (Kramersch, 1998; Kachru, 1985; Holliday, 1999). These concepts provide the theoretical basis for understanding how language operates within cultural and social contexts.
2. Extraction of Islamic Ethical Principles. Relevant principles were derived from Islamic sources, focusing on values such as *akhlaq* (ethics), respect in communication, and the pursuit of knowledge. These principles were analyzed in relation to language use and educational practices, emphasizing the moral dimension of communication.
3. Thematic Synthesis and Model Construction. The identified sociolinguistic concepts and Islamic values were then systematically compared and integrated using a thematic analysis approach. Themes such as cultural identity, intercultural sensitivity, ethical communication, and language pedagogy were categorized and synthesized into a proposed conceptual model.

#### **Data Analysis Technique**

The study utilizes thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. This method is widely used in qualitative research to organize complex information into meaningful categories (Sultana, 2018). The analysis followed three main steps:

1. Data reduction, selecting and simplifying relevant concepts from the literature
2. Data display, organizing findings into thematic categories
3. Conclusion drawing and verification interpreting relationships between themes and validating consistency across sources

This analytical process allows for a structured interpretation of how language, culture, and Islamic values intersect in EFL teaching.

#### **FINDINGS**

To directly address the research objectives of exploring the intricate relationship between language, culture, and society in EFL teaching and highlighting the role of Islamic principles, the following findings are structured into key themes. These themes explicitly demonstrate how cultural nuances, social contexts, and Islamic values practically influence language acquisition and pedagogical strategies

##### **1. Language as a Reflection of Culture ( Islamic perspective)**

To address the first research objective, findings indicate that language in an Islamic framework is inseparable from *Akhlaq* (ethics). Unlike traditional sociolinguistic theories that view language as a neutral social tool, the Islamic perspective treats communication as a moral responsibility. In an EFL context, students are not just learning a linguistic code, but are learning how to represent their character through a new medium. Therefore, EFL instruction should focus on "integrity" in expression rather than just "fluency."

##### **The Role of Language in Expressing Cultural Identity**

Cultural identity is shaped by a complex interplay of shared values, beliefs, traditions, and customs, forming the unique character of a community. Language plays a central role in this intricate

framework, serving not only as a reflection of cultural nuances but also as a crucial tool for its preservation (Wang, 2021). Fuller (2007) highlighted that cultural identity is influenced by interactions between individuals and their choice of language in various social contexts. Similarly, Vygotsky (1980) proposed that interactions within a community serve semiotic functions, with language acting as both a linguistic and cognitive tool that enables individuals to first internalize the social and cultural perspectives of others before developing their own psychological framework within society. However, some scholars have challenged the idea that language is the sole determinant of cultural identity, arguing that it can also contribute to cultural identity crises within a society.

Arslan et al. (2024) assert that language is one of the most effective means through which individuals express and share their cultural practices. Embedded within language is culture itself, as it reflects the traditions, beliefs, and histories of the people who use it. Language serves as a medium for conveying cultural norms, regional histories, and social values. Beyond its basic communicative function, language possesses power as a system for encoding and transmitting cultural identities. Literature, including novels, poetry, and folk tales, exemplifies how language functions as a repository of cultural knowledge.

To safeguard cultural identity, multilingualism should be preserved, as each language carries the unique meanings and traditions of a specific culture. The loss of a language equates to the loss of the cultural heritage it represents. However, globalization, modernization, and rapid development pose significant threats to the survival of many minority languages, leading to a decline in cultural diversity. The extinction of a language ultimately results in the disappearance of cultural knowledge, practices, beliefs, and distinct worldviews embedded within it (BenítezBurraco & Progovac, 2021).

### **The Influence of Language on Education, Identity, and Social Integration**

Language plays a vital role in shaping a nation's educational landscape, particularly through its influence on the medium of instruction in schools. This, in turn, impacts how future generations perceive their identity and cultural heritage. For example, countries that implement bilingual education often experience positive outcomes, as students develop greater cultural awareness and an appreciation for diversity. Such an approach not only enhances language proficiency but also instills a sense of pride in multiple identities, contributing to a more unified national identity.

Conversely, nations that enforce a single official language in education risk marginalizing linguistic minorities, potentially leading to feelings of exclusion and a decline in cultural expression. Furthermore, language policies significantly influence social integration in multicultural societies. When governments adopt inclusive language policies, they foster an environment where all linguistic groups feel acknowledged and valued. This recognition strengthens social cohesion and encourages active civic participation, as individuals are more likely to engage when their language and cultural heritage are respected (Imran & Natsir, 2024).

