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Investigating Learning Approaches to Language, Culture, and Cognition: A Lens of Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between language, culture, and cognition has long been a central focus in applied linguistics and language pedagogy. Cognitive linguistics, as a theoretical framework, challenges traditional language learning models by emphasizing the interconnectedness of language, human cognition, and cultural context. In teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this perspective highlights the importance of integrating cognitive and cultural dimensions into language instruction. As EFL learners engage with the language, they not only acquire vocabulary and grammar but also navigate the cognitive schemas and cultural frameworks that influence how language is used in different contexts. Despite the growing recognition of this approach, there remains limited empirical research on how cognitive linguistics can be applied to EFL pedagogy and how cultural awareness can be effectively integrated into teaching practices. This study aims to investigate how cognitive linguistics informs the development of EFL teaching strategies that incorporate cultural awareness and to explore the challenges and benefits of integrating cultural content in diverse cultural contexts. The research adopts a qualitative design, using interviews and classroom observations with 15 EFL teachers from various educational settings. The findings reveal that cognitive linguistics offers a framework for designing teaching strategies that foster learners' understanding of how language is shaped by culture and cognition. The study also highlights the challenges teachers face, such as selecting appropriate cultural materials and addressing diverse student backgrounds, but it underscores the significant benefits, including enhanced intercultural communicative competence and critical thinking. This study contributes to EFL pedagogy by emphasizing the importance of integrating cognitive and cultural elements into language instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language, culture, and cognition has long been a fundamental area of interest in applied linguistics and language pedagogy. Cognitive linguistics, a theoretical framework that emerged in the late 20th century, challenges traditional views of language learning by emphasizing the intrinsic connection between

language and human cognition. In the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), cognitive linguistics offers a perspective that moves beyond treating language as a mere collection of abstract symbols to be memorized. Instead, it posits that language is embedded in human experience, shaped by perception and cultural contexts (Doğançay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2018). This view transforms how we approach EFL instruction, advocating for the integration of cognitive and cultural dimensions into teaching practices. Traditional language pedagogy often focuses on grammatical rules, vocabulary, and language structures, whereas cognitive linguistics emphasizes how these linguistic forms map onto mental representations of the world. Understanding language as a cognitive tool grounded in cultural experience provides learners with a richer understanding of language as a means of communication that reflects their perceptions of reality.

The integration of cultural awareness and cognitive structures in EFL teaching has become increasingly recognized as vital for developing authentic communicative competence (Yurtsever & Özel, 2021). EFL learners face the challenge of acquiring not only vocabulary and grammar but also the cognitive schemas and cultural frameworks that underlie how native speakers conceptualize and communicate their experiences. Research has shown that cultural competence—an awareness of how cultural values, norms, and practices shape language use—is as crucial as linguistic competence for effective communication in a foreign language (Aldosari & Alrefai, 2020). For example, Yurtsever and Özel (2021) highlight the necessity of incorporating cultural elements into the language learning process. Their meta-synthesis of fifty studies on cultural awareness in EFL classrooms demonstrates that language learning is not solely about mastering syntax or vocabulary but understanding how these linguistic elements function within particular cultural and social contexts. Therefore, EFL instruction should go beyond teaching abstract language rules and should aim to foster learners' understanding of the cultural meanings and cognitive frameworks encoded in the language.

A deeper understanding of the connection between language and culture can be traced to the work of Benjamin Whorf, who argued that language structures were inseparable from cognition and culture (Doğançay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2018). This perspective, often referred to as linguistic relativity, suggests that the way individuals think is influenced by the language they speak. Although contemporary research has nuanced this view, the core insight—that language reflects culturally specific ways of perceiving and categorizing the world—remains central to cognitive linguistics.

