



INTEGRATING MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN EFL CLASSROOMS: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstrak

Pendidikan multikultural memainkan peran penting dalam mendorong pembelajaran bahasa siswa dengan meningkatkan kesadaran budaya, motivasi, dan kompetensi komunikatif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi perspektif guru EFL, tantangan, serta peluang dalam mengintegrasikan pendidikan multikultural ke dalam pembelajaran bahasa. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini dilakukan di Universitas La Tansa Mashiro dengan melibatkan dua guru EFL dan dua puluh mahasiswa yang terdaftar dalam mata kuliah Multiculturalism and Language Education. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru memandang pendidikan multikultural sebagai komponen esensial dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris (ELT) yang meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa, mempromosikan pemikiran kritis, serta kemahiran bahasa dalam menghargai dan berkembang di dunia yang beragam. Namun, implementasinya menghadapi tantangan, termasuk pelatihan guru yang terbatas, bahan ajar yang responsif secara budaya untuk menyeimbangkan dengan persyaratan kurikulum standar, serta paparan antarbudaya siswa yang minim. Meskipun ada kendala tersebut, strategi pengajaran seperti pembelajaran berbasis tugas dan berbasis kasus memberikan peluang untuk integrasi multikultural yang efektif di kelas EFL. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan berharga bagi guru, institusi, dan pembuat kebijakan untuk meningkatkan aktivitas pendidikan multikultural guna memaksimalkan hasil belajar dalam konteks EFL.

Kata kunci: pendidikan multikultural, guru EFL, pembelajaran bahasa, kompetensi antarbudaya, studi kasus.

Abstract

Multicultural education plays a significant role in fostering students' language learning by enhancing cultural awareness, motivation, and communicative competence. This study aims to explore EFL teacher's perspectives, challenges and opportunities in integrating multicultural education into language learning. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study was conducted at La Tansa Mashiro University involving two EFL teachers and twenty undergraduate students enrolled in the Multiculturalism and Language Education course. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documents analysis, and were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that teachers' perceive multicultural education as an essential component in ELT that enhance students' engagement, promotion of critical thinking and linguistic proficiency of



appreciating and thriving in a diverse world. However, the implementation faces challenge, including limited teacher training, culturally responsive teaching materials to balance with standardized curriculum requirements, and students' limited intercultural exposure. Despite these constraints, instructional strategies such as task-based and case-based learning provide opportunities for effective multicultural integration in EFL Classrooms. This study provided valuable insights for teachers, institutions, and policymakers to improve multicultural education activities to maximize learning outcomes in EFL setting.

Keywords: *multicultural education, EFL Teachers, language learning, intercultural competence, case study.*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and increasingly cross-cultural integration, English has emerged as crucial medium of global lingua franca for international communication. The ability to communicate effectively across cultures has become indispensable skill, requiring not only linguistic proficiency but also inter-cultural competence (Cong-Lem, 2025). Consequently, underscoring the imperative of integrating multicultural education into English Language Teaching (ELT) has shifted from purely language focused approach toward integrating multicultural perspective to better prepare students for global communication (Kusumaningputri et al., 2022). Especially, in Indonesia, English is widely used alongside *Bahasa Indonesia* in educational settings and is a mandatory subject from junior high school to university level. Internationally, multicultural education has been recognized as a crucial educational approach to promote respect for diversity, equity and inclusive learning environments. This approach highlight that language learning is inseparable from cultural competence, social values, and identity formation (Atobatele & Mouboua, 2024; Banks & Banks, 2019). Language is far beyond being a mere communication tool for conveying information. As Hino (2020) reported that ELT in the Asian, where pedagogical models focusing on the need for ELT teachers to be eclectic and integrative, learning from multiple paradigms in order to best serve their students. Therefore, integrating multicultural education into ELT is increasingly viewed as a strategic effort to enhance learners' intercultural communication skills and global awareness.

In higher education, students are expected to develop strong English skills to engage them with diverse academic communities and professional environments in this global era. Hence, this expectation highlights the importance of English for Multicultural Competence (EMC) in education, which integrates language proficiency with cultural awareness, as well



as critical understanding of diversity (Lestari et al., 2024). Through multicultural-based ELT, educators can empower learners to appreciate cultural diversity, develop empathy, and engage in meaningful communication across intercultural boundaries.

