



# Impacts of Culture on Classroom Participation Among Undergraduate EFL Learners in Afghanistan

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## Article Information

### Suggested Citation:

Atifnigar, H., Israr, S.W., Khanjar, I. & Hameed, S.S.B.A. (2023).

Impacts of culture on classroom participation among undergraduate EFL learners in Afghanistan.

*European Journal of Theoretical and Applied Sciences*, 1(2), 291-300.

DOI: : [10.59324/ejtas.2023.1\(2\).25](https://doi.org/10.59324/ejtas.2023.1(2).25)

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## Abstract:

This research aims to examine the impacts of culture on classroom participation among the English majored students at the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, Laghman University (LU), specifically seek to find out the impacts of multi-ethnicity, dressing styles, and family background that affect students' participation. A mixed-method of research approach has been employed in this study; an adapted questionnaire and a semi-structured interview have been used as the research instruments for this study. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been collected from one hundred and ten (n = 117) respondents. The quantitative data were descriptively analyzed using the SPSS version 24, and later the semi-structured interview has been thematically analyzed. After the analysis of the data, it was revealed that cultural factors hindered

student's participation. Significantly, participation was affected by their family upbringing, they were not allowed to speak in front of elders or teachers confidently, which progressively caused them to be passive in the classroom. Also, urban students are active, communicative, and more confident that is why rural area students' participation prone decline nation due to shyness, low confidence level, and weak educational background. Higher educational institutions in Afghanistan recommended implementing a learner-centric method when teaching the students to enhance the practices of classroom participation.

**Keywords:** *implementation of e-learning, technology, content and design, students' characteristics.*

## Introduction

Classroom participation is considered one of the essential elements of teaching and learning. Classroom participation refers to actively taking part in classroom activities that provide practical learning outcomes for students. Lee (2005)

mentioned that participation conveys the meaning of students' interaction in the classroom including: questioning, commenting, and working in groups. Besides, students should be alerted, responsive, and respectful to teachers and peers in the classroom (Bonwell & Eison,



1991). Participation is a process of requiring students to take part in the activities accommodated in the classroom tentatively.

Different scholars such as (Atifnigar et al., 2022; Bean & Peterson, 1998; Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005; Fewings & Wonder, 2009; Gul et al., 2014; Petress, 2006; Rich, 2006) proposed several advantages of classroom participation which can enhance students' soft skills including self-confidence and self-esteem, critical thinking, communication, interpretation synthesizing skills and freedom of culture across their entire life span. In addition, students can increase their collaboration, social interaction, team working, and self-improvement (Hall et al., 2017) and boost up the teaching and learning process when engaged in the classroom (Lawrence & Tar, 2018).

However, there might be students who are silent during the classroom and try to avoid themselves in each session. According to Schmitt and Schmitt (2020) students who do not participate in the classroom are called passive students. Participation is considered to be vigilant, responding to the question, and engaging during the classroom discussion (Atifnigar et al., 2021). Classroom participation is a vital issue in improving learners' educational performance in Afghanistan specifically within higher educational classes but still, it is observed that the implementation of active learning has unintentionally been neglected both in schools and tertiary levels. Therefore, this study aims to examine the cultural factors including multi-ethnicity, dressing styles, family background, and gender differences that affect English majored students' participation at the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences of Laghman University, Afghanistan.

### Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the Ministry of Higher Education MOHE, teachers, and students in improving the level of classroom participation and lowering the factors affecting participation. It is hoped this research may provide significant insights to the students and teachers about the benefits and importance of classroom participation. Firstly, the findings of this study

may provide evidence and insights to the MOHE in which students' participation is affected by various types of factors, and they may enforce and implement the rules and regulation already provided for enhancing the quality of education among students. Particularly, faculty members, teachers, and students may be assisted in overcoming the factors affecting classroom participation. Secondly, this study is essential for teachers in enhancing the low level of participation and confronting the factors that affect interaction in the classroom. Teachers may provide effective teaching methodology and materials to boost students' level of participation and rectify those deteriorating factors that affect participation among students. Finally, this research may also deliver essentials awareness about the advantages and importance of participation to the students. Also, several empirical information has been described in this study to enhance the level of participation among students and eliminate the factors that impact participation in the classroom.