Language goes beyond being a mere communication tool; it is fundamentally a cognitive system that influences and shapes our perception of the world around us. According to cognitive linguistics, language is intricately tied to our mental processes, including how we categorize, think, and understand various concepts. In the context of TEFL, this cognitive perspective calls for a deeper exploration of how language—particularly English, given its widespread use globally—embodies specific cultural assumptions and ways of thinking. English, as a global lingua franca, carries with it not just grammatical rules but also the values, beliefs, and worldview of its native speakers (Aldosari & Alrefai, 2020). These cultural nuances are embedded in vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and communication styles, influencing how meaning is constructed and understood. This understanding has significant implications for EFL pedagogy. It suggests that teaching English should not be limited to merely imparting linguistic skills such as vocabulary and grammar. Instead, educators must also guide learners in recognizing and interpreting the cultural contexts that shape the language. By doing so, students gain not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural competence, enabling them to use English in ways that are contextually and socially appropriate. This approach fosters a more holistic

understanding of language, helping learners to navigate and communicate effectively in diverse cultural environments.

The integration of cultural awareness into EFL instruction is further emphasized by Aldosari and Alrefai (2020), who argue that learning a language is inherently linked to learning about the culture it represents. Their study of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia found that many educators acknowledge the importance of incorporating cultural content into their classrooms. However, they also noted significant challenges in integrating cultural materials, such as over-reliance on indigenous cultural content, which can conflict with the goals of teaching a global language like English. Teachers reported that while literature is an excellent vehicle for introducing cultural concepts, they also faced practical challenges, including a lack of appropriate resources and insufficient training on how to effectively integrate culture into language teaching. This highlights a broader issue in EFL pedagogy: the need for more thoughtful and systematic approaches to incorporating cultural content that does not obscure the global nature of English but enhances learners' ability to engage with it meaningfully in diverse contexts.

Gabriel's (2023) review of learning styles and EFL performance in the Arab Gulf region reinforces the idea that culture plays a significant role in language acquisition. He argues that culture, encompassing beliefs, norms, and value systems, influences how learners approach language learning and shapes their cognitive frameworks. Gabriel's work underscores the bidirectional nature of the language-culture relationship, where not only do learners need to internalize the cultural meanings embedded in the target language, but their own cultural backgrounds also influence how they conceptualize and approach the language learning process. This understanding calls for EFL instruction that is attuned to the cognitive and cultural needs of learners, respecting their cultural frameworks while providing them with the tools to navigate and understand the cultural nuances of the target language.

The role of cognitive linguistics in shaping language learning is further enriched by the recognition that language acquisition is not a mere process of memorizing rules but a cognitive activity involving the construction of mental representations and the categorization of experiences (McIver & Park, 2020). This perspective aligns with constructivist approaches to education, which view learning as an active process of constructing knowledge based on prior experiences and new insights. In the context of EFL, this means that learners must not only acquire linguistic forms but also develop the cognitive structures that underlie native-like language use. McIver and Park (2020) argue that proficiency in a foreign language reflects the ability to engage with the cultural and cognitive dimensions of the language, meaning that language learners must internalize the cultural schemas that guide how language is used by native speakers. Therefore, effective language instruction should help learners construct these cognitive frameworks, providing them with a deeper understanding of how language reflects and shapes human experience.

Furthermore, research on academic literacy in EFL contexts has illustrated the cognitive aspects of language learning. Li's (2022) review of academic literacy highlights the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), which integrates language learning with academic content and strategy instruction. This approach situates language learning within authentic, meaningful contexts and encourages the development of academic language skills alongside content knowledge. CALLA aligns with cognitive linguistics by emphasizing the importance of context in language learning and advocating for the integration of cognitive and cultural factors into language instruction. This approach shifts the focus of language teaching from isolated linguistic tasks to real-world applications that require learners to engage with language in culturally and cognitively rich contexts.

