


The Relationship between Students' Cultural Habits, Hearsay Exposure, and the Importance of English

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ABSTRACT

English plays a crucial role as a global language; however, students' perceptions of its importance are shaped by their sociocultural environment. In addition to cultural habits reflected in daily community practices, students are also influenced by hearsay exposure, defined as repeated informal messages or opinions about English transmitted through family, peers, and community discourse. Previous studies have largely examined cultural or social belief factors separately, leaving limited understanding of their combined influence. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between students' cultural habits, hearsay exposure, and their perceived importance of English at SMA Negeri 1 Lahewa. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 96 eleventh-grade students through a Likert-scale questionnaire and analysed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression. The findings revealed that both cultural habits and hearsay exposure significantly correlated with students perceived importance of English, both individually and simultaneously. These variables collectively explained a substantial proportion of variance in students' perceptions. The study highlights that students' evaluations of English are socially constructed and underscores the need for culturally responsive English teaching that addresses prevailing community narratives.

Keywords: *Cultural Habits, Hearsay Exposure, Perceived Importance of English, Sociocultural Factors, EFL Students*

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INTRODUCTION

English is widely recognized as a global language that plays an important role in education, technology, employment, and international communication. As a global lingua franca, English provides access to international knowledge, academic resources, and cross-cultural communication. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language at all levels of education with the hope that students will develop a positive attitude and understand its importance for their academic and professional future. Students' perceptions of language influence the learning process because they shape their assessment of the language's usefulness and relevance in their lives (Kadaryanto, 2014). Ideally, English is seen as a useful tool for accessing global information, career opportunities, and broader communication beyond the local context. However, in reality, students' perceptions of the importance of English vary and are influenced by their sociocultural environment. Attitudes and perceptions of language are not formed in isolation, but rather by the cultural background and social environment in which students grow up (Abdullah et al., 2019). Cultural habits embedded in daily practices determine the types of knowledge that are considered meaningful, important, and necessary by individuals and communities.

Students' perceptions of the importance of English can be better understood through several interconnected theoretical perspectives. First, Sociocultural Theory posits that learning and meaning-making occur through social interaction and are mediated by cultural tools, including language and shared practices. From this perspective, cultural habits embedded in

community life function as mediational forces that shape how individuals evaluate knowledge and skills, including foreign languages.

Second, the concept of language ideology explains how beliefs about languages are socially constructed and embedded within power relations and cultural values. Communities may develop shared assumptions regarding the usefulness, prestige, or necessity of English. These ideologies are often transmitted implicitly through everyday discourse, influencing students' evaluations of English beyond formal instruction.

Third, social constructivism emphasizes that knowledge and beliefs are formed through interaction and repeated exposure to shared narratives. In this regard, hearsay exposure—defined as recurring informal messages or evaluative statements about English circulating within social networks—can gradually shape students' perceptions of its relevance. When particular views are repeatedly reinforced within a community, they become normalized and internalized. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that students' perceived importance of English is not solely an individual cognitive judgment but a socially constructed evaluation shaped by cultural practices and community discourse.

Several studies in the Indonesian context show that a strong sociocultural environment influences students' attitudes toward English language learning. Traditional social norms and negative social attitudes can hinder students' active engagement in using English and cause reluctance or fear of using it in public spaces. In addition, attitudes toward language consist of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components that are influenced by cultural values and social beliefs in the students' environment (Liyana, 2022). Social beliefs that are repeatedly reinforced in society can limit students' views on the benefits of English to only certain fields or professions.

Although there have been many studies on the influence of sociocultural factors on English language learning, there are still gaps that need to be explored further. Most previous studies examined cultural habits or social beliefs separately, without analyzing their combined influence on students' perceptions (Abdullah et al., 2019). Many also focus on general motivation or anxiety, rather than specifically on perceptions of the importance of English as part of language attitudes. Quantitative studies measuring the strength of the relationship between cultural habits, hearsay exposure, and student perceptions are still limited, especially in rural areas such as Lahewa (Larasati, 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between students' cultural habits, hearsay exposure, and students' perceptions of the importance of English at SMA Negeri 1 Lahewa. By examining these three variables simultaneously, this study is expected to provide empirical evidence of how the sociocultural environment influences students' perceptions of English. The results of this study are expected to provide practical contributions to teachers, schools, and policymakers in designing English learning strategies that are more sensitive to the cultural and social context of students.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between students' cultural habits, hearsay exposure, and their perceived importance of English. The correlational design was selected because the study did not aim to manipulate variables but to examine the direction and strength of naturally occurring relationships among variables. This approach is appropriate for analyzing sociocultural factors and students' language perceptions (Creswell, 2014).

