



Cultural Competence and Technology in ESL Education: A Case Study of Dubai's Private Schools in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

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Learning and Teaching methods continuously evolve considering the use of the latest techniques and technology along with modifying according to the requirements and needs. English as a language has gained immense popularity being the most understood globally. However, recent concern addresses the need for effective learning of English, incorporating new methodologies. Incorporating cultural competence is a new concept. Also, technological advancement has opened doors to learning and teaching, providing effective and flexible tools. This research aims to investigate how cultural competence and new media tools improve the learning of ESL (English as a second language) in Dubai's private schools. To examine the role of inclusivity and technologies in learning English effectively survey shall be conducted to collect data. Teachers, students, and administrators of a private school in Dubai shall be included. The gathered data shall be analyzed in the light of available literature for conclusions and recommendations. Theoretical frameworks shall be examined by observing the reciprocal relationship between language acquisition and cultural understanding.

Keywords: *Cultural Competence; Globalization; Technology*

Background

Globalization asserts immense pressure to develop a need for clear communication, English is thus considered the lingua franca connecting industries. However, the recent approach to learning ESL (English as a second language) is not limited to linguistic knowledge, such as grammar but also involves cultural knowledge. Culture and language have a strong connection. Kuo & Lai (2006) considers culture and language to have intertwined bonds. Mohammed (2020) observes incorporating culture with instructional approaches and techniques while learning ESL improves linguistic understanding. A language being a symbol of culture, rather than merely a product of culture cannot be separated by culture while learning (Gleason, 1961). Tijani (2011) observes cultural understanding as a significant part of language learning. The use of vocabulary and structure of language can be better acquired by understanding the culture of the native speakers. According to Kuo & Lai (2006), communication can be misleading while neglecting culture. Mohammed (2020) further elaborates that ESL learners with cultural knowledge use the language appropriately. However, teaching ESL in a multicultural environment, as in Dubai is challenging. Tijani (2011) indicates a misinterpretation of language structures due to a lack of cultural awareness. Dubai is a diverse region where people from different cultural backgrounds reside, therefore private schools in Dubai cater to multicultural learners, emphasizing the need for blended learning incorporating technology and cultural competence. This study aims to investigate how private schools in Dubai cater to cultural competence and technology in ESL learning.

Problem Statement

The importance of English proficiency in the globalized world is evident, but it presents challenges in the multicultural environment of Dubai. private schools in Dubai cater to students from diverse cultures, requiring a balance between English as the primary language and respecting their cultural identities. The standardization of learning approaches can overshadow cultural identities, leading to a lack of cultural competence. This research explores how Dubai private schools can develop inclusivity while preserving their cultural identity in the digital age. The study also highlights the need for educators to use digital resources effectively to support cultural integration within language learning frameworks.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. How do teachers exhibit cultural competence in ESL classes?
2. Which technological tools are used and integrated in ESL classes?
3. How do cultural competence and technology improve the ESL experience?

This study explores the integration of cultural competence and technology in ESL education within Dubai private schools. It aims to examine how new media and digital tools enhance language learning, promote intercultural interaction, and support inclusive education in a multicultural environment. By engaging with administrators, teachers, and students involved in ESL programs, the research investigates how cultural diversity is addressed through technological approaches and how these influence teaching strategies, student perceptions, and policy implementation. The study also evaluates the role of administrators in promoting inclusive practices and the effectiveness of media programs in facilitating English language acquisition. Furthermore, it considers whether technology-based learning in multicultural settings supports or threatens students' cultural identities. Through its findings, the research seeks to contribute valuable insights into effective ESL practices in the information age, offering practical and academic contributions to literature on language education, particularly in culturally diverse contexts like Dubai.

Literature Review

Dubai is home to multiple cultures, with English being the main communication language (Garces-Bacsal, *et al.*, 2024). Learning the English language is vital to achieving educational and professional success, however, adapting the English language may vary according to native cultures. This indicates that the success of an instructional strategy may depend on the learner's culture, thus asserting the importance of cultural competence for ESL effectiveness. Garces-Bacsal, *et al* (2024) elaborates on the significance of considering learners' cultural implications to cater to culture-specific requirements. This research explores integrating cultural competence in Dubai private schools for ESL education.