### Scope of the Research

This research is aimed to examine the Impacts of culture on classroom participation among English-majored students at Laghman University (LU). This study was conducted on students from the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences at LU. There first year, second year, third year, and fourth year classes at the English department with more than sixty students in each classroom. Moreover, this research is founded on a mixed-method research design, and the data was gathered in the form of questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews using WhatsApp and Facebook messenger, The primary stage of this research was conducted after the winter season semester break in 2019, and the survey took one week for the respondents to complete the questionnaire and the interview.

### Background of the Study

The English language is taught both as a content and general subject at Laghman University. Aims of teaching content subjects are to train students in four integrated skills of the English language,

literature, and teaching methodology. According to (Pratiwi, 2018), content subjects such as history, geography, and science are instructed to comprehend a specific content of the information rather than to achieve competency in a skill. At the same time, non-English major students seek to acquire the English language as a general subject and are taught for two years (four semesters) at the Laghman University of Afghanistan.

As noted earlier, classroom participation is one of the significant aspects of teaching and learning. It does not only help students in enhancing the level of their confidence but also contribute to high achievement in their future career (Bauler et al., 2019). However, several dominant factors influence classroom participation, namely, teachers related, cultural, and classroom size factors. The teacher's role possesses its advantages and disadvantages to classroom participation. Instructors are the only authority in the classroom teaching, and learners are viewed as the 'guest' of the instructing activities. Teachers' traits and characters are significant features that assist in forming and boosting learners' participation. Instructors who are more flexible and utilizes communicative approaches in their teaching are more comprehensible and friendly, role player model, and facilitator (Flores, 2015).

Several researches indicated that students' participation can be affected in the classroom. One of them is that if teacher abide cultural values of a nation in the classroom then the classroom may be passive one. Historically, participation of the students in the classroom is lined with the social rules of a territory (Congmin, 2016). As a matter of fact, sometimes, students' freedom participation is extremely limited due to the cultural norms enforced on their manner through the communication with their teachers and the peers (Luk & Lin, 2017). In addition, class size also plays an influential role in affecting students' participation in large classes. Meanwhile, researchers indicated that classes in which students' participation was reported higher were smaller classes that included ten or fewer learners compared to the classes in which the

participation was lower included 40 or more learners (Auster & MacRone, 1994). In addition, within large classes there will be extremely limited classrooms compared to the small ones and large classes are the detrimental factors of lowering down classroom participation (Christopher, 2003).

## Literature Review

### Effects of Culture on Classroom Participation

The term culture is related to the inner world of people entailing experiences, expressions, symbols, materials, customs, morals, values, attitudes, parents, and beliefs generated and communicated among the people and shift down from generation to another in the form culture (Sanchez-Reilly, 2010). Indeed, the word culture is general containing many various aspects that cultural standards and qualities affect teaching and learning. Different studies have indicated the role of religion in shaping learning styles and strategies. Furthermore, society's tradition may utilize strong grouping and harmonizing effects, which impact the enhancement of learning procedures (Atifnigar, Alokozay, Wahidullah, Zaheer, et al., 2020; Hayes & Allinson, 1997).

Teachers' and students' beliefs can affect participation. Definitely, beliefs are the principles or convictions that people embrace to be true. Individuals in a society have specific beliefs, but they also share collective values. Teachers cannot escape the fact that their communication "styles" reflect their cultural background (Bar-Tal, 2012). Therefore, the teacher can enhance the belief and attitudes of students toward participation inside or outside of the classroom. Moreover, parents are the primary teachers of the students at home. Indeed, parents play a significant role in improving their offspring to communicate effectively inside or out of the classroom. According to (Steinberg, 2001) students, participation is profoundly affected by their parents and colleagues in a way they have been socialized in an individual society.

