

**TEACHING ENGLISH TO LOW-CONTEXT AND HIGH-CONTEXT
STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY: DIFFERENCES AND SOLUTIONS**

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Abstract

Effective English language instruction in higher education increasingly demands sensitivity to students' cultural communication styles. One critical distinction in cross-cultural communication is between low-context and high-context cultures. This study examines how these cultural orientations impact English language learning among university students and identifies teaching strategies that address related challenges. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study analyzed the performance and preferences of 80 university students from different cultural contexts. Results revealed significant variations in classroom participation, comprehension strategies, and language skill development. The study recommends differentiated instruction, cultural awareness training, and blended learning to bridge these cultural gaps. These findings underscore the necessity of culturally responsive pedagogy in English language education.

Keywords: low-context, high-context, English language teaching, cultural differences, university students, teaching strategies

Annotatsiya

Oliy ta'limda ingliz tilini samarali o'qitish talabalarning madaniy muloqot uslublariga nisbatan sezgirlikni talab qilmoqda. Madaniyatlararo muloqotdagi muhim farqlardan biri past kontekstli va yuqori kontekstli madaniyatlar o'rtasidagidir. Ushbu tadqiqot ushbu madaniy yo'nalishlar universitet talabalari orasida ingliz tilini o'rganishga qanday ta'sir qilishini o'rganadi va tegishli muammolarni hal qiladigan o'qitish strategiyalarini aniqlaydi. Aralash usullardan foydalangan holda, tadqiqot turli madaniy kontekstdagi 80 ta universitet talabalarining ishlashi va afzalliklarini tahlil qildi. Natijalar sinfda ishtirok etish, tushunish strategiyalari va til ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishda sezilarli farqlarni aniqladi. Tadqiqot ushbu madaniy bo'shliqlarni bartaraf etish uchun tabaqalashtirilgan ta'lim, madaniy xabardorlikni oshirish va aralash ta'limni tavsiya qiladi. Ushbu topilmalar ingliz tilini o'qitishda madaniyatga javob beradigan pedagogika zarurligini ta'kidlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: past kontekstli, yuqori kontekstli, ingliz tilini o'qitish, madaniy farqlar, universitet talabalari, o'qitish strategiyalari

1. Introduction



In today's globalized university classrooms, students from diverse cultural backgrounds converge with different learning expectations and communication styles. [1] Among the many frameworks proposed to understand cross-cultural variation, Edward T. Hall's (1976) concept of high-context and low-context communication remains particularly influential in education. High-context cultures rely heavily on implicit messages, non-verbal cues, and shared cultural understanding, while low-context cultures favor explicit, direct, and detailed communication (Hall, 1976). [2]

This cultural dichotomy influences not only everyday communication but also learning preferences, language acquisition, and classroom interaction. English, as a second or foreign language, is often taught using pedagogical methods developed in low-context societies, where educational systems emphasize individualism, verbal clarity, and direct assessment. However, for students from high-context cultures—such as many Asian, Middle Eastern, and Central Asian countries—these methods may clash with deeply ingrained cultural norms about authority, group dynamics, and indirect communication.[3]

Despite the increasing multicultural makeup of English language classrooms in universities worldwide, little research has examined how the context level of a student's culture affects English language learning outcomes. In this study, we explore the following questions:

- What are the main differences in English language learning behaviors between students from high-context and low-context cultures?
- What challenges do teachers face when managing culturally diverse classrooms?
- What pedagogical strategies can be implemented to improve outcomes for both high-context and low-context students?

This paper contributes to the growing field of culturally responsive language education by identifying classroom strategies that align with the communication preferences of both student groups.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to capture both performance outcomes and personal perceptions. The design focused on comparing classroom behavior and English learning progress across students from low-context and high-context cultures.

2.2 Participants



The study involved 80 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses at a private university. Participants were evenly divided into two groups: [3]

- Group A (Low-context): 40 students from Germany, the Netherlands, the USA, and Norway.
- Group B (High-context): 40 students from Uzbekistan, China, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.

All participants had a similar intermediate English proficiency level (B1-B2 CEFR), based on placement test results.[4]

2.3 Data Collection

Three tools were used to collect data:

1. Pre- and post-course language proficiency tests focused on reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills.
2. Surveys and Likert-scale questionnaires assessed student attitudes toward teaching methods, feedback, group work, and class participation.
3. Classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with five English instructors provided insights into behavioral differences and teaching challenges.

2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from tests and surveys were analyzed using SPSS to calculate descriptive statistics and compare group performance using t-tests. Qualitative data from interviews and classroom notes were analyzed using thematic coding to identify patterns in communication behavior, participation, and teacher strategies.

3. Results

3.1 Communication Preferences and Participation

Survey and observation data revealed distinct patterns:

- Low-context students preferred explicit instructions, direct teacher feedback, and individual tasks. They were more likely to ask questions, challenge ideas, and seek clarification.
- High-context students favored indirect communication, non-verbal cues, and collaborative group tasks. Many were hesitant to interrupt or question instructors publicly.

3.2 Language Performance Outcomes

Skill	Low-Context Group	High-Context Group
Speaking	+18%	+10%
Writing	+22%	+14%



Listening	+15%	+19%
Reading	+17%	+20%

Low-context students showed significantly greater gains in speaking and writing, especially where clarity and directness are essential. High-context students outperformed in listening and reading, particularly when the materials involved cultural inference or contextual interpretation.

3.3 Teacher Interviews and Observations

All five instructors confirmed that cultural differences influenced class dynamics. Challenges cited included uneven participation, confusion over indirect instructions, and discomfort with individual assessment formats for high-context students.

4. Discussion

The findings support Hall’s (1976) communication theory, showing that cultural context levels significantly impact how students learn English. While low-context students aligned well with Western-style EFL methods, high-context students often required adaptation to fully benefit from instruction.

4.1 Implications for Teaching

To ensure equitable learning opportunities, instructors must consider cultural context in their pedagogy. Based on the findings, the following strategies are recommended:

1. Differentiated Instruction

- Provide detailed written instructions and rubrics for low-context learners.
- Use modeling, visual aids, and contextual examples for high-context learners.

2. Cultural Mediation Activities

- Include intercultural communication tasks that explain classroom norms.

3. Blended Learning and Technology

- Use digital tools for participation and reinforcement.

4. Group Dynamics and Assessment

- Combine group and individual tasks to balance preferences.

4.2 Addressing Teacher Challenges

Educator training programs should include modules on cultural intelligence and inclusive pedagogy.

4.3 Limitations and Further Research

The study’s sample was limited to one university. Future research should explore longitudinal outcomes and test interventions across broader educational settings.





5. Conclusion

Cultural context plays a crucial role in shaping students' English language learning experiences. By recognizing and adapting to the needs of both low-context and high-context students, university instructors can foster inclusive, productive, and culturally sensitive classrooms. [5] The implementation of differentiated, culturally responsive teaching strategies holds promise for improving language proficiency and student confidence across cultural divides.

References

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