Several previous studies have shown that by embracing multicultural education in ELT contribute positively to students' EMC, critical thinking, and tolerance toward diversity, ultimately preparing them for success in the global workforce (Asrianti et al., 2022; Budianto et al., 2024; Smith & Jones, 2022). This showed that EMC is important not only for language learners but also other subject learner to face the global diversity. Moreover, multicultural approaches in ELT aimed to produce globally minded graduates who can communicate and collaborate across cultural boundaries (Ratrina et al., 2022). These findings confirm the relevance of multicultural education in language learning across various educational contexts. Thereby, graduates with strong EMC are better prepared for the global workforce for success in today's interconnected world.

Despite its benefits, the implementation of multicultural education in EFL classroom presents several challenges and issues, especially in Indonesia. Teachers' often face constraints such as limited teaching resources, lack of institutional support, and students' varying levels of cultural awareness, and potential conflicts arising from cultural differences when implementing multicultural education (Gay, 2018). Moreover, the cultural diversity of students provides both opportunities and challenges for EFL teacher. As Karacabey et al. (2019) stated that teacher's perspective and positive attitudes toward multicultural education are essential for ensuring inclusive and equitable learning environments. However, practical strategies and empirical evidence on how EFL teachers integrate multicultural education into classroom practices in Indonesian higher education remain limited.

Based on the existing studies on multicultural education in ELT focus on curriculum design or student outcome, while several studies examine teacher's perspective and instructional practice, especially in Indonesian EFL context. Therefore, to fill this gap, the present study aimed: (1) to explore EFL teacher perceptions of integrating multicultural education and its impact on students' language learning, (2) identifying challenges and opportunities in its implementation, and (3) investigate strategies used to integrate multicultural education at La Tansa Mashiro University within Multiculturalism and Language Education Course. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for EFL



teachers and contribute to the development of contextually relevant multicultural-based ELT practices in Indonesian higher education.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach using case study design. The qualitative case study was chosen to explore an in-depth understanding of EFL teachers' perspectives and students' experiences in integrating multicultural education in specific educational setting. This design allowed the researcher in exploring teaching practices, challenges, and strategies in an educational setting to capture rich, contextualized data related to multicultural-based ELT.

Participant

The study was conducted at La Tansa Mashiro University, especially on the Multiculturalism and Language Education Course. The participants consisted of two EFL teacher who taught the course and twenty undergraduate students enrolled in the class. The number of participants was considered sufficient due to the in-depth nature of qualitative case study research. The teachers were selected by using purposeful sampling based on their involvement and experiences in teaching multicultural education. The students were chosen based on their active participation in the course to ensure meaningful reflections and experience. The sampling technique was employed to obtain information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives.

Technique of Data Collection

The data collection techniques used in this research were: 1) classroom observations, 2) Semi-structured interview, and 3) document analysis. First, classroom observations to examine real-time instructional practices, teaching strategies, student interactions, and the implementation of multicultural education. Second, semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers and selected students to obtain deeper insights into their perceptions, experiences, challenges and strategy related to multicultural education. Third, document analysis obtained to support and triangulate the data by reviewing the course syllabi, teaching materials and relevant learning artifacts. Data collection was conducted over one academic semester to ensure sufficient exposure to the instructional process.



Technique of Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis adapted from Braun & Clarke (2019). The analysis involved several stages: familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and interpreting the findings. The identified themes were then contextualized within existing literature on multicultural education, intercultural competence, and ELT to ensure theoretical alignment and analytical depth. To ensure the trustworthiness, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and document analysis. In addition, focus group discussion with fellow researchers was employed to enhance analytical credibility and contributed to the validity and reliability of the findings.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

EFL Teachers' Perspective in Integrating Multicultural Education

The findings indicate that EFL teachers at La Tansa Mashiro University within Islamic university-level education possess a foundational awareness of multicultural education, primarily conceptualized as an approach to fostering tolerance, respect, and empathy among students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