Cultural competence and technology

Integration of language and culture in second language learning has emerged as a critical area of focus for educators and researchers, which is essential not only for enhancing linguistic proficiency but also for fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which is increasingly recognized as a vital skill in our globalized society. However, Ashrafova (2024) emphasizes cultural competence in ESL education, asserting the importance of respecting and addressing the cultural diversity of the learners. Culture outlines the use of vocabulary, expressions, and idioms (Mohammed, 2020), furthermore, Tijani (2011) observes the complexity of learning a different language due to differences in customs, social norms, and beliefs, which are reflected differently by culture. Language is a set of vocabulary and structure outlined by culture. This indicates the importance of considering cultural backgrounds and promoting inclusion while planning instructional strategies for ESL. Ayber & Hojeij (2021) further elaborates that learners from different cultures may engage with the English language differently, thus emphasizing the importance of cultural competence for effective learning.

Technology advancements have evolved methods and techniques in almost every field, including education. Ahmadi (2018) observed new and modern learning methods to enhance experience and effectiveness. Alomari (2018) further indicates opportunities for learning language through innovative tools offered by technology. Luckin, *et al* (2011) underlines digital platforms to be more interactive and personalized, providing a better learning experience. Several games, apps, and virtual classrooms not only engage learners through experiential learning techniques, enhancing vocabulary and understanding while listening and speaking. Ramzan, *et al* (2023) observe a direct relationship between motivated students and language acquisition.

Schools in Dubai aim to provide the best education by incorporating the latest methodologies and techniques. ESL programs are also enhanced by using digital platforms, applications based on Artificial intelligence, and smartboards. However, Ashrafova (2024) observes interactive methods of ESL to provide command of the English language by cultural know-how. The student interacts with native culture understanding the essence of language, however ignoring individual cultural factors. Alisoy (2024) observes ESL requirements for different cultures may vary which may be overlooked through standardized technological learning tools.

Cultural competence and technology are different subjects; however, research shows their interconnection in educational setups. Technologies designed to consider ESL should be culturally responsive to bridge gaps between cultures for a better understanding of the learner. Ashrafova (2024) asserts the importance of inclusivity while using technology for ESL. Alisoy (2024) observes that culture-related examples when incorporated reduces cultural barriers and improve learners' engagement, such as bilingual features.

Dubai private schools provide the best setting for the research of technology use in ESL in a multicultural environment can be conducted; however, limited literature is available related to how teachers incorporate cultural competence and technology in ESL programs.

Methods

This study adopts a quantitative approach to ascertain the advantages of new media use in ESL programs at private schools in Dubai. As defined by Ghanad (2023), quantitative methods involve collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results in measurable form. This approach aligns with the research objective of identifying patterns and correlations between new media use and ESL outcomes in a structured and measurable way.

Research Design and Procedure

The research is designed as a descriptive quantitative study to gather data on ESL educators' and academic administrators' perceptions and experiences. The design aims to capture a comprehensive snapshot of the media integration in language learning environments. The rationale for selecting this design lies in its ability to systematically analyze relationships between variables, such as the impact of media activities on language proficiency and cultural interaction.

A structured questionnaire was developed using Google Forms software. A separate questionnaire shall be designed for teachers, administrators, and students. The questions shall be divided into subsections:

- *Demographic section: capturing participant details, age, nationality, mother tongue, education level, number of languages spoken, curriculum followed, years of experience, and whether the school is private or government.*
- *Cultural competence in ESL classes: focusing on obtaining data related to cultural integration in English language learning. Observing frequency, challenges, and importance.*
- *Cultural diversity consideration through technology: assessing the type of technology addressing cultural diversity.*
- *Recommendations: obtaining recommendations from the participants.*

The population for the research shall include teachers, students, and school administration. Careful selection of school samples shall be carried out, to include diverse types of Dubai private schools; such as International, schools associated with specific cultures or local. The sample size for the research will be 50-70 teachers, 100-120 students, and 20-30 school administrators. Through this sample size, the aim is to capture an adequate and diverse amount of data.

Procedure:

1. The questionnaire link is distributed via emails and professional social media platforms.
2. Participants are informed of the study's purpose and assured of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their responses.
3. Respondents have the option to exit the questionnaire at any time.
4. Data collection is open for a defined period, ensuring sufficient time for participation.