Every society is composed of various races and tribes, which have different ways of life, behaviour, attitude, and moral values. Students from different tribes and ethnicity can impact each other when involved in participation in the classroom. It is revealed by (Atifnigar, Zaheer, et al., 2020; Nijat et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2009) that race and ethnicity often play essential roles in students' identities, and interactions, and contribute to their behaviour and their beliefs possess in a specified society. Thus, student's participation can be also being affected by different ethnicities and races

Morals are the values that refer to an individual's positive and negative characteristics which can affect students' participants. Moral values are the innate features of human being that rule their behaviour and way of life (Hunter, 2008). Such moral can be derived from a society, government, religion, and at the same time, students' moral potential plays a significant role in the learning process. In order to teach student effectively teachers are required to understand students' behaviours and academic competency individually rather than depending on their race and ethnicity (Gibbs et al., 2007).

Likewise, teachers need to consider cultural norms in the alleviation of a student's passiveness in the classroom. Students' participation behaviour is bound by social rules that have long been connected with traditional values. Students are not free to participate in the classroom; instead, they learn the social norms imposed on their behaviour through interaction with teachers and peers. Existing rules and regulations in society can limit the frequency of interaction between teachers and students. Similarly, it is indicated that regulations and attitudes that existed in a particular society may impact the way people interact and expect the effect of their interaction on each other (Brown, 2000). In addition, law and culture are two distinct concepts but sometimes influence one another in the application (Chu & Kim, 1999; Kato, 2001; K. S. Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006; Rosen, 1989).

As many theories can underpin every aspect of the research, in this study, the Social

Constructivist theory developed by Lev Vygotsky is used to support cultural factors that affect the practice of participation among students. The most common principles of Social Constructivist Theory are the Zone of approximation, Scaffolding, More Knowledgeable Others KMO, and Cooperative learning, which be directly and directly related to some aspects of cultural factors that affect classroom participation. In addition, scaffolding and cooperative principles are used in this study to support the cultural factor that affects the practice of participation among students.

According to the social constructive theory, classroom participation is improved through social interaction within a specific society (Vygotsky, 1962). Social interaction is an effective method of teaching students when cooperation and communication are utilized at the same time and he further insisted that social interaction is an integral part of learning in which students can engage in the classroom and improve their critical thinking process. Vygotsky believes social constructivism and language development are jointly concerned with cognitive communication, ZPD enhancement, interaction, culture, and innate speech.

Indeed, students at school, college, and university levels learn with different manners and methodologies. Learning can be effective when students are supported by elders or teachers, and this process is called scaffolding. According to Vygotsky, scaffolding is the potential of understanding that students learn more effectively when other people assist in learning. Scaffolding is an aided learning process that supports the ZPD or getting to the next degree of understating of each learner with the help of instructors, peers, or other elderly people. For instance, when a student is facing a problem in speaking, if they are provided with clues and information, then they can solve the problems facing. Through scaffolding, a typical kind of internalization happens for each learner. Such a process occurs when a student is asked to carry out an activity that is worthwhile to the student, and with help, they may complete. Meanwhile, this type of activity could be challenging for both students, but there is a

supportive system available that allows students to problems.

## Methods

A mixed-method of research design has been employed in the study. An online survey questionnaire for the quantitative data and a semi-structured interview were used as the data collection tools.

### Research Instruments

For the quantitative approach, the researchers used an adapted questionnaire from Shamim and Negash, (2007) intending to gain cultural factors that hindered students' participation. The developed questionnaire is consisting of two sections (A) comprises demographic data which is positioned at the beginning of the questionnaire, which is consisting of gender, year of study, age, ethnicity, and experience in using the English language. Section (B) comprises cultural related factors with (7 items) which was intended to gain how family background, multi-ethnicity, age, and outfit of teachers, and urban students affect the participation of the students. This section was designed on the 5-Likert Scale 1-5 (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree). In addition, for the qualitative approach, a semi-structured interview comprises four open-ended questions aimed to explore in-depth insight into quantitative data regarding cultural factors that affected students' participation.