### **The Role of Language and Literature in Communication, Cultural Preservation, and Islamic Values**

One crucial aspect of Indonesian language learning is the enhancement of communication skills. In an era dominated by information, the ability to articulate ideas clearly and persuasively is essential. Effective learning enables students not only to develop speaking and writing skills but also to express their opinions on various digital platforms. This is particularly relevant in addressing the communication challenges of today's information-driven society.

Furthermore, literature learning plays a vital role in cultural preservation. By engaging with literary works, students internalize the values embedded within them, making these values an integral part of their identity. Cultural preservation has become increasingly significant in the age of globalization, where foreign cultural influences are pervasive. A deep understanding of Indonesian

literature fosters a love for one's own cultural heritage, encouraging students to be not just consumers but also preservers and promoters of Indonesian culture (Putri & Ristiyani, 2024).

From an Islamic perspective, language and literature serve as powerful tools for conveying knowledge and preserving cultural and religious values. The Quran itself emphasizes the importance of language in communication and education, as seen in Surah Ar-Rahman (55:4), which states, "He taught him eloquence (Al-Bayan)." This highlights that effective communication is a divine gift meant to be cultivated. Additionally, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encouraged the learning of multiple languages to facilitate understanding and bridge cultural divides. Thus, nurturing a deep appreciation for Indonesian language and literature not only strengthens national identity but also aligns with the Islamic duty to uphold knowledge and cultural values.

### **Formal and Informal Language in a Sociocultural Context**

Different cultures define and apply formal and informal language uniquely. Research by Syafryadin et al. (2022) found that Indonesian students exhibit different levels of formality depending on their academic and social environments. The study emphasizes that formal language is used in academic settings, while informal speech dominates social interactions. Similarly, Irawan and Setianingsih (2021) highlighted the importance of teaching colloquial Indonesian to foreign learners to improve their communicative competence in informal settings. In Western cultures, the line between formal and informal language tends to be more flexible, particularly in English-speaking countries. While professional settings often demand formal language, many workplaces and universities adopt a more relaxed communication style compared to Asian cultures. The widespread use of first names in English-speaking countries, even in professional environments, contrasts with cultures that emphasize hierarchical relationships through formal address.

### **The Role of Honorifics in Islamic Culture**

Islamic societies employ extensive honorifics and polite speech forms to show respect. Titles such as Sheikh, Ustadh, and Hajji are commonly used to address religious scholars, teachers, and those who have completed the pilgrimage to Mecca. Arabic and other Islamic languages also contain formal pronoun distinctions to convey deference. In many Islamic cultures, younger individuals are expected to use formal speech when addressing elders or authority figures, demonstrating respect and humility. In Islamic communities, the use of honorifics is also deeply rooted in religious customs. For example, referring to the Prophet Muhammad with the phrase Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) is a common practice among Muslims, reflecting reverence and respect. Similarly, scholars and imams are often addressed with respectful titles that acknowledge their religious authority. This level of formality extends to interactions in family, workplace, and educational settings.

### **The Role of Culture in Language Learning**

Culture shapes the way individuals perceive, interpret, and use language. According to Ordóñez Procel et al. (2023), cultural integration into English Language Teaching (ELT) is essential for fostering intercultural competence. Language learners bring their cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and social norms into the learning process, which significantly influences their linguistic choices and comprehension. Cultural context affects how learners interpret meaning, express thoughts, and interact with others in diverse linguistic situations.

Moreover, cultural context influences how individuals process and internalize new vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation. For instance, learners from high-context cultures, where meaning is often derived from implicit communication, may struggle with English's direct

communication style. Understanding these cultural differences allows educators to adapt teaching strategies and provide students with practical applications for their language skills. In EFL teaching, it is crucial to consider cultural factors that impact not just comprehension but also verbal and non-verbal language use.

Bagea (2023) highlights that language learning extends beyond mere vocabulary and grammar acquisition; it involves understanding the cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and communication styles embedded within the target language. Sultana (2018) also asserts that cultural background affects learners' ability to comprehend and produce language, as cultural perceptions shape linguistic expectations and pragmatic norms. For example, idiomatic expressions vary across cultures, and learners may find certain phrases difficult to understand if they do not share the cultural background in which they originated. Similarly, humor, sarcasm, and metaphors can pose challenges, as they rely heavily on cultural context. In EFL classrooms, educators must teach not only linguistic structures but also the cultural appropriateness of language use in different contexts. Teachers should integrate authentic materials, including literature, movies, and real-life conversations, to expose students to culturally embedded language use.