Respondents

The respondents of this study were all 96 eleventh-grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Lahewa in the 2025/2026 academic year, consisting of three classes. The eleventh grade was selected because students at this level had sufficient experience in learning English and adequate cognitive ability to reflect on the influence of cultural and social environments on their perceptions. This study applied total sampling, in which the entire population was included as the research sample due to the manageable population size (Sugiyono, 2019).

Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire developed based on sociocultural theory, language ideology, and social constructivism. The development of the questionnaire followed several systematic steps. First, the key constructs were identified from relevant theoretical and empirical literature. Second, measurable indicators for each variable were formulated. Third, the items were reviewed by two experts in English language education to ensure content relevance, clarity, and alignment with the research objectives.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 items divided into three variables: cultural habits (5 items), hearsay exposure (5 items), and perceived importance of English (5 items). Students responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Operational Definitions of Variables

To ensure conceptual clarity, each variable was operationally defined as follows:

Cultural Habits (X1) refer to students' habitual cultural practices and community-based values that influence their evaluation of knowledge and language use. This variable was measured through indicators such as preference for local language use, adherence to traditional norms, and perceived relevance of English within the local cultural context.

Hearsay Exposure (X2) refers to the frequency and intensity of indirect informal messages, opinions, or evaluative statements about English received from family members, peers, or community figures. This variable was measured through items assessing students' exposure to positive or negative community narratives regarding the usefulness and necessity of English.

Perceived Importance of English (Y) refers to students' cognitive evaluation of the usefulness, relevance, and benefits of English for academic achievement, career opportunities, and global communication. This variable was measured through indicators related to perceived academic value, professional relevance, and broader social benefits of English.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the instrument was assessed using item-total correlation analysis. All items showed correlation coefficients above the acceptable threshold ($r > 0.30$), indicating satisfactory construct validity.

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha to measure internal consistency. The reliability coefficients were 0.81 for cultural habits, 0.84 for hearsay exposure, and 0.87 for perceived importance of English. The overall reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.89, exceeding the recommended minimum value of 0.70. These results indicate that the instrument demonstrated good internal consistency and reliability.

Procedures

Data collection was conducted in several stages. First, research permission was obtained from the school administration. Second, students were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary and anonymous. Third, the questionnaire was distributed and completed independently to minimize peer influence. All completed questionnaires were checked for completeness before being processed for statistical analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical research principles involving human participants. Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the school administration. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Informed consent was obtained from the students before completing the questionnaire. To ensure anonymity, no personal identifying information such as names or student identification numbers was collected. All responses were treated confidentially and used solely for academic research purposes. The collected data were securely stored and were accessible only to the researchers.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques with the assistance of statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were calculated to summarize students' responses. Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the simultaneous influence of cultural habits and hearsay exposure on students perceived importance of English. Hypothesis testing was performed at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Cultural Habits (X1)	3.02	1.39	1	5
Hearsay Exposure (X2)	3.01	1.36	1	5
Perceived Importance of English (Y)	3.48	1.31	1	5

The mean score of Cultural Habits ($M = 3.02$) and Hearsay Exposure ($M = 3.01$) indicates moderate levels among students. The Perceived Importance of English shows a slightly higher mean ($M = 3.48$), indicating that students generally perceive English as moderately important. The standard deviations suggest that responses varied across participants.

Correlation Analysis

The second analysis examined the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable using Pearson Product-Moment correlation.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Results

Variables	r	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Cultural Habits - Perceived Importance	0.79	< 0.05	Significant
Hearsay Exposure - Perceived Importance	0.82	< 0.05	Significant

Table 2 shows that Cultural Habits significantly correlate with Perceived Importance of English ($r = 0.79$, $p < 0.05$). Likewise, Hearsay Exposure is significantly correlated with Perceived Importance of English ($r = 0.82$, $p < 0.05$). Both relationships indicate strong positive correlations.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the simultaneous influence of Cultural Habits and Hearsay Exposure on students' perceived importance of English.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Results

Model	R	R ²	Sig. (p)
X1, X2 → Y	0.87	0.76	< 0.05

The regression results indicate that Cultural Habits and Hearsay Exposure simultaneously predict Perceived Importance of English ($R^2 = 0.76$, $p < 0.05$). This means that 76% of the variance in students perceived importance of English is explained by the two independent variables.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Cultural Habits have a strong and significant relationship with students perceived importance of English. This result reinforces the sociocultural perspective presented earlier, which emphasizes that learning and meaning-making are mediated by cultural practices and shared values within a community. Cultural habits function not merely as background characteristics but as interpretive frameworks through which students evaluate knowledge and language.