### Reliability of Research Tools

Reliability tests have been conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaire, after revising items in the questionnaire, the researcher conducted Cronbach's Alpha test, and the reliability coefficient was above 0.70 which is high reliability. For the reliability of validity of the semi-structured interview, the researcher consulted a senior lecturer at the Language Academy of University Technology Malaysia

after several feedback and revisions it was later approved for collection of the data.

### Sample of the Research

In this study, the researcher utilized purposive conveniently sampling techniques. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been gathered from the four classes of the English department including freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior classes of Laghman University. Out of four hundred students, one hundred and ten (n=110) of them participated in an online survey (n=217) and a semi-structured (n=7) interviews.

### Data Analysis

The data for this research have been sequentially analysed, first, quantitative i.e. questionnaires have been descriptively analysed -by using mean and percentage data, and later qualitative i.e. semi-structured interviews have been thematically analysed. Furthermore, the following table describes the score interpretation, which has been divided into three categories, such as low, medium, and high.

**Table 1. Score Interpretation**

Mean Score Level	Level
1.00 - 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.66	Average
3.67 – 5.00	High

## Results

### Impacts of Culture on Classroom Participation

This section represents the findings from the survey questionnaire and is semi-structured about the impacts of culture on classroom participation. The data reveals from the table below that cultural factor is ranked as the lowest factor that affected students' participation at the English department of Laghman University. Further discussion is provided below.

**Table 2. Cultural Related Factors**

No	Statements	Percentage	Mean
1	My family upbringing prevents me from speaking up confidently in front of an elder or audience.	73.6%	3.68
2	I cannot ask the teacher because it is a sign of disrespect.	66.5%	3.33
3	The multi-ethnicity in the classroom stops me from interacting in the classroom	54.7%	2.74
4	The age difference causes me to be passive in the class	52.0%	2.60
5	It is not permitted in my culture to actively communicate in the classroom.	48.5%	2.43
6	The outfit of my teacher and classmates affect my classroom participation	46.4%	2.32
7	Classroom participation is impacted by students who are from the city	41.5%	2.07

Table 2 shows the findings of the cultural factor that affected the participation of students. Based on the data, most of the students believed that their family upbringing prevented them from speaking up confidently in front of the elder or audience (73.6%). It is also indicated, that asking teachers in the classroom is a sign of disrespect. That is why they stay passive in the classroom (66.5%), the existence of different ethnic groups, and age differences (52.0%) also affected students' class participation (54.7%). Whereas,

students from the city (41.5%), dressing style of teachers and students (46.4%), and talking too much in the classroom is cultural not granted as good traits of the students (48.5%) affected students' classroom participation with a low frequency.

The following data is gathered from the semi-structured interview about the cultural factor that affects students' participation.

**Table 3. Responses of the Participant Regarding the Cultural Factor**

Respondent	Response
Respondent 2	" Well! In the society in which I am living in, our parents advised us not to speak in front of the elder and teachers it is rude.
Respondent 1	"...Students who are wearing new and well-fashioned shirts, can speak actively and encouragingly in the classroom rather than those who wear old shirts...."
Respondent 2	"Those students who are aged and come to the classroom they are passive themselves and they do not affect others classroom participation."
Respondent 3	"Yes, sometimes, I feel shy. Whenever I am talking in front of students who are from another tribe or area of Afghanistan."
Respondent 4	"... active students are appreciated very well in society and the class. But some students are very talking and talk a lot about any issue in the classroom. It will be perfect if they let other students participate in the classroom and share /her ideas in the classroom."

