



Comparing Multi-Age and Homogeneous Classrooms in EFL Context: A Systematic Literature Review

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-01-09 Revised: 2026-01-25 Accepted: 2026-04-22</p> <p>Keywords: Systematic literature review, multi-age classroom, EFL</p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.7805</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Lili Nandita Auliya lilinanditaa7@students.unnes.ac.id Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Negeri Semarang</p>	<p><i>Multi-age classrooms are still few and far between in Indonesia where the national policy is based on age-homogenous grouping in which students of the same chronological age are instructed together. Whilst this may make teaching simpler in administrative, it can limit approaches to inclusive and personalized learning, particularly in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting where many learners will be very different in terms of their level of proficiency and need. This systematic literature review investigates the unique features of multi-age classrooms as opposed to homogenous classrooms especially in the field of EFL. PRISMA was used to evaluate 13 journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 from total 123 records. Five key elements of multi-age classrooms are identified by the findings such as peer learning and interaction, learner autonomy, identity and inclusivity, instructional flexibility, and social-emotional development. The review concludes that multi-age classrooms promote richer language learning opportunities and personalized pedagogy. For educators, these characteristics highlight both advantages and difficulties, particularly in environments with limited resources or multilingualism. The pedagogical dynamics and impacts of teaching EFL to multi-age classrooms are highlighted in this review.</i></p>

1. Introduction

The use of multi-age classrooms is still quite rare and strange for educators in Indonesia. While they have potential to provide inclusive and personalized education, it is not as commonly used in either formal or informal setting. In Indonesia, the order of education arranges students in same age group which create a homogeneous-less across different classes. National policies basically strengthen this practice as it is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud, 2016). Further evidence found that age remains the predominant factor for classroom placement in age-homogeneous classes (Zakia, 2017). Age-based classrooms, which are the norm already may not be successful for all students.

For instance, Ramadhan et al. (2024) stress that adopting inclusive education might be greatly hindered by the rigidity of age-based class systems. This gives importance to more flexible and inclusive alternative models, such as multi-age classrooms. These models are still limited and barely studied in Indonesia, particularly when it comes to the secondary education and non-formal education settings. Hence, this study seeks to systematically examine and delineate the distinctive attributes that differentiate multi-age classrooms from homogeneous ones.

The idea of a multi-age classroom has attracted interest from all over the globe because it places emphasis on flexibility, teamwork and personalized learning. Internationally, it has been adopted by countries such as Australia, Finland, Austria and New Zealand with its own systemic and cultural changes. In Europe, the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system in Finland which was the idea of mixed-age learning was rooted promoting peer learning, social development, and individualized progress (Tarr, 2007). Rural schools in Austria have also applied the practice of multi-age classroom since decades ago.

In the Asia-Pacific region, multi-age classrooms gained popularity in Australia in the 1980s due to the necessity to address increasing student populations in rural areas (Elwick & White, 2022). Innovative Learning Environments (ILEs) in New Zealand also offer a modern model where big, adaptable spaces facilitate collaborative, cross-age teaching (Fletcher & Everatt, 2021). Meanwhile, secondary schools frequently use multi-age formats in specialized subjects because of scheduling limitations (Garbutt, 2019). There are great examples that exist across the world that demonstrate how multi-age classrooms are not only a matter of "making things easier," but rather, a purposeful teaching choice that promotes peer-learning and emotional resilience and accommodating learning by interacting with peers of different ages (Wu & Ko, 2024).

Although there are many educators who agree with the ideas of multiage classrooms, the setting remains unfamiliar in Indonesia. Indonesian teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to use differentiated instruction in accordance with

the Merdeka Curriculum (Azzahra, 2024). Differentiated instruction itself presents a significant obstacle for teachers. Another study case in Malaysia also shows that although teachers are familiar with differentiated instruction, it has not been widely adopted for a number of reasons. They must prepare extensively to serve students from various backgrounds (Kaur, 2017).

There are certain educators who have some doubts about multiage programs because of the challenges of creating and running them (Song et al., 2009). According to several researchers, teaching multiple-grade is more demanding than teaching mono-grade (Mason & Burns, 1995). It is supported by Pasiningsih (2024) especially when dealing with students of varying ages or developmental stages.