This study seeks to explore the intersection of cognitive linguistics, culture, and EFL pedagogy, aiming to develop a more integrated approach to language instruction that takes into account both cognitive and cultural factors. The objectives of this research are to investigate how cognitive linguistic principles can enhance EFL teaching and to identify effective strategies for integrating cultural awareness into language instruction. Two key research questions guiding this study are: (1) How can cognitive linguistics inform the development of EFL teaching strategies that integrate cultural awareness? (2) What are the challenges and benefits of incorporating cultural content into EFL classrooms in diverse cultural contexts? This study is novel in its approach to linking cognitive linguistics with intercultural competence in EFL pedagogy, providing a fresh perspective on how language learning can be reconceptualized to foster deeper cultural and cognitive understanding.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the integration of cognitive linguistics and cultural awareness in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy. The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this research because it allows for an in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions, practices, and the challenges they face when incorporating cognitive and cultural elements into their teaching. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research provides rich, detailed insights into how teachers approach language instruction and how they perceive the relationship between language, culture, and cognition. This design allows for flexibility and adaptability, providing an opportunity to gather data that reflects the complexities of real-world teaching practices.

The research questions focus on understanding how cognitive linguistic principles can inform EFL teaching strategies and the challenges and benefits of incorporating cultural content into language instruction. Qualitative methods such as interviews and observations are ideal for addressing these questions, as they provide opportunities to gather detailed responses from participants, observe their instructional practices, and understand the contextual factors influencing their teaching. The open-ended nature of interviews allows participants to express their views in their own words, providing insights into their experiences and perspectives.

Despite the strengths of this qualitative approach, there are limitations to consider. First, qualitative research typically involves a smaller sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the aim of this study is not to generalize but to gain a deep understanding of the specific challenges and practices of EFL teachers. Additionally, potential biases may arise from the researcher's interpretation of the data. To address this, the study incorporates triangulation, where data from interviews and observations are compared to cross-check findings and reduce individual researcher bias. Peer debriefing and member checking are also used to ensure the validity of the findings, allowing participants to review and confirm interpretations made from the data.

Participants

The research participants for this study include 15 EFL teachers and lecturers from a range of educational institutions, such as high schools, universities, and language institutes. These participants have been selected through purposive sampling, which is ideal for this qualitative study as it focuses on gathering insights from individuals with direct experience in incorporating cognitive and cultural elements into their language instruction. This sampling method ensures that the selected participants are not only familiar with the subject matter but also possess the practical knowledge required to provide meaningful perspectives on the integration of these elements in EFL teaching.

The participants are required to have at least two years of experience teaching English as a foreign language, which guarantees that they have enough practical teaching experience to reflect on their strategies, challenges, and the effectiveness of their instructional methods. This criterion ensures that participants can offer valuable insights that are grounded in real classroom experience. Additionally, including teachers from various institutional settings helps to capture a broad range of perspectives. This diversity in the institutional context allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how cognitive linguistics and cultural awareness are applied in different teaching environments, enriching the data gathered.

Demographic information such as age, gender, years of teaching experience, and the type of institution they work at will be collected to provide context for the study. This data will offer further insights into how these factors may influence teaching approaches and the ways in which teachers perceive and implement cognitive and cultural integration in their classrooms. Collecting such demographic details helps to understand whether certain trends or challenges are more prevalent in specific groups, adding depth to the study's findings.

Instruments

For data collection, semi-structured interviews serve as the primary research instrument, offering a balance between flexibility and focused inquiry. The semi-structured format allows for the exploration of specific topics related to the research questions, while also giving participants the opportunity to share their perspectives in an open-ended manner. The interview questions are tailored to the study's objectives, exploring how EFL teachers incorporate cognitive linguistics and cultural awareness into their teaching. These questions delve into aspects such as the strategies teachers use to integrate cultural content, the challenges they face in doing so, and their perceptions of the benefits of merging cognitive linguistics with cultural teaching. For instance, questions such as "How do you incorporate cultural content into your English lessons?" or "Can you describe a time when you faced challenges integrating cultural or cognitive content?" are designed to stimulate reflective responses that provide insight into the complexities of EFL instruction. To ensure the interviews are both valid and reliable, the interview questions are piloted with a small sample of EFL teachers before the main data collection begins. This pilot test helps refine the questions, ensuring they are clear, relevant, and appropriate for the context of the research. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