1. Multicultural Education as Tolerance-Oriented Pedagogy in EFL Classrooms

Based on the interview data, it revealed that both teachers viewed multicultural education as extending beyond linguistic competence to include intercultural understanding and social harmony. Teachers emphasized inclusivity and mutual respect as central goals of EFL instruction in multicultural classrooms to ensure that all learners feel represented and valued, particularly within the context of an Islamic higher education institution. The first EFL teacher described multicultural education as an effort to cultivate respect and understanding beyond linguistic competence, highlighting its role in maintaining harmonious classroom interaction with different cultures on a deeper level:

“In the context of EFL classrooms within Islamic institution, like La Tansa University here, multicultural education is more than learning about language but also embracing cultural diversity, respecting one another, and building understanding across different backgrounds” (T1)



Similarly, the second EFL teacher framed multicultural education as a means to develop an inclusive learning environment where students of diverse background feel valued and represented. The teacher emphasized encouraging students to reflect on their own cultural identities while learning about others, suggesting that multicultural instruction is closely associated with affective and relational dimensions of teaching:

“Multicultural education help in creating a learning environment where students can reflect their own cultures while gaining insight into others’ perspective, values and experiences, not only from within classroom but also the outside world by discussing global issues and encouraging open dialogues toward differences” (T2)

It showed that both EFL Teachers understood the importance of promoting inclusivity and tolerance while teaching multicultural education in EFL classroom. The findings also reveals that tolerance emerged as a recurring and dominant category in EFL teachers’ understanding of multicultural education. By associating multicultural practices with reducing prejudice, nurturing empathy, and promoting social cohesion among students. The EFL teacher explicitly linked multicultural education to addressing bias and cultivating empathy:

“For me, multicultural education involves mostly about tolerance toward bias that might exist, so the student knows how to feel empathy and have a sense of comradeship among students and outside the university” (T1)

“By understanding other people differences, whether it is culture, language or background, they will feel empathy and able to tolerate others people prejudice. Moreover, as an Indonesian people with many ethnic group and other diverse culture need more deeper understanding and tolerance” (T2)

Hence, this tolerance-oriented perspective suggests that teachers position themselves primarily as facilitators of harmonious interaction rather than as agents of critical social change. However, document analysis of course syllabi and teaching guidelines of EFL teachers showed that multicultural education was not explicitly articulated as a structured pedagogical objective. Multicultural elements appeared implicitly stated as part of the general learning goals rather than embedded into specific instructional outcomes or assessment criteria. Classroom observations further supported this finding, revealing that EFL teachers consistently embedded multicultural content into lessons through culturally themed discussions, global issues, and comparative cultural examples rather than through



systematically planned multicultural instruction. This finding highlights a tendency toward what can be described as *surface-level multiculturalism*, where diversity is acknowledged and respected, but not critically interrogated.

2. Multicultural Education as Contextual Adaptation within an Islamic and Boarding School-Oriented Institution

Based on the finding, it reveals that for most educators in this Islamic School of La Tansa Mashiro University is strongly shaped by institutional and religious context on the nature of “*pondok pesantren*” (Islamic boarding school) students’ traditions. Teachers perceived multicultural education not only as cultural inclusion but also as an adaptive practice that accommodates students’ religious obligations and institutional norms. Both teachers acknowledged that a significant number of students were simultaneously engaged in academic study and religious responsibilities. As a result, multicultural education was enacted through flexibility and tolerance toward students’ participation in religious activities and viewed as integral to their identities rather than as disruptions to academic learning:

“Some of the students are from an Islamic boarding school, so sometimes they have to help do some activities for their school, such as teaching, recite the Qur’an, conducting exam and many others like usually others Islamic teachers do. That’s why we need more tolerance toward them” (T1)

“We cannot, however, prevent students from religious or Islamic boarding school activity during school hours. Because it is one of Islamic boarding school requirement for them to continue their studies” (T2)

These responses indicates that multicultural education in EFL context extends beyond ethnic or national diversity to include religious identity and institutional belonging. Teachers positioned tolerance not only as a moral value but also as a practical strategy for managing diversity within a faith-based academic environment, particularly on the acceptance of students’ religious commitments, framing accommodation as an essential component of inclusive education. However, this contextual adaptation also suggests implicit boundaries: multicultural practices were shaped to align with existing institutional norms rather than to challenge them. Furthermore, classroom observation support this finding. It showed the EFL teacher valued a sense of community and comradeship where cultural diversity, broadening students’ worldviews and deepening their respect in this interconnected world.