To move beyond this structural concern, it is important to consider how complexity appears at the level of classroom environment. In EFL context, multi-age setting requires reacting to a range of language proficiency levels in along with adjusting to the age diversity of the students. Teachers have to handle a variety of learner profiles and differentiate their instruction (Luspa, 2018).

However, recent studies have investigated this intersection. Peer tutoring in EFL multi-age classrooms increased students' confidence and teamwork in addition to speaking competency (Ariesinta & Widyantoro, 2024). Saqlain (2015) stated that his findings preferred multi-grade education for non-cognitive successes such as relationship formation, self-esteem improvement, self-concept, and social growth. In contrast to conventional age-segregated classrooms, multi-age environments give students the chance to study at their own speed while participating in cooperative learning activities and peer mentoring (Stone & Burris, 2019).

A further advantage is that it promotes student-centered learning where students learn new information outside the scope of what they have learned (Black, 2022; Ronksley-Pavia et al., 2019). These theoretical perspectives focus on the importance of managing a variety of student needs across ages and skill levels just as important as teaching English in the multi-age classroom. Considering the low level of local acceptance of such models, it is essential to understand the dynamics of these processes in the broader context of real-life situations in Indonesia.

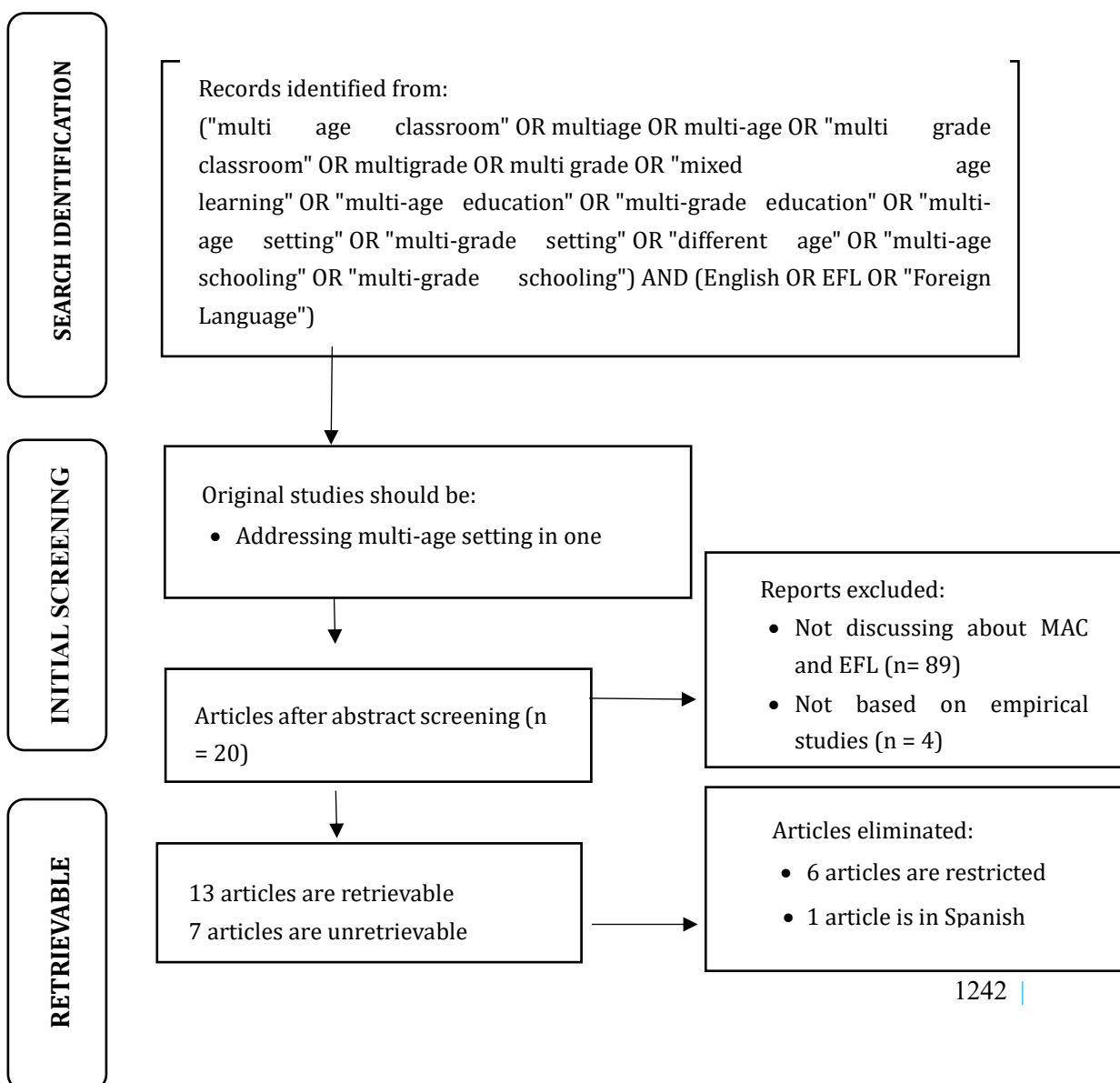
Although multi-age classrooms have attracted global attention, there is still a lack of comprehensive synthesis that compares them directly with homogeneous classrooms. Much of the existing literature tends to focus on either the benefits or the challenges of multi-age education in isolation, without clearly contrasting these with age-homogeneous classroom practices.