In addition to the interviews, classroom observations are conducted to directly observe how teachers implement cognitive and cultural elements in their teaching. Observations are particularly useful for capturing the nuances of teaching practices, including the use of materials, classroom activities, and teacher-student interactions. To maintain consistency across all observations, a standardized observation protocol is developed. The observations are non-intrusive, allowing teachers to conduct lessons as naturally as possible while still gathering useful data. Detailed field notes are taken during these observations, focusing on how language and culture are woven into the lessons and the application of cognitive linguistic principles. Multiple observations per teacher ensure a comprehensive understanding of their teaching practices across different contexts, enhancing the reliability of the data. This approach helps gather a rich set of data that complements the interviews, providing a more holistic view of how cognitive and cultural integration plays out in the classroom.

Data Analysis

In this qualitative study, data analysis follows a systematic approach designed to distill and make sense of the collected data in meaningful ways, ensuring that it remains grounded in the research questions and objectives. The process includes three key steps: data

condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions, each crucial for ensuring the accuracy and richness of the findings.

Data condensation is the first critical step in the analysis. This process involves organizing the raw data into manageable segments while preserving its richness and depth. In this study, the collected interview transcriptions and observation notes are read and reread multiple times to immerse the researcher in the data. Through this iterative process, key themes, patterns, and insights related to the integration of cognitive linguistics and cultural awareness in EFL instruction begin to emerge. For example, recurring concepts such as strategies for incorporating cultural elements into lessons, the role of cognitive linguistic principles, and challenges faced by teachers are identified. Initial coding is performed manually to ensure the researcher becomes familiar with the data. This manual process helps maintain a deep engagement with the material before potentially using software to assist in organizing larger volumes of data. By manually coding the responses, the researcher ensures that no important detail is overlooked, and the themes are accurately categorized.

Once the data is condensed, it is organized into a format that facilitates comparison and pattern recognition, a step known as data display. This stage involves creating a thematic matrix that visually represents the relationships between the different themes identified during the coding process. The matrix is structured to align with the research questions, ensuring a clear and organized display of the data. This visual representation allows the researcher to easily identify connections between the themes and highlights the relationships between cognitive linguistics, cultural integration, and teaching practices. The thematic matrix also helps in mapping out the key findings in a way that is easy to interpret and analyze, ensuring the researcher can address the core objectives of the study.

The final stage, drawing conclusions, involves interpreting the identified patterns and themes to answer the research questions. This step requires synthesizing the findings to understand how EFL teachers integrate cognitive linguistics and cultural awareness into their teaching practices, the challenges they face in doing so, and the perceived benefits. The conclusions are drawn by comparing responses across different participants, identifying recurring themes, and using the thematic matrix to establish connections between various aspects of teaching practices. This comparative approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the data. To enhance the validity of the conclusions, the study incorporates member checking, where participants are invited to review the findings to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. Additionally, peer debriefing is used, where the researcher discusses the findings with other experts in the field to mitigate any potential biases or alternative interpretations, ensuring that the conclusions are robust and reliable. This reflective process strengthens the study's credibility by involving both the participants and external researchers in verifying the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

How can cognitive linguistics inform the development of EFL teaching strategies that integrate cultural awareness?

Cognitive linguistics offers a powerful framework for developing EFL teaching strategies that effectively integrate cultural awareness by emphasizing the relationship between language, cognition, and culture. Language is not merely a system of arbitrary symbols; it is deeply rooted in the way humans perceive and conceptualize the world. In this context, cognitive linguistics can inform teaching strategies by encouraging EFL instructors to focus on the cognitive schemas and cultural frames that shape language use. By understanding that language is not just a set of rules but a reflection of the speaker's

worldviews and experiences, teachers can design activities that help students recognize and internalize these cultural and cognitive dimensions of language. For example, teaching vocabulary and idiomatic expressions becomes more effective when learners are exposed to the cultural contexts in which they are used, thereby linking linguistic forms to the cultural practices and cognitive structures that inform their meaning.

