



Contextualizing Multicultural Instruction in Indonesian EFL Classrooms: A Qualitative Case Study of Pedagogical Practices in Junior High Schools

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Abstract: *This study explores how Multicultural Instruction (MI) is implemented in junior high school English classrooms. A pre-observation was conducted to identify whether multicultural elements had been integrated prior to the main observation phase. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research employed observation checklists to examine teacher activities in the classroom across two different schools. The findings reveal that MI has been implemented through five key dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering classroom culture. However, the depth and mode of implementation vary between the two contexts. In SMPN 1 Tolitoli, MI is enacted through a more experiential, reflective, and student-centered approach, where cultural content is deeply contextualized and connected to students lived experiences. whereas, SMPN 7 Tolitoli demonstrates a more structured and material-driven approach, emphasizing systematic instruction, guided analysis, and consistent classroom procedures. Despite these differences, both teachers successfully promote intercultural awareness, respect for diversity, and equitable participation. This study highlights that MI implementation is context-dependent and shaped by teachers' pedagogical orientations, suggesting that both experiential and structured approaches can serve as complementary models in multicultural English language teaching. The findings contribute to the growing body of research on culturally responsive pedagogy by providing empirical insights from Indonesian EFL classrooms.*

Keywords: *Multicultural Instruction, English Language Teaching, Junior High School, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Qualitative Case Study, Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and digitalization, English language classrooms increasingly represent diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. In Indonesia, teachers and students come from various ethnic groups, religions, and local languages that reflecting the Indonesians' multicultural identity. Recent studies highlight that students' perceptions of diversity significantly affect their learning experiences.

For example, a study at a state university in Sumatra revealed that although students demonstrated positive cultural awareness, they still faced "difficulties in tolerating differences." Annisa Ritonga and Saleh (2024) stated that the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia is designed to foster multicultural education, emphasizing inclusivity, respect, and cultural understanding to address the nation's growing diversity. While the curriculum's intent is clear, its implementation across schools is varied and faces notable challenges (Reskia et al., 2025).

However, when narrowed down to English language teaching (ELT), specific challenges emerge regarding how multicultural instruction is practically implemented. Teachers often struggle to balance linguistic competence with cultural sensitivity. Research in Indonesia confirms that multicultural education frameworks have a positive influence on English teaching (Haswani et al., 2023) but that teachers' strategies and perceptions remain inconsistent and limited (Deiniatur and Hasanah, 2024). Internationally, recent studies have also shown that culturally responsive assessment practices in ELT are still underdeveloped, often neglecting students' local linguistic and cultural identities leading to disengagement and inequitable learning outcomes (Ordóñez Procel et al., 2023).

These findings underscore the academic and pedagogical urgency of exploring how multicultural instruction (MI) is implemented in English classrooms. Firstly, intercultural interaction in EFL settings is not a supplementary condition but a central challenge that, if unaddressed, can impede learning effectiveness. Secondly, despite the proliferation of multicultural education discourse and policy, a persistent gap remains between top-down policy intentions and bottom-up classroom practices especially in content selection, dialogic structures, inclusive language use, and assessment methods. Thirdly, as English is not merely a linguistic subject but also a medium of intercultural communication, embedding MI in ELT becomes essential to cultivate learners who are not only linguistically competent but also culturally responsive.

Against this backdrop, this study explores the implementation of multicultural instruction in junior high school English classrooms through classroom observation. It focuses on how teachers integrate multicultural content

in EFL Classrooms. This inquiry offers a contextual and empirical understanding of how multicultural values are operationalized in authentic classroom practices. Ultimately, this research seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice by presenting classroom-based evidence of MI in Indonesian EFL contexts. The findings are expected to contribute to the enrichment of multicultural pedagogy, offering insights for teachers, policymakers, and curriculum designers to develop English language instruction that is both inclusive and transformative aligning with Indonesia's educational vision of promoting harmony within diversity.

Literature review

Teaching English in EFL Classroom

Teaching English in EFL classrooms is inherently shaped by the sociocultural and linguistic diversity of learners, particularly in contexts such as Indonesia where multilingualism and multiculturalism are deeply embedded. In EFL settings, English is not used as a daily communication tool, which positions the classroom as the primary site for both linguistic and intercultural exposure. Thus, English teaching extends beyond grammar and vocabulary to include meaning-making processes influenced by learners' cultural backgrounds.