2. Method

This study carefully looked at many past research papers, using clear rules and a main question to decide which ones to include. This research used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to study earlier research comparing multi-age and single-age classrooms. SLR as a process of finding and reviewing important articles in a clearer and organized manner follows steps (Triandini et al., 2019). The study by PRISMA, reducing the possibility of bias in the process keeping it open and reliable.

Systematic reviews assist researchers in identifying patterns and advocating for gaps, and it helps them build off prior knowledge in a fair and careful (Booth et al., 2016). This method is able to be used in schooling as because teaching shows to be regularly changing. To be thorough, the study employed a combination of database searches and hands-on checking of key articles to follow and see that they lead to more relevant studies (Booth et al., 2016; Wohlin, 2014).

The PRISMA process, which includes search identification, initial screening, retrievability assessment, and eligibility evaluation is illustrated in Figure 1.



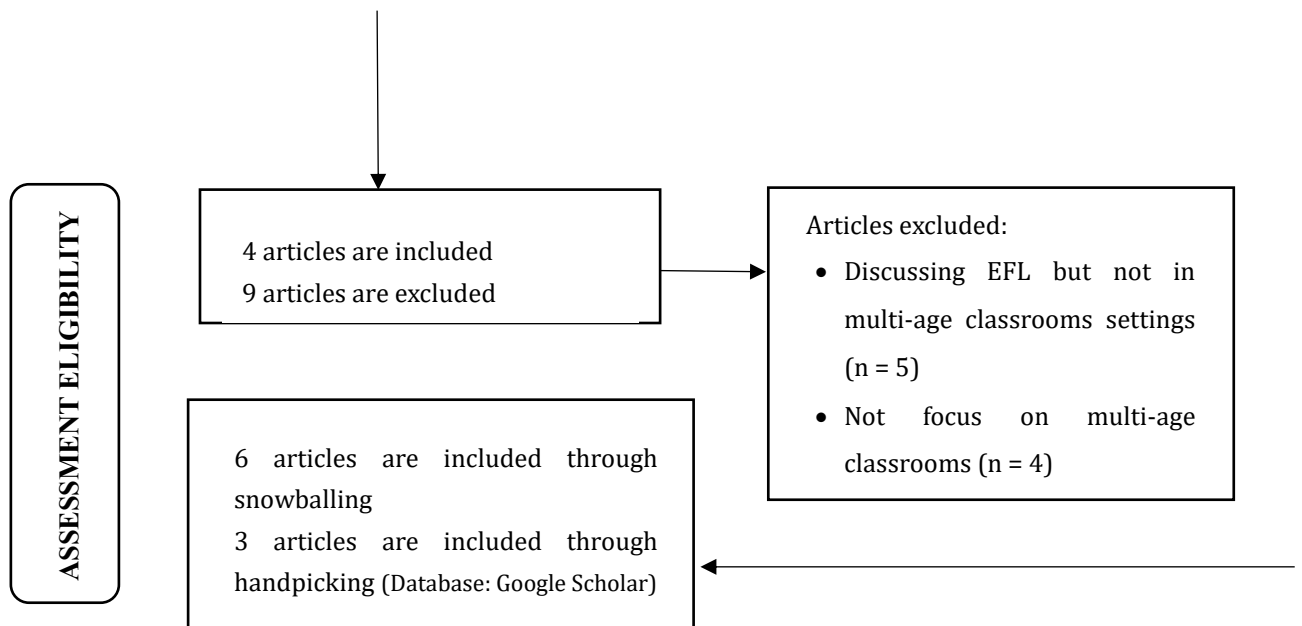


Figure 1. Flow of The Diagram Based.

The studies were collected from academic databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar. Many different keywords were used to cover the various terms for multi-age classrooms, to find the most relevant research. These keywords included: “multi age classroom,” “multi grade classroom,” “mixed age learning,” “multi-age education,” “multi-grade education,” “multi-age setting,” “multi-grade setting,” “different age,” “multi-age schooling,” “multi-grade schooling,” “EFL,” “foreign language”. The first search yielded 123 articles. The keywords were carefully selected as different countries and fields use different terms when referring to multi-age education. Since research in this area is limited and sometimes hard to find, it was important to use broad and inclusive terms so no important studies were missed.

The first step of the review process was to identify and select appropriate search keywords. Several keywords were selected to span the various terms used for multi-age education in the research. These were combined with terms relating to English Foreign Language, in the hope of including both national and international sources, and reflecting the diversity of language used in the field.

The second stage was spent in identifying relevant articles. Using combinations of keywords, 123 articles were identified in Scopus database while another 9 articles were identified using manual search via Google Scholar and snowballing techniques. All the selected studies were published in English language and within the last five years from 2020 until 2025, as this period reflects recent discussion on classroom differentiation.