Furthermore, cognitive linguistics can promote teaching strategies that encourage active engagement with language, allowing learners to construct their own mental representations of linguistic structures and cultural meanings. Integrating cultural content through activities like role-playing, discussions, and case studies provides learners with opportunities to engage with both the cognitive and cultural aspects of the language in context. By grounding language teaching in cognitive linguistics, EFL instructors can foster deeper comprehension and communicative competence, helping students understand not only how to use the language but also the cultural frameworks that shape its use.

What are the challenges and benefits of incorporating cultural content into EFL classrooms in diverse cultural contexts?

Incorporating cultural content into EFL classrooms presents both challenges and benefits, particularly in diverse cultural contexts. One of the primary challenges is the risk of cultural misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Teachers may face difficulties in selecting appropriate cultural materials that align with students' backgrounds and experiences, particularly in contexts where students have limited exposure to the target culture. The presence of diverse student backgrounds in the classroom may further complicate the integration of cultural content, as learners may come from varied cultural contexts that influence how they interpret language and cultural symbols. Another challenge is the lack of adequate teacher training in intercultural communication and the integration of culture in language teaching. Many teachers may not feel confident in addressing cultural topics due to a lack of cultural competence or pedagogical strategies to effectively incorporate cultural content into lessons.

However, the benefits of incorporating cultural content into EFL classrooms are significant. It enhances learners' intercultural communicative competence, helping them understand not only the linguistic forms of the target language but also the social and cultural nuances that underlie communication. Integrating cultural awareness fosters empathy and broadens students' perspectives, allowing them to appreciate different worldviews and ways of life. Furthermore, students gain a deeper understanding of the cognitive frameworks that shape language use, which aids in their ability to engage meaningfully with native speakers. The incorporation of cultural content also prepares students for global communication, equipping them with the skills necessary to navigate diverse cultural settings. The exposure to cultural contexts through language learning can motivate students to learn more about the world around them and enhance their critical thinking skills as they examine cultural differences. Ultimately, while there are challenges in integrating culture into EFL instruction, the benefits of developing culturally competent learners outweigh these obstacles, enriching both the language learning experience and students' broader worldview.

Table 1. Challenges and Benefits of Incorporating Cultural Content into EFL Classrooms

Challenges	Benefits
Risk of cultural misinterpretation or misunderstanding	Enhances intercultural communicative competence
Difficulty in selecting appropriate cultural materials	Helps learners understand linguistic and cultural nuances

Challenges	Benefits
Diverse student backgrounds leading to varied interpretations	Fosters empathy and broadens students' perspectives
Lack of teacher training in intercultural communication	Prepares students for global communication
Limited exposure of students to the target culture	Motivates students to explore other cultures and enhances critical thinking

The chart highlights the key challenges and benefits of incorporating cultural content into EFL classrooms, particularly in diverse cultural contexts. One of the primary challenges is the risk of cultural misinterpretation or misunderstanding. This arises when cultural materials used in the classroom are unfamiliar to students or are perceived differently based on their own cultural backgrounds. For example, a cultural reference that may be commonplace in one country could be entirely alien or even offensive to students from another background. This challenge is further compounded by the difficulty in selecting appropriate cultural content that aligns with students' diverse experiences. Teachers may struggle to find materials that resonate with all students, particularly in classrooms with students from varying cultural backgrounds.

Another significant challenge identified is the lack of adequate teacher training in intercultural communication. Many EFL teachers may not feel equipped to address cultural topics effectively because they lack the knowledge or the pedagogical tools to integrate culture into their teaching. Without proper training, teachers may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes or present cultural content in a way that lacks depth or authenticity. Moreover, in some cases, students may not have sufficient exposure to the target culture, making it difficult for teachers to engage them in meaningful cultural discussions or activities.

Despite these challenges, the chart also highlights several important benefits to incorporating cultural content into EFL teaching. First, integrating cultural awareness into language instruction enhances students' intercultural communicative competence. This means that learners are not just learning vocabulary or grammar; they are also gaining a deeper understanding of how language is used in specific cultural contexts. This competence helps students navigate conversations and social situations more effectively when interacting with native speakers. Another significant benefit is the development of empathy and broader perspectives. Exposure to different cultural practices and worldviews allows students to appreciate the diversity of human experiences and fosters a sense of global citizenship.