The Impact of Multicultural Education on Students' Language Learning

Based on the findings from classroom observations and student interviews twenty students (S1-S20) indicate that the integration of multicultural education positively influenced students' engagement and motivation in learning English.

1. Students' Enhanced Engagement and Motivation through Multicultural-Oriented EFL Instruction

The findings from interview reveal that students consistently reported that multicultural education encouraged more active participation, meaningful interaction, and increased confidence in expressing opinions during classroom activities, in order to understand the diverse culture, especially in ELT classroom. Several students contrasted multicultural EFL instruction with more traditional, form-focused teaching approaches, noting that discussions of cultural topics created a more engaging learning atmosphere:

"The multicultural is the most helpful to build intercultural awareness. We were able to express our opinion about the cultural topic and more engage during the discussion without thinking about the basic." (S4, S13 and S19)

Students also perceived language learning as more purposeful when connected to real-world cultural contexts, describing English not only as academic subject rather as a tool for intercultural communication:

"Language as the key role to communicate in understanding different cultures, rather than stuck with our language and culture, with multicultural education help to connect with the world beyond it" (S1, S5 and S12)

"We are motivated to use what we learn to communicate with others from diverse backgrounds in the real-world context" (S2, S17, S18 and S20)

From the interview above, it showed that students are more motivated and enjoy the lesson when linked to real-life multicultural contexts. Moreover, classroom observations supported these accounts, by showing higher levels of interaction during discussions involving identity, cultural experiences, and global issues. Students demonstrated greater willingness to speak, share personal experiences, and respond to peers' perspectives when cultural content was integrated into tasks.

2. Students' Intercultural Competence Remains at an Emerging Level



Despite positive perceptions and increased engagement, the findings indicate that students' intercultural competence remained largely at an emerging or developing stage. Interview data and document analysis revealed that most students demonstrated openness, curiosity, and respect toward cultural differences but had limited evidence of critical reflection or active intercultural agency. Students' interview responses further reflected this pattern. While students frequently mentioned empathy, respect, and understanding, their reflections tended to focus on personal attitudes rather than broader social or structural issues:

"During the lesson, there was a time when we discussing about the topic "exceptional child", we learn how to understand to appreciate but also how to respect the gifted children." (S3, S9 and S11)

"We were able to express our opinion about the cultural topic and more engage during the discussion without thinking about the basic like grammar and sentence structure" (S8, S10 and S16)

Based on this result the impact showed on the improved student's intercultural competence, where they develop empathy and a better understanding of different worldviews. Through observation, while students developed foundational intercultural awareness, their competence largely remained at the level of appreciation rather than critical intercultural understanding. The document analysis data from the Cultural Values Adjustment Survey that EFL teachers provided also support this. The majority of students were positioned at intermediate levels of intercultural development, 82% students characterized by open-minded in learning about other cultures and willingness to engage with different perspectives. Only 10% students demonstrated higher-level competencies associated with social action or critical awareness of having respect and appreciation of diversity. The last 8% students were slightly adjusted to have closed-minded in certain areas, but open in some others, and needs more assistance. This finding indicates a gap between the intended goals of multicultural education and its realized outcomes.

Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating Multicultural Education in EFL Classrooms

1. Challenges in Integrating Multicultural Education

The findings indicate that the integration of multicultural education in EFL classrooms faced multiple interconnected challenges, primarily related to culturally inclusive curriculum, limited instructional resources, and teachers' intercultural preparedness.