According to Kramsch (2013), language learning is inseparable from culture, as language both reflects and constructs cultural realities. Similarly, Byram (2020) posits that EFL instruction should foster intercultural communicative competence, enabling learners to interpret and relate cultural meanings across contexts. In line with this, Richards (2015) highlights that effective English teaching must integrate contextualized content that resonates with learners' experiences, while Macalister and Nation (2019) underscore the importance of curriculum design that accommodates learners' sociocultural needs. These perspectives reinforce the argument that EFL classrooms should function as intercultural spaces where language learning is contextual, meaningful, and socially situated.

Building on this foundation, contemporary EFL pedagogy increasingly aligns with culturally responsive teaching approaches that position students' cultural identities as assets rather than obstacles. This is particularly relevant in Indonesian classrooms, where cultural diversity influences classroom interaction, participation, and comprehension. As highlighted in the present study, teachers are required to balance linguistic objectives with cultural sensitivity, ensuring that learning materials and classroom discourse are inclusive and representative. Gay (2018) argues that culturally responsive teaching enhances student engagement by linking instruction to learners' cultural contexts, while Ladson-Billings (2021) further conceptualizes this approach as transformative, enabling students to critically engage with both local and global perspectives.

Thus, teaching English in EFL contexts should not merely focus on language proficiency but also on cultivating intercultural awareness, which becomes a foundational element for implementing Multicultural Instruction (MI) in classroom practice.

Multicultural Instruction (MI) in Indonesian EFL Classroom

Multicultural Instruction (MI) in Indonesian EFL classrooms emerges as a pedagogical response to the need for inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive education. Rooted in the broader framework of multicultural education, MI operationalizes theoretical principles into classroom practices that integrate cultural diversity into teaching and learning processes. According to Banks (1993), multicultural education consists of five key dimensions that guide instructional practice.

First, *content integration* refers to incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into teaching materials.

Second, *knowledge construction* involves helping students understand how cultural assumptions influence knowledge.

Third, *prejudice reduction* focuses on developing positive attitudes toward different cultural groups. Fourth, *equity pedagogy* requires adapting teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learners.

Finally, *empowering school culture* emphasizes creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. These dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how MI is implemented in EFL classrooms, as also reflected in the findings of this study. Supporting this framework, Gay (2018) and Ladson-Billings (2021) highlight that multicultural instruction must be both culturally relevant and transformative, enabling students to connect language learning with their lived cultural experiences.

In the Indonesian context, the execution of MI is closely linked to national educational goals that prioritize diversity, tolerance, and social harmony. Nonetheless, empirical studies emphasize that its application remains varied and context dependent. For instance, Haswani, et al. (2023) demonstrate that while teachers recognize the importance of multicultural education, their instructional practices are often inconsistent. Similarly, Deiniatur and Hasanah (2024) identify challenges such as limited teacher understanding and lack of institutional support in implementing multicultural approaches.

Furthermore, Ordóñez Procel, et al. (2023) argue that neglecting students' cultural identities in language instruction can lead to disengagement and inequitable outcomes. Complementing these findings, Suri and Chandra (2021) emphasize the importance of integrating local cultural values to support identity development, while Liao and Li (2023a) show that culturally responsive strategies significantly enhance students' intercultural competence.

In alignment with these studies, the present research demonstrates that MI in Indonesian EFL classrooms is not a uniform practice but rather a dynamic process shaped by teachers' pedagogical orientations, which vary from experiential and student-centered approaches to structured and material-driven instruction. This indicates that MI should be viewed as a flexible and context-responsive model that bridges theoretical frameworks with practical classroom realities.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design of the Study

This research employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of multicultural instruction (MI) in junior high school English classrooms. The case study approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth examination of complex social and pedagogical phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2018). It focuses on understanding how teachers naturally integrate multicultural values in classroom practices rather than testing predefined hypotheses. According to Tisdell et al (2025), a qualitative case study is particularly suitable for educational settings, as it emphasizes meaning-making and contextual interpretation, both of which are essential for exploring culturally responsive pedagogy.

Participants

The participants consisted of two English teachers from a junior high school selected through purposive sampling, focusing on those who had previously incorporated multicultural elements in their teaching practices. These teachers were observed during regular English lessons to capture authentic instructional behaviours' and classroom interactions. The setting represented a typical Indonesian junior high school context where cultural diversity among students provides an ideal environment for implementing multicultural instruction. Ethical considerations were maintained through informed consent and anonymity of participants.

Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was an observation checklist, designed to document the presence and quality of multicultural teaching indicators. The checklist items indicators were adapted from the conceptual frameworks of Banks (1993), which outline key components of multicultural education, including content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering classroom culture. This instrument ensured systematic observation of teacher behaviors and classroom dynamics relevant to multicultural instruction. Prior to data collection, a pre-observation was conducted to confirm whether multicultural elements were already embedded in classroom activities.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which allows for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analysis process included familiarization with data, coding teacher activities based on observed multicultural practices, generating themes, and interpreting how these themes reflected the implementation of multicultural instruction. This analytical approach was appropriate because it provides flexibility in exploring meaning across different levels of interpretation and aligns well with the interpretive nature of qualitative case studies. To enhance trustworthiness, the researcher employed triangulation through reflective memoing and observation notes.

FINDINGS

The following table below shows that the implementation of multicultural instruction (MI) in English classrooms is manifested through five interrelated dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering classroom culture.

Table 1. The Implementation of Multicultural Instruction in English EFL Classroom

MI Dimension	SMPN 1 Tolitoli	SMPN 7 Tolitoli	Insight of practice
Content Integration	Culturally rich and dialogic; integrates diverse ethnic examples and students' lived experiences	Contextual but more material-driven; relies on visuals and textbook representations	Both integrate multicultural content, but SMPN 1 demonstrates deeper contextualization
Knowledge Construction	Interactive and reflective; students actively compare cultural perspectives through discussion	Structured and analytical; students engage through guided text analysis	Both promote perspective awareness; approach differs (experiential vs. analytical)
Prejudice Reduction	Strong emphasis on empathy, stereotype awareness, and reflective dialogue	Emphasizes respectful norms and corrective feedback on stereotypes	Both address prejudice; SMPN 1 is more transformative, SMPN 7 more normative
Equity Pedagogy	Adaptive and differentiated; responsive to diverse learner needs	Systematic and structured; ensures participation through organized activities	Both ensure equity; SMPN 1 is flexible, SMPN 7 is procedural
Empowering Classroom Culture	Highly student-centered; promotes identity expression and intercultural collaboration	Inclusive but teacher-guided; interaction is structured and controlled	Both foster inclusive environments; level of student agency differs

Based on the table above the researchers elevated MI dimensions through the teachers practices in the EFL Classroom. The first is Content Integration, the findings indicate that both teachers in SMPN 1 Tolitoli and SMPN 7 Tolitoli have incorporated multicultural elements into their English language teaching; however, the depth of integration differs significantly. At SMPN 1 Tolitoli, content integration is highly contextual and dialogic, as teachers consistently employ examples from diverse ethnic backgrounds such as Bugis, Javanese, Chinese, and Manado, and explicitly connect lesson materials to students lived cultural experiences.

This approach enables students to actively relate language learning to their own identities. In contrast, SMPN 7 Tolitoli demonstrates a more material-driven approach, where multicultural content is primarily presented through visual aids and textbook-based representations, such as images of traditional clothing and regional figures. Although both schools successfully integrate multicultural content, SMPN 1 exhibits a deeper level of contextualization, while SMPN 7 relies more on structured instructional materials.

The second is Knowledge Construction, In terms of knowledge construction, both teachers emphasize that knowledge is shaped by cultural perspectives, but their instructional approaches vary. At SMPN 1 Tolitoli, knowledge construction is facilitated through interactive and reflective classroom discussions, where students actively compare cultural practices, such as differences in self-introduction and descriptive expressions across ethnic groups. This promotes critical thinking and intercultural awareness. Meanwhile, SMPN 7 Tolitoli adopts a more structured and analytical approach, guiding students to construct knowledge through reading texts and identifying differences in perspectives within written materials. While both approaches are effective in fostering awareness of multiple perspectives, SMPN 1 tends to be more experiential and discussion-based, whereas SMPN 7 is more text-oriented and systematically guided.

The third is Prejudice Reduction, teachers demonstrate a clear commitment to prejudice reduction by promoting respectful interaction and addressing stereotypes; nevertheless, the intensity and strategy of implementation differ. At SMPN 1 Tolitoli, prejudice reduction is strongly emphasized through reflective dialogue, where teachers actively challenge stereotypes and encourage empathy through role-play and collaborative activities. This approach fosters deeper intercultural sensitivity among students. In comparison, SMPN 7 Tolitoli also addresses stereotypes but tends to do so through reinforcing classroom norms and providing corrective feedback when inappropriate language or assumptions arise. Thus, while both schools aim to cultivate tolerance and respect, SMPN 1 adopts a more transformative and reflective approach, whereas SMPN 7 employs a more normative and rule-based strategy.