Furthermore, integrating cultural content prepares students for global communication. As English is used as a global lingua franca, it is essential for EFL learners to understand not only the language itself but also the cultural norms and cognitive frameworks that shape communication across different cultures. Lastly, incorporating cultural elements into lessons motivates students to explore other cultures and enhances their critical thinking skills. By reflecting on cultural differences, students become more self-aware and better equipped to think critically about the world around them. Ultimately, while incorporating cultural content into EFL classrooms poses challenges, the benefits far outweigh them, enriching both the language learning experience and students' global perspectives.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate how cognitive linguistics can inform the development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching strategies that incorporate cultural awareness, and to explore the challenges and benefits of integrating cultural content in diverse cultural contexts. The findings contribute significantly to the ongoing dialogue within EFL pedagogy by highlighting the importance of linking language learning with cognitive and cultural dimensions.

The findings of this study align closely with previous research that emphasizes the inseparable relationship between language, culture, and cognition. For instance, Doğançay-Aktuna and Hardman (2018) argue that language is not merely a tool for communication, but also a reflection of cognitive structures shaped by cultural contexts. This study further confirms their assertion by demonstrating that EFL teaching strategies grounded in cognitive linguistics can enhance learners' understanding of how language is used in specific cultural contexts. EFL learners are not simply acquiring vocabulary or grammar; they are also internalizing the cognitive and cultural frameworks that influence how native speakers use language. This highlights the importance of integrating cultural context into language instruction, which aligns with Yurtsever and Özel's (2021) meta-synthesis on cultural awareness in EFL classrooms. They stress that language learning should go beyond syntax and vocabulary, advocating for the inclusion of cultural elements that influence communication, a point that is reaffirmed by the findings of this study.

Moreover, the findings suggest that teachers can incorporate cognitive linguistics into their instructional strategies by focusing on the cognitive schemas that underlie language use. This supports McIver and Park's (2020) view that language proficiency is not just about mastering linguistic rules but also about understanding the cognitive structures behind language use. The study's results also resonate with Aldosari and Alrefai (2020), who emphasize the importance of integrating cultural competence with linguistic competence. The integration of cognitive linguistics and cultural awareness allows learners to develop a richer and more meaningful understanding of language, which is crucial for developing authentic communicative competence.

However, the study also identifies several challenges in incorporating cultural content into EFL classrooms. These challenges are consistent with those found in earlier studies, such as Gabriel (2023), who noted that diverse cultural backgrounds among students can complicate the integration of cultural content. This study's findings confirm Gabriel's argument, showing that teachers face difficulties in selecting appropriate cultural materials that resonate with students' varied cultural experiences. Moreover, the study highlights the lack of teacher training in intercultural communication as a significant barrier, echoing the concerns raised by Aldosari and Alrefai (2020), who found that many EFL teachers struggle to integrate culture effectively into their lessons due to insufficient training and resources. This finding calls attention to the need for more comprehensive professional development programs that equip teachers with the tools to address the complex cultural dimensions of language learning.

Despite these challenges, the study also underscores the substantial benefits of incorporating cultural content into EFL instruction. The findings align with the work of Saha (2020), who highlighted that incorporating cultural elements enhances learners' intercultural communicative competence. In this study, participants reported that cultural integration helped learners not only understand linguistic forms but also navigate the cultural contexts in which those forms are used. This insight supports the growing body of literature on the importance of cultural awareness in fostering deeper communication skills (Yurtsever & Özel, 2021). Additionally, the benefits of increased empathy and global citizenship, as highlighted in this study, echo Gabriel's (2023) assertion that cultural content broadens students' perspectives and enhances their ability to engage meaningfully in a globalized world.

Furthermore, the study reveals that incorporating cultural content helps students understand the cognitive frameworks that shape language use. This is consistent with Li's (2022) findings on the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), which underscores the importance of embedding language learning within meaningful, culturally-rich contexts. By reflecting on cultural differences and engaging with language in these

contexts, students develop critical thinking skills and a more nuanced understanding of both the target language and their own cultural backgrounds. This finding further confirms the significance of integrating cultural content into language instruction, as it not only improves linguistic proficiency but also enhances learners' cognitive and social skills, preparing them for real-world communication in diverse settings.