Although teachers expressed strong commitment to multicultural values, structural and pedagogical constraints limited the depth and consistency of implementation. They may also struggle with students' resistance to unfamiliar cultural perspectives. One major challenge identified was:

a. The Rigidity of the Prescribed Curriculum

Form the observation, it revealed that EFL teacher left minimal flexibility for exploring diverse cultural perspectives in depth. This statement supported by the interview result where teachers reported that strict adherence to syllabi constrained their ability to expand discussions beyond predetermined learning objectives on the available curriculum:

“Balancing cultural sensitivity with a rigid in EFL classrooms at our university is hard. We genuinely want to introduce students to a range of cultural perspectives, but the pressure to follow a strict syllabus limit how we can explore those cultural differences.” (T1)

This constraint positioned multicultural education as an “add-on” rather than an integral component of language instruction. As a result, cultural content was often introduced selectively and depended largely on individual teacher initiative rather than institutional mandate.

b. Limited Exposure of Cultural Context Leads to Potential Resistance

The finding reveals that the complexity of addressing sensitive cultural topics within the EFL classrooms may lead to potential resistance or discomfort among students, and passive engagement during discussion:

“A common challenge is students feeling toward sensitive cultural discussions come. Since they come from different backgrounds, certain discussion can spark disagreement or unease. So, creating a safe and respectful is essential.” (T2)

Teacher interview responses further indicated that while student valued multicultural discussions, some experienced initial discomfort when addressing unfamiliar or sensitive cultural issues.

“Limited access to varied materials of diverse cultures lead to passive engagement in class.” (T1 and T2)



Observation data also showed that students with limited exposure to diverse cultural contexts will affect their participation in multicultural discussions. Some students appeared hesitant or passive, which teachers attributed to limited intercultural exposure and fear of expressing differing viewpoints. These findings suggest that students' intercultural readiness varied significantly, requiring teachers to carefully mediate discussions to prevent discomfort or conflict. Such mediation demanded additional pedagogical skill, particularly in managing divergent viewpoints without reinforcing stereotypes or suppressing dialogue.

d. Teachers' Preparedness

Based on the interview, teachers acknowledged limitations in their own intercultural competence and access to professional development. Both teachers emphasized the need for training and collaborative support to integrate multicultural content and address potential classroom tensions:

"We require collaborative efforts among teacher and institution in training on how to effectively promote multicultural into ELT and manage potential classroom conflicts arising from cultural misunderstandings." (T1 and T2)

These challenges indicate that the obstacles to multicultural education were not primarily attitudinal but structural and systemic. Teachers' willingness to implement multicultural education was evident. However, the absence of sustained institutional support and professional development constrained its pedagogical impact.

2. Opportunities for Strengthening Multicultural Education through Professional Development and Digital Integration

Despite these challenges, the findings also highlight significant opportunities for enhancing the integration of multicultural education in EFL classrooms. Teachers perceived professional development, technological advancement, and pedagogical innovation as key avenues for strengthening intercultural learning. Both teachers expressed optimism that targeted training in multicultural education to design effective and innovative instructional practices:

"If we have more training on multicultural education, it will help us in more innovative ways to teach intercultural competence, especially in English into the curriculum to maximize the outcomes" (T1)



In addition, the availability of digital tools and online platforms was viewed as a valuable opportunity to access authentic multicultural materials and facilitate intercultural exposure beyond the local context:

“In this digital era, we can use many technological platforms to help in integrating multicultural education with global cultural materials. The students will learn and see by themselves about the culture, how to free-thinking and respectful of diverse perspectives and lifestyles.” (T2)

These opportunities suggest a shift toward promoting technology to overcome material limitations and broaden students' intercultural experiences. Importantly, the opportunities identified were not limited to technological solutions but also pointed toward institutional change. Observation data indicated that the use of digital resources and multimedia content facilitated student engagement and reduced resistance toward multicultural discussions. It was affirmed on document analysis that the EFL teachers' multicultural education more systematically into curricula and assessment practices through collaborative effort.

Teachers' Strategy in Implementing Multicultural Education in ELT Classrooms

Through classroom observation, semi-structured interview, and document analysis was used to enhance the credibility of the data about the strategy to integrate multicultural education in classroom. It showed that they have successfully integrate multicultural education in ELT and often used almost the same strategies of experience-based, task-based and case-based learning.