The fourth is Equity Pedagogy, regarding equity pedagogy, teachers ensure that all students have equal opportunities to participate in the learning process; however, their pedagogical execution differs. SMPN 1 Tolitoli demonstrates a highly adaptive and differentiated approach, where teachers adjust instructional pacing, provide scaffolding, and respond to individual student needs during classroom interaction. This flexibility supports diverse learners and promotes inclusive participation. On the other hand, SMPN 7 Tolitoli applies a more systematic and structured approach, utilizing organized activities such as group

work, visual aids, and word banks to support student understanding. Although both approaches achieve equitable participation, SMPN 1 is characterized by pedagogical flexibility, whereas SMPN 7 emphasizes procedural consistency.

The fifth is Empowering Classroom Culture, in terms of empowering classroom culture, English school teachers create inclusive environments that value cultural diversity and encourage student participation. At SMPN 1 Tolitoli, the classroom atmosphere is highly student-centered, allowing learners to freely express their cultural identities and engage in collaborative learning across diverse backgrounds. This fosters a strong sense of belonging and intercultural interaction. Conversely, SMPN 7 Tolitoli also promotes inclusivity, but classroom interaction tends to be more teacher-guided, with structured activities that regulate student participation. While both schools successfully establish supportive learning environments, SMPN 1 provides greater student agency, whereas SMPN 7 maintains a more controlled instructional setting.

DISCUSSION

The findings also strongly resonate with Gay's (2018) concept of culturally responsive teaching, which emphasizes the integration of students' cultural backgrounds into pedagogical design to enhance engagement and meaning-making. Similarly, Banks' (1993) multicultural education framework underscores the importance of curriculum transformation, equity pedagogy, and prejudice reduction, all of which were evident in teachers' use of culturally relevant materials and inclusive language strategies. Extending this theoretical lens, Ladson-Billings (2021) introduces the idea of transformative multicultural pedagogy, where teachers act as cultural mediators who connect global perspectives with local realities—precisely what was demonstrated through teachers' blending of English with local languages and moral reflection activities.

Turning to another theoretical perspectives, the findings also align with previous research on multicultural English teaching in both Indonesian and international contexts. For instance, (Liao and Li, 2023; Ngan and Dan, 2025; Sutrisno et al., 2024; Yuliantari and Huda, 2023) found that EFL teachers who employ culturally inclusive materials improve students' engagement and cultural awareness. Likewise, (García-Carrión et al., 2020; Ugalde et al., 2023) reported that dialogic interaction and collaborative learning are widely recognized as effective strategies for fostering empathy and tolerance among students, especially in multilingual and culturally diverse classrooms. Consistent with these findings, Suri and Chandra (2021) noted that moral integration through local cultural examples supports students' identity negotiation in diverse classrooms. Therefore, the present study not only reinforces earlier findings but also extends them by offering a more contextualized and dialogic application of multicultural instruction.

Given these insights, it becomes evident that while the observed practices are commendable, English teachers can still enhance their implementation of MI to achieve greater pedagogical depth. This calls for more reflective practices to ensure that multicultural content is not merely thematic but also transformative in shaping students' perspectives. Accordingly, teachers are encouraged to develop localized teaching modules, integrate continuous assessments that value intercultural dialogue, and participate in professional training focused on multicultural pedagogy. Strengthening teachers' intercultural communication competence (Deardorff, 2020) would further enable them to manage cultural dynamics effectively and avoid superficial treatment of diversity within classroom practices.

Consequently, the originality of this research lies in its contextual and interpretive focus, providing empirical insights into how multicultural instruction is operationalized within real Indonesian EFL classrooms. Unlike prior studies that focus mainly on curriculum or textbook analysis, this study captures the teacher's lived practices and their adaptive responses to culturally diverse learners. The emerging context-responsive model reveals a dynamic process in which teachers mediate between global educational paradigms and local cultural realities. This localized and interpretive contribution enriches the broader discourse on multicultural education by demonstrating how MI can foster both language proficiency and intercultural harmony in developing educational settings.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the implementation of Multicultural Instruction (MI) in junior high school English classrooms in Indonesia has been effectively demonstrated. These five interconnected dimensions show that English teachers are not only language facilitators but also cultural mediators who promote inclusivity, tolerance, and empathy in learning. The findings affirm that multicultural pedagogy enhances students' engagement and fosters intercultural understanding when teachers intentionally design lessons that connect global perspectives with local cultural realities.

However, the study acknowledges that the implementation remains at a formative stage teachers need to deepen their reflective practices, develop localized modules, and integrate transformative assessments that go beyond thematic exposure to truly shape students' intercultural competence. Despite its limitation in the absence of document analysis and teacher interviews, this research provides an original, context-responsive insight into how multicultural instruction can be authentically operationalized within Indonesian EFL classrooms. The localized contribution of this study thus serves as a valuable foundation for advancing

culturally responsive English teaching practices aligned with Indonesia's vision of harmony in diversity.

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