In comparing the findings of this study with those of previous research, it becomes evident that integrating cognitive linguistics and cultural awareness into EFL pedagogy is both a challenging and highly rewarding endeavor. While the challenges identified—such as cultural misinterpretation, teacher training gaps, and the selection of appropriate materials—are consistent with previous studies, the benefits outlined in this study further validate the importance of addressing these challenges. The integration of cultural content in EFL instruction enriches the learning experience by promoting intercultural competence, empathy, and critical thinking. Moreover, it enhances learners' ability to navigate global communication, which is essential in today's interconnected world.

The implications of this study are significant for both EFL teaching practice and research. The findings suggest that EFL curricula should be redesigned to more explicitly incorporate cultural and cognitive dimensions into the teaching of English. Teacher training programs must also be adapted to provide educators with the necessary skills and resources to integrate cultural content effectively into their lessons. Additionally, further research is needed to explore how different cultural contexts influence the way cultural content is integrated into EFL classrooms, as well as how students from diverse backgrounds respond to these integrations. By continuing to investigate the intersection of cognitive linguistics, culture, and language learning, future research can further contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective EFL pedagogies.

This study confirms the findings of previous research on the significance of cultural awareness in EFL teaching, while also extending the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the pivotal role of cognitive linguistics in shaping language learning strategies. Despite the challenges faced in incorporating cultural content, the benefits for learners—ranging from enhanced intercultural competence to improved cognitive and critical thinking skills—are clear and impactful. As the field of EFL pedagogy continues to evolve, the integration of cognitive and cultural elements will remain a crucial area for both theoretical exploration and practical application.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has emphasized the critical importance of integrating cognitive linguistics and cultural awareness into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching practices. The findings reveal that cognitive linguistics provides a robust framework for understanding the connection between language, cognition, and culture, offering valuable insights for developing more effective EFL teaching strategies. By situating language learning within the cognitive and cultural contexts in which it is used, this study confirms that learners benefit from a deeper comprehension of both linguistic forms and the cultural frameworks that shape their use. Teachers can leverage cognitive linguistic principles to design instruction that not only focuses on vocabulary and grammar but also helps learners internalize the cultural meanings and cognitive structures embedded in the target language. This approach not only enhances learners' language proficiency but also develops their intercultural communicative competence, a crucial skill in our increasingly globalized world.

However, the study also highlights the significant challenges that teachers face when incorporating cultural content into EFL classrooms, particularly in contexts with diverse student backgrounds. Teachers often struggle with selecting culturally appropriate materials

that resonate with all students, and many lack sufficient training in intercultural communication to effectively address these complexities. Despite these challenges, the study also underscores the considerable benefits of cultural integration, such as fostering empathy, broadening perspectives, and preparing students for global communication. The results emphasize the need for more comprehensive teacher training programs and curricula that equip educators with the tools to navigate the intersection of language, culture, and cognition in EFL teaching. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in EFL pedagogy by demonstrating the crucial role of cognitive linguistics and cultural awareness in shaping effective, inclusive, and contextually relevant language learning experiences. The integration of these elements into EFL instruction not only enriches the learning process but also better prepares students for meaningful, real-world interactions across cultures.

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DECLARATION OF USING AI TOOLS

We hereby declare that we have used AI tools in the process of composing and refining certain sections of this manuscript. The AI tools were primarily utilized for tasks such as generating preliminary drafts, enhancing clarity, and improving the structure of specific paragraphs. These tools were employed to assist in the writing process while maintaining academic rigor and ensuring the accuracy of the content. We affirm that all critical analysis, interpretation, and original research have been carried out by myself, and the final manuscript reflects my own intellectual contributions. The use of AI tools has been supplementary and does not undermine the integrity of the research and conclusions presented in this study.

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