1. Student-Centered and Experience-Based Pedagogy as the Core Strategy of Multicultural Instruction

The findings indicate that EFL teachers predominantly employed student-centered and experience-based pedagogical strategies to implement multicultural education in the classroom to create a safe space in appreciating and respecting diverse cultures and experiences. Rather than positioning themselves as sole knowledge providers, teachers encouraged students to actively contribute their personal, cultural, and social experiences as learning resources. Classroom observations revealed that discussions on identity-related topics allowed students to share their backgrounds, beliefs, and lived experiences. Teachers



intentionally created spaces for students to narrate their cultural stories, enabling peer learning and fostering mutual understanding:

“During discussion about the topic ‘My Identities’, where students are encouraging to share their own experiences and background. From hesitant and awkward atmosphere turn into heated discussion.” (T1)

Similarly, the second teacher emphasized the importance of facilitating student voice to build intercultural awareness:

“With some encouragement, the students started to bravely share their own experiences in their community. They were shock on how cultures enrich their learning experiences.” (T2)

Student responses further confirmed that sharing personal experiences helped them better understand peers from different educational backgrounds:

“The topic about ‘My Identities’ open my mind, because now I learn more about how my friend do in Islamic boarding school and the responsibility they have to balance between university and their job.” (S1, S8 and S17)

Furthermore, based on the document analysis, both of EFL Teachers to incorporate Multicultural Content (literature, case study, news articles, discussion, videos) for students to be exposed on diverse perspectives. By using authentic materials that reflect real-world multicultural interactions and encourage them to share from their own cultural experiences and compare them with others.

2. Task-Based and Case-Based Instruction to Promote Intercultural Reflection

Another prominent strategy identified was the use of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and case-based activities to integrate multicultural content into EFL instruction. Teachers frequently employed case studies, problem-based discussions, reflective task, and contextualized tasks such as to deepen cross-cultural understanding in analyzing cultural issues while using English as a communicative tool. Moreover, observation data showed in the ELT classroom, both EFL teachers mostly used involving real-life cultural dilemmas and social issues prompted students to engage in reflective discussion and collaborative problem-solving. Students have shared their respective backgrounds during the discussion, some students confidently said have a teaching experience and some were reluctant but still shared



their background were freshly graduate from high school and did not have any experience in teaching.

Furthermore, document analysis data showed that EFL teachers assessed the multicultural competence by allowing students to express their learning through various formats (oral presentations, reflective essays, and creative projects). The shared experiences or perspective of cultural diversity leads to breaking down their barriers, develop deeper understanding, increase positive attitude, respect toward each other's and create a safer environment to communicate. Teachers perceived such tasks as effective in stimulating critical thinking and intercultural reflection:

"Case study and task-based activities help students think deeper about cultural issues and how they express their perspectives in English. This kind of discussion activities will show students' awareness and behavior toward diversity through communication to express their critical thinking." (T1)

The second teacher stated that group discussions and debates were useful for exploring sensitive cultural topics while maintaining learning atmosphere:

"It is better to conduct small group discussion or small debate about "The Complexity Identities of Adolescents" to promote students' curiosity, critical thinking on how they perceive the diverse identities and the difference of their experiences." (T2)

Based on the responds above, both EFL teacher positioned language learning as a means of engaging with cultural meaning rather than merely achieving linguistic accuracy.

DISCUSSION

In terms of teachers' perceptions on multicultural education in EFL classroom, it showed a gap between teachers' conceptual understanding and pedagogical enactment of multicultural education. While teachers demonstrated positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, their practices relied heavily on personal beliefs rather than formal instructional design. This align with Efendi & Lien (2021) and Kurniawan et al. (2025), who argue that cultural-based integration in Indonesia promotes inclusivity and intercultural competence for developing contextualized and meaningful practice due to the nation's sociocultural diversity. Similarly to Chaika (2023) and Fernández-Silva (2019) study, affirmed that foreign language



teachers recognize the importance of intercultural competence in language learning. However, unlike studies that highlighted formal multicultural curricula integration (Fernández-Silva, 2019; Smith & Jones, 2022), the present study reveals that teachers' understanding remains largely normative rather than pedagogical reflecting the realities of Indonesian higher education settings study. This difference may stem from institutional constraints within Islamic higher education, where rigid curricula limit instructional flexibility and innovation. The teachers in this study relied heavily on personal initiatives and contextual adaptation, reflecting the realities of Indonesian higher education settings. Especially, it highlights a distinctive feature of multicultural education in Islamic higher education, where inclusivity is negotiated within predefined religious and institutional frameworks. Multicultural education thus functions as a means of maintaining social harmony while respecting religious authority.