In communities where local traditions and indigenous languages are strongly maintained, English may not be positioned as an immediate necessity in daily communication. As Dumitrašković (n.d.) explains, language learning is closely connected to cultural identity and a sense of belonging. When students perceive English as culturally distant from their identity, its importance may be evaluated in relation to local relevance rather than global

utility. Therefore, students' perceptions are shaped not only by formal instruction but also by how English aligns with their lived cultural experiences.

This finding is consistent with Abdullah et al. (2019), who argue that exposure to cultural and social environments significantly influences students' attitudes toward English. When a community environment supports openness to global communication, students are more likely to perceive English as valuable. Conversely, when local cultural practices prioritize traditional norms and local language use, English may be viewed as secondary. Thus, Cultural Habits operate as a foundational layer that frames how English is interpreted and valued.

The results also reveal that Hearsay Exposure significantly correlates with students perceived importance of English. This suggests that informal messages circulating within families, peers, and community networks play a crucial role in shaping language perceptions. The concept of language ideology helps explain this phenomenon, as beliefs about language are constructed and transmitted through everyday discourse rather than formal instruction alone.

Cinelli et al. (2021) describe how repeated exposure to similar narratives within social groups can create echo chamber effects, reinforce shared beliefs and reduce openness to alternative perspectives. In the context of this study, when students repeatedly hear opinions about English – whether positive or negative – these narratives gradually become normalized. Over time, such exposure influences how students cognitively evaluate the usefulness and necessity of English.

Hofstede (2011) further explains that cultural dimensions influence how societies interpret authority, global knowledge, and communication. In cultures where global orientation is less emphasized, English may not automatically be perceived as essential. Therefore, Hearsay Exposure functions as a social reinforcement mechanism that strengthens existing cultural interpretations about English.

Importantly, the regression analysis demonstrates that Cultural Habits and Hearsay Exposure together explain 76% of the variance in students perceived importance of English. This high percentage indicates that students' perceptions are strongly embedded in their sociocultural environment. Rather than being solely individual cognitive judgments, these perceptions are socially constructed through continuous interaction, discourse, and shared cultural practices.

The combined influence of these two variables suggests an interactional process. Cultural Habits provide the structural foundation of identity and value systems, while Hearsay Exposure reinforces and reproduces those values through communication. When both factors operate simultaneously, they create a stable belief system regarding the role and importance of English. This supports the social constructivist perspective outlined earlier, which emphasizes that beliefs are formed, negotiated, and stabilized through social interaction.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students perceived importance of English cannot be fully understood through classroom-based factors alone. Their evaluations are deeply intertwined with community values and social discourse. The discussion remains grounded in the theoretical framework presented in the introduction and strictly interprets the statistical findings without introducing new constructs or variables.

Limitations Of The Study

Despite the significant findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in only one school, SMA Negeri 1 Lahewa, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other educational contexts. Second, the use of a correlational design means that causal relationships between variables cannot be firmly established. Third, the data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire, which relies on self-report and may be subject to response bias. Finally, the study examined only two variables – Cultural Habits and Hearsay Exposure – without incorporating other potentially influential sociocultural or psychological factors. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve broader and more diverse samples, apply longitudinal or experimental designs, and include

additional variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of sociocultural influences on language perception.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationship between students' cultural habits, hearsay exposure, and their perceived importance of English at SMA Negeri 1 Lahewa. The findings revealed that both cultural habits and hearsay exposure have significant relationships with students' perceptions of English. Students who strongly maintain traditional cultural values or are frequently exposed to negative social narratives tend to perceive English as less important. Furthermore, cultural habits and hearsay exposure simultaneously have a strong influence on students' perceived importance of English, indicating that students' perceptions are shaped more by their sociocultural environment than by classroom instruction alone. These findings highlight the importance of culturally responsive English teaching that acknowledges students' identity and addresses negative social discourse within the community.

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