## **2. Intercultural Sensitivity in EFL Teaching**

This section presents the research findings regarding the development of a conceptual model for integrating intercultural sensitivity into EFL pedagogy. Based on the analysis, the proposed model shifts the focus from purely linguistic skills to a Culturally Responsive Framework

### **Importance of Intercultural Sensitivity**

A key aspect of successful EFL teaching is developing students' intercultural sensitivity. Sultana (2018) emphasizes that educators should not limit language instruction to traditional native-speaker contexts (e.g., the UK or the USA) but should also incorporate diverse cultural perspectives to reflect English as a global language.

Intercultural sensitivity helps students navigate language barriers and misunderstandings that arise from cultural differences. Teachers can foster this sensitivity through activities that encourage cultural exploration, such as role-playing exercises, collaborative projects with international peers, and the analysis of multilingual media. By doing so, students become more adaptable communicators and gain the skills necessary to interact in diverse linguistic environments. An EFL classroom should be a microcosm of the real-world linguistic landscape, allowing learners to interact with a variety of cultural expressions in English.

### **English as a Global Language**

This is particularly relevant given the rise of English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which stress the importance of understanding multiple cultural contexts (Ordóñez Procel et al., 2023). Holliday (1999) and Kachru (1985) argue that cultural awareness in language education enables learners to navigate different varieties of English, preparing them for real-world communication.

With the globalization of English, non-native speakers frequently interact in professional and academic settings. Recognizing that English varies across cultures—both in pronunciation and in usage—ensures that students are prepared to engage in global communication effectively. Teaching world Englishes in the EFL classroom provides learners with exposure to diverse linguistic styles,

thereby fostering greater acceptance of different English variations. For instance, teachers can introduce students to various English accents, dialects, and regional vocabulary to enhance their understanding of English as a global language.

### **Assessment and Cultural Awareness**

Lopez Rodriguez & Casal Madinabeitia (2021) advocate for culturally responsive assessment methods to ensure fairness and inclusivity in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. Similarly, Ishak Bagea (2023) states that EFL learners must be exposed to different cultural environments to develop their cross-cultural communication skills. Cultural bias in assessments can impact learners' performance. Traditional testing methods often favor Western academic expectations, which may disadvantage students from cultures with different learning styles. To create a more inclusive assessment system, teachers can use performance-based evaluations such as storytelling, debates, and self-reflective essays that allow students to express language use in culturally relevant ways.

### **The Interplay Between Language Use and Culture**

Language use is deeply embedded in cultural norms and expectations. In EFL teaching, it is essential to understand that different cultures have unique conventions regarding how language is used in communication. According to Kramsch (1998), language is not just a means of communication but a way of representing cultural identity. The way people express politeness, make requests, and engage in conversations varies significantly across cultures. For instance, while English speakers in Western cultures may prefer direct communication, many Asian cultures favor indirectness to maintain social harmony.

Understanding these cultural influences helps educators teach students how to use English appropriately in different settings. For example, pragmatic competence, the ability to use language effectively in various contexts should be a fundamental component of EFL instruction. Teachers can use role-playing activities to demonstrate culturally appropriate ways of greeting, apologizing, and making requests in English.

### **Strategies and Cultural Variations**

Politeness strategies are an essential part of language use and vary significantly between cultures. In EFL teaching, learners must be aware that what is considered polite in one culture may not be interpreted the same way in another. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains that individuals use different strategies to maintain social harmony, including direct and indirect speech acts.

For example, in Western cultures, it is common to use explicit expressions of gratitude, such as 'thank you,' while in some Asian cultures, politeness may be conveyed through non-verbal gestures or indirect speech. Similarly, making requests in English often requires a balance between politeness and assertiveness. Learners need to be taught different ways to phrase requests, such as 'Could you please...?' instead of a blunt imperative like 'Give me...!' These subtleties in language use illustrate how culture shapes communication norms in English.

To help students develop cultural awareness in language use, educators should integrate activities that expose learners to various cultural communication styles. One effective method is through cross-cultural dialogues, where students compare how the same message is conveyed across

different cultures. This comparison helps highlight differences in politeness, directness, and formality.