Teacher

Section	Question	Options
Background Information	1. Age	18-24, 25-34, 34-44, 45 and above
	2. Gender	Male, Female
	3. Nationality	Arab, American, European, Asian, British, Australian
	4. Educational Qualification	Masters, Bachelors, Any other
	5. Years of Experience	1-3, 3-5, 6-10, More
	6. Languages Spoken	1, More than 1
	7. Type of School	International, Local, Cultural Specific
Cultural Competence in ESL Program	8. Do you incorporate cultural factors in your ESL lesson?	Always, Sometimes, Never
	9. Have you attended training on cultural competence?	Yes, No
	10. Do you think cultural competence is important in the ESL program?	Very Important, Important, Not Important
	11. What is the challenge in an ESL classroom with multinational students?	Time, Resources, Training, Other (Specify)
Technology Use in ESL Program	12. Which technology do you use in the ESL classroom?	Apps, Online platforms, Interactive Whiteboards
	13. What is the frequency of digital tools in your classroom?	Always, Sometimes, Rarely, Never
	14. Do you think the above digital tool is appropriate for cultural interaction?	Yes No
Recommendations	15. What is your recommendation to improve cultural competence in your classroom?	

Students

Category	Question	Options
Background Information	Age	7-10,10-12,12-15
	Gender	Male, Female
	Nationality	Arab, American, European, Asian, British, Australian
	First Language	Arabic, Asian (specify), Other (specify)

	Years of Learning English	1-3, 3-5, 6-10, More
	Availability of Technology at Home	Yes, No
Cultural Competence in ESL Program	Do you think your teacher considers your language/cultural values while teaching?	Always, Sometimes, Never
	Do you think your culture is valued in the classroom?	Yes, No
	Do you think cultural competence is important in an ESL program?	Very important, Important, Not important
Technology Use in ESL Program	Do you think the digital tools used in the classroom are helpful?	Yes, No
	What is the frequency of digital tool use outside your classroom?	Always, Sometimes, Rarely, Never
	Do you think the digital tool recognizes your culture?	Yes, No
Recommendations	Do you find using digital tools challenging?	Never, Sometimes, Always
	What feature would you recommend for the digital tools used in the classroom?	Open-ended response

Administrators

Section	Questions	Options
Background Information	1. Age	<input type="checkbox"/> 18-24 <input type="checkbox"/> 25-34 <input type="checkbox"/> 35-44 <input type="checkbox"/> 45 and above
	2. Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
	3. Nationality	<input type="checkbox"/> Arab <input type="checkbox"/> American <input type="checkbox"/> European <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> British <input type="checkbox"/> Australian <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
	4. Position in School	_____ (Open-ended response)
	5. Years in Current Position	<input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 years <input type="checkbox"/> 4-5 years <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 years <input type="checkbox"/> More than 10 year
	6. Type of School	<input type="checkbox"/> International <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/> Culturally specific
Cultural Competence in the ESL Program	7. Does your school provide teachers with training to address cultural diversity?	<input type="checkbox"/> Always <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Never
	8. Does your teacher evaluate inclusivity in classrooms?	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Never

Technology Use in ESL Program	9. Does your school integrate technology into the ESL program?	<input type="checkbox"/> Always <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Never
	10. Does your school assess the suitability of technology in a multicultural environment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	11. Do you think the technology used in the ESL program is effective?	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
Recommendations	12. What is the primary challenge in incorporating cultural knowledge into ESL education?	<input type="checkbox"/> Budget constraints <input type="checkbox"/> Training availability <input type="checkbox"/> Resource limitations <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify
	13. What actions should be taken to balance cultural preservation with effective ESL education?	_____ (Open-ended response)

Results and Discussion

Data for the research is collected through questionnaires (Google Forms) targeting teachers, students, and administrators of private schools in Dubai. The findings aim to explore ESL education and the interaction of cultural competence in Private schools in Dubai.

The teachers and students from different nationalities exhibit the multicultural environment of Private schools in Dubai, with various cultures and native languages. Zamani (2019) affirms the multicultural environment in Dubai, is the hub of many multinational companies. Gallagher (2022) further indicates the presence of expatriates as a large population. The research shows that the teachers in private schools of Dubai are qualified and experienced, despite being bilingual, and have adequate command of English. The majority of the students had limited previous exposure to the English language. Students in International schools in Dubai had better availability of technology at home; whereas, students of local private schools or culturally specific schools had limited availability. Administrators in private schools in Dubai are highly qualified and experienced. AlGhawi (2017) indicates Ministry of Education (MOE) in Dubai strives to provide excellence in education, focusing on ESL education.