In addition, the positive impacts on Multicultural Education that students gain are mostly in improving their confidence and appreciation of diversity. This result in line with Deiniatur & Hasanah (2024) that affirm students feel more confident and comfortable interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Abduloh et al. (2020) asserted on developing the human potential to appreciate diversity of local cultural wisdom. They also feel valued when their cultural backgrounds are included in lessons. Analytically, these findings suggest that multicultural education enhances student engagement by increasing the perceived relevance of language learning. However, rather than focusing solely on grammatical accuracy (Rostandi et al., 2025), intercultural competence and critical literacy (Gilani et al., 2020) through multicultural context to make students experienced English as a medium for meaningful social interaction. The present data suggest that engagement was primarily stimulated at the affective and participatory levels, such as empathy and openness but did not consistently lead to deeper critical engagement with issues such as inequality, power, or cultural marginalization into sustained linguistic development over time. This highlights the need for more structured pedagogical strategies that move beyond awareness toward reflective and action-oriented intercultural learning.

Despite these, in its implementation, teachers faced various challenges in integrating multicultural education such as a safe classroom environment, institutional support, and material resources to guide them during the discussion to develop tolerant. This align with



Bahri (2020) who identified resource limitations and inadequate teacher preparation as common barriers in multicultural education. Similarly, Nguyen & Phan (2019), who emphasize digital tools to foster multicultural connections and learners' curiosity. Analytically, these findings indicate that multicultural education in this context is positioned at a transitional stage. However, this finding differs from Budianto et al. (2024) and Ratrina et al. (2022), who reported strong institutional support and innovative pedagogical approaches in their study in developing globally competent graduates. The present study suggests that institutional readiness significantly influences the effectiveness of multicultural integration in EFL classrooms. The current practices rely heavily on individual teacher initiative and adaptive strategy. There is potential for more sustainable implementation through institutional support, professional development, and strategic use of technology. Realizing these opportunities would require shifting multicultural education from a peripheral pedagogical choice to a core component in Indonesian higher education. Hence, the need of collaborative efforts among teachers and institutional support to equip educators with the skills and tools necessary to adapt teaching methods and curricula effectively within resource-constrained environments.

Furthermore, in the practice of multicultural education, EFL teachers also used various strategies that aimed to increase students' intercultural competences and reflects a pedagogical orientation that views multicultural learning as experiential and dialogic. This in line with Nurpratiwi (2024) statement that as the teacher help students acquire information, skills, values, ways of thinking, and means of expressing themselves, they are also teaching them how to learn. By embedding multicultural content within communicative tasks, teachers enabled students to practice English in socially meaningful contexts. However, while previous studies focused primarily on curriculum design by highlighting task-based and experience-based strategies used by teachers to manage multicultural diversity to motivate students in real-world context (Chaika, 2023; Hackett et al., 2023; Ramdhani et al., 2024). This present data relied heavily on students' willingness and ability to articulate their experiences, suggesting that deeper intercultural learning may remain uneven among less confident participants. Moreover, while task-based and case-based strategies supported reflective engagement, the depth of intercultural reflection largely depended on the complexity of tasks and the level of teacher scaffolding. Without explicit critical prompts,



discussions tended to focus on understanding differences rather than interrogating underlying cultural or social structures.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that integrating multicultural education in EFL classrooms contributes positively to improve students' engagement, motivation, and cultural awareness. The findings indicated that multicultural-based ELT encourages learners to appreciate diverse perspectives while enhancing their communicative competence. However, the implementation of multicultural education remains challenged by limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and varying levels of students' intercultural exposure to achieve maximized education become crucial. In the Indonesian higher education context, these challenges highlight the need for culturally responsive teaching materials and clearer institutional guidelines to support multicultural practices in EFL classrooms. The study suggests that strategies such as case-based learning and task-based instruction can facilitate effective multicultural integration by promoting critical thinking, curiosity, empathy, and collaborative interaction. Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples and to examine the long-term impact of multicultural education on students' linguistic and intercultural competence development, as well as technology integration for global challenge.

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