Likewise, the data from Table 3 from semi-structured interviews showed, that most of the respondents replied that those who were from the city affected their participation because they were more communicative and confident in the classroom. Also, most of the students believed that their family upbringing does not allow them to speak up. In front of elders or teachers, therefore, stay passive in the classroom, and students and teachers whose style of dressing very well affected students' participation. Whereas age differences among students had

minimal effect on students' participation, some of the students who are communicative and talkative are also affecting the participation of other students who are shy or come from different tribes and ethnicity.

One of the respondents said that sometimes the old-age student is shy and less confident they are affected by themselves, but they do not affect other students. At the same time, they believe that urban students are active, communicative, and talkative. While Students from remote areas

tend to be bashful and less confident in front of them in the classroom, therefore students from the rural regions stay passive in the classroom.

However, the data obtained from the interview about the negative impacts of students who are from different geography of Afghanistan can impact students' classroom participation. Multi-ethnicity put themselves passive because they feel shy and less confident. The data are driven from the interview asking the teachers inside the classroom, and the adverse effects of the family uprising on classroom participation, three out of five respondents replied that family breeding avoided them not speaking in front of elders or teachers.

## Discussion

As this research aimed to examine the impacts of culture on classroom participation at tertiary levels in Afghanistan. After the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, we have come to the conclusion that culture affected students' classroom participation. It is believed that most of the students' participation is affected by their family upbringing; they believed that most of the students are not allowed to speak in front of elders or teachers confidently, because, culturally, it is a sign of disrespect. In such a situation, it is the teacher's responsibility to motivate students' attitudes and beliefs toward interaction in the classroom. In support, (Bartal, 2012) mentioned that teachers' and students' beliefs could affect participation in the classroom. Similarly, a study carried out by (Steinberg, 2001) discovered that parents play a significant role in improving their children to communicate effectively inside or out of the classroom.

It has been indicated that the number of students at Laghman university level is composed of different ethnicities and geographies. Thus, students who are from urban can negatively affect the participation of students who are from rural areas. Urban students are active, communicative, and confident. However, rural students are shy and less confident; then, they tend to be passive in the classroom and show less

interaction in the classroom. These findings resemble (of Torres et al., 2009), who revealed that race and ethnicity often play essential roles in students' identities, interaction, and contribute to their behaviour and their beliefs possess in a specified society. Thus, students' participation can also be affected by different ethnicities and races that exist in the classroom.

In addition, a specific number of teachers and students who come to the class with a good clothing style also affected students' participation. It is obvious that Afghanistan is ranked as the world's poorest country (Rubin & Hamidzada, 2007), and people are needy and are unable to wear expensive and fancy outfits. Therefore, such students have demotivated in front of them and stay silent for the whole period of the class.

## Conclusion

After collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from the respondents, it is believed that most of the students' classroom participation is impacted by their family upbringing; students are not allowed to speak in front of elders or teachers confidently, which progressively caused them to be passive in the classroom. Students who are from urban areas are active, communicative, and confident could be affected by rural areas' participation owing to their shyness, confidence, and great educational background. In addition, a specific number of teachers and students who come to the class with a good clothing style also affected students' participation.

## Limitations

Every research has its limitations, but this research also has some limitations. First, the sample selected for this was only the students from the English department which can be generalized to the English students, however, to gain further insights can be gained if students from different departments and faculties are involved. This study entailed both an online survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Besides, observational study is

required to get further and real-life problems related to the students' classroom limitations.

### Recommendations

Following are the recommendation provided concerning this study, first of all, the ministry of higher education of Afghanistan is recommended to implement a student-cantered learning approach across the country's educational institutions to implement the practices of classroom participation. parents are also recommended to motivate their offspring to communicate in front of elders, at home, village, school and always let them speak confidently every in order to improve their speaking skills through which later they can actively take part in the classroom.

### Acknowledgement

I am extremely thankful from my kind and helpful supervisor Siti Aisha bnt Abdul Hameed that helped me in completed this research study.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors state that there is no potential conflict of interest in publishing this research article.

### Funding

The authors do not receive any direct funding from any entity.

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