Teachers in private schools in Dubai, consider the cultural factors important for effective ESL education but face challenges due to a lack of training. Garces-Bacsal *et al* (2024) declare the significance of understanding different cultures. Shin (2008) emphasizes appropriate teacher training for effective teaching when multiple cultures are involved. Some teachers also indicate time constraints as a challenge while incorporating cultures. Andrews, *et al* (2021) and Lunin & Minaeva (2015) observe inclusive lessons require time for preparation and delivery. The unavailability of materials is also a concern of teachers.

The research shows students' motivation toward ESL education when their cultures are respected and incorporated. Motivation is significant in second-language learning, enhancing intrinsic and extrinsic factors driving commitment and effort (Ng & Ng, 2015). Administrators of Private schools in Dubai are also aligned with the goal of effective ESL education, focusing policies and implementation to cater to

cultural integration; however, International and cultural-specific private schools emphasize inclusivity rather than local schools.

Media tools are considered important and widely used in private schools in Dubai. Several media tools were used by teachers as indicated by Ahmadi (2018) stating the evolution of teaching methods and techniques. The majority preferred online platforms but were inadequate for cultural adaptation. According to Fenuku & Akpaku (2024), standardized learning techniques have limited flexibility to cope with individual learning requirements. Students find technology-based learning when incorporated with culture engaging and thus helpful in ESL education. Deng (2021) affirms engaged learners, emotionally and cognitively are more likely to retain language features effectively. Administrators understand the requirement of inclusive learning technology; however, the availability of resources and budget constraints are limitations.

Research indicates that teachers find designing and delivering inclusive lessons challenging due to time constraints. The 'One size fits all' notion requires extensive lesson preparation (Evans *et al.*, 2021, Lunin & Minaeva, 2015). Also, teachers in private schools in Dubai are not sufficiently trained. According to Kulshrestha & Pandey (2013), training promotes the quality of teaching. Teachers of private schools recommend providing more training and resources to implement cultural competence in ESL education.

Students complained that technology doesn't possess the unique needs of culture. English language learning was found to be difficult by students as they did not meet individual cultural requirements. Lunin & Minaeva (2015) suggest features such as translation or subtitles. Some students found pronunciations difficult to understand. Students with limited technology availability at home also had limited knowledge of using media tools for ESL education. Ahmadi (2018) suggests user-friendly tools for active language learning; also recommended by students of the research. Balancing the preservation of individual cultural values with ESL education is found to be a challenge for administrators. Lunin & Minaeva (2015) indicate the importance of cultural knowledge of the target language for proficiency; however, a threat to the cultural preservation of the learner. Administrators highlighted that the teachers need extensive training to use technology, incorporate cultural values, and use technology with cultural diversity consideration. Kulshrestha & Pandey (2013) indicate a direct relation between a teacher's competence and student performance. Budget seems to be a big constraint to meeting training requirements. Appropriate measures are suggested by administrators for cultural values safeguarding by restricting technology, inclusiveness, family and community engagement, and technological restrictions.

Conclusion

The significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance the effectiveness of teaching English as a second language (ESL) through cultural interaction in the information age. This study explores the effectiveness and relevance of early second-language immersion programs, particularly in the context of Dubai's private schools. It highlights the value of such programs in supporting students' academic development, personality growth, and cognitive skills, especially in a culturally diverse environment like the United Arab Emirates. The research gathers insights from educators and academic administrators, emphasizing the need for collaborative community efforts to create language-rich environments that enhance multilingual learning. Bilingualism not only helps students connect across cultures but also opens up personal and professional opportunities. Dual-language programs in private schools aim to ensure students achieve fluency in a second language, particularly English, which is seen as essential for future success. Despite broad agreement on their benefits, the practical implementation of immersion programs remains a challenge. In today's globalized world, understanding the link between language and culture is increasingly important. The study also addresses the integration of cultural awareness into second-language education, which is key to building empathy and effective intercultural communication. By

incorporating technology and interactive tools, the research proposes innovative strategies to improve cultural engagement and support the development of intercultural communicative competence among learners in diverse educational settings.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: Ethical aspects of quantitative data collection include gaining informed consent, providing a clear explanation of the research, protecting participants' privacy, maintaining confidentiality, and safeguarding personal information from unauthorized use.

Conflicts of Interest: Not applicable.

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