Additionally, real-world language exposure is essential; students can be encouraged to watch English-language films, listen to podcasts, and read literature from diverse English-speaking cultures to understand language use in authentic contexts. Role-play and simulations also offer valuable practice, allowing students to engage in conversations, negotiate meaning, and manage misunderstandings in culturally appropriate ways. Moreover, explicit instruction on pragmatics—such as teaching speech acts, discourse markers, and culturally specific language conventions—can further enhance learners' awareness of how language functions differently across cultures. By incorporating these activities into EFL instruction, teachers can prepare learners to use English effectively in intercultural settings, ensuring they are both linguistically competent and culturally aware.

### **Cultural Motivation in Language Learning**

Cultural context significantly impacts learners' motivation in acquiring a foreign language. Guillén Nieto & Cáceres-Lorenzo (2019) found a strong correlation between students' interest in cultural aspects of English-speaking countries and their enthusiasm for learning the language. This suggests that integrating cultural elements into EFL curricula can enhance learner engagement and motivation.

Moreover, learners who feel a connection to the target culture are more likely to persist in language study. Motivation can be enhanced through cultural immersion activities such as film screenings, literature discussions, and virtual exchanges with native speakers. By encouraging students to see language learning as a gateway to cultural understanding, educators can create an environment that makes English learning more relevant and engaging.

### **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study highlight that the relationship between language, culture, and society significantly influences the process of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Language is not merely a tool for communication, but also a medium that carries cultural meanings and social values. This is consistent with the view that language and culture are inseparable, as language reflects cultural identity and shapes social interaction (Kramsch, 1998; Arslan et al., 2024). Therefore, integrating cultural elements into EFL teaching enhances learners' understanding of both linguistic and contextual meaning.

Furthermore, the role of cultural identity in language learning is crucial in maintaining learners' sense of belonging while acquiring a foreign language. Learners who are aware of their own cultural identity tend to be more confident and engaged in the learning process (Sultana, 2018). In line with this, language choice and usage can serve as a tool for constructing identity and social positioning (Fuller, 2007). This implies that EFL instruction should not neglect the cultural backgrounds of learners but instead use them as a resource in the classroom.

In addition, intercultural competence has become an essential component in EFL learning, particularly in a globalized world. Learners need to develop not only linguistic skills but also the ability to understand and interact across cultures effectively. Studies have shown that motivation and intercultural awareness contribute significantly to successful language learning outcomes (Guillén Nieto & Cáceres-Lorenzo, 2019). Similarly, the influence of cultural context on English teaching practices demonstrates that culturally responsive approaches can improve both engagement and comprehension (Ordóñez Procel et al., 2023).

From a sociocultural perspective, learning is inherently a social process that occurs through interaction within a cultural context. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes that cognitive development is mediated by social interaction and cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1980). In EFL classrooms, this suggests that collaborative learning and culturally relevant materials can significantly enhance students' language acquisition.

Moreover, language policy and educational practices in multicultural societies must consider social integration and cultural diversity. Language education should promote inclusivity while respecting learners' cultural backgrounds (Imran & Natsir, 2024). This perspective supports the idea that EFL teaching should not impose a dominant culture but rather encourage mutual respect and intercultural dialogue.

Finally, culturally responsive assessment and pedagogy play a vital role in ensuring that language learning is meaningful and equitable. Teachers must adapt their instructional strategies to accommodate diverse cultural perspectives and learning needs (Lopez Rodriguez & Casal Madinabeitia, 2021). By doing so, EFL education can become more inclusive, effective, and relevant to learners' real-life contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

The relationship between language, culture, and society plays a crucial role in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), influencing both the learning process and the way English is taught. Language is not just a system of communication; it carries cultural values, traditions, and social norms that shape identity and interaction. Recognizing these connections is essential for creating an effective and culturally responsive EFL learning environment.

From an Islamic perspective, language learning should go beyond mere linguistic competence to include ethical communication, mutual respect, and knowledge acquisition, all of which align with Islamic values. Integrating these principles into EFL teaching helps learners develop their English proficiency while preserving their cultural and religious identity. It also ensures that language education remains meaningful and relevant to their lives.

Incorporating cultural awareness and Islamic values into EFL instruction fosters a more inclusive and balanced approach to language learning. By understanding the social and cultural dimensions of English, learners can engage more effectively in global communication while remaining rooted in their beliefs and traditions. Ultimately, a holistic approach to EFL, informed by linguistic, cultural, and religious considerations, contributes to a richer, more ethical, and socially aware language-learning experience.

To further strengthen the academic value of this field, future research should empirically test the proposed integrative model in various classroom settings to evaluate its direct impact on student proficiency and cultural preservation. Additionally, qualitative studies exploring the perspectives and challenges of EFL teachers in implementing these religiously aligned pedagogies would provide valuable practical insights.

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