The third stage involved an initial screening of the article titles and abstracts, which was used to determine the relevance of the articles to the research topic. After this screening 20 articles were considered potentially suitable. Of those, only 13 could be accessed in their entirety for further perusal, while the remaining 7 were excluded because one was in Spanish and the rest were not available.

During the fourth stage an elaborate eligibility evaluation was made. The full texts of the 13 accessible articles were reviewed. At this point, only four articles met all the inclusion criteria and were deemed suitable to be included in the study since they directly addressed the research question in terms of the distinctions between multi-age and homogeneous classrooms in EFL contexts.

The fifth and last stage included the expansion of the data by manual selection and snowballing. Six other studies were identified through following citations (snowballing), and three others were selected manually from Google Scholar based on relevance. Though these articles were not found in the initial search, they were included because of their great relevance to the topic.

Altogether, this systematic review encompasses 13 relevant studies (4 studies were obtained by the database, 6 were obtained by snowballing and 3 were obtained by manual selection).

Then, 13 empirical studies that met the inclusion criteria were retained after the data collection was completed. The subsequent phase involved extracting data, during which essential details from each study like the title, author, and research results were pinpointed and documented. With this process, all evidence pertaining to the research question was systematically structured for upcoming analysis as shown in Figure 2.

Articles	Authors	Research Results
Contexts For Self- and Co-Regulated Learning in A Dual-Language Elementary School Classroom	(Cerde et al., 2020)	The research investigated the ways in which classroom contexts can foster self-regulated as well as co-regulated learning among mixed-age learners in a dual-language environment. It discovered that structured routines, collaborative tasks, and teacher scaffolding motivated students to take ownership of their learning. Learners showed their sense of responsibility by establishing personal goals, tracking their progress, and modifying their strategies according to input from peers or teachers. Due to the mutual responsibility between teachers and students, an environment was created in which autonomy grew together with social accountability.

<p>Towards Inclusive Education: Instructional Practices to Meet the Needs of Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Multi-Grade Settings.</p>	<p>(Tiernan et al., 2020)</p>	<p>From this research study, the teachers who taught in multi-grade classes made extensive use of flexible grouping and flexible teaching arrangements in efforts to meet the diverse needs of students with special educational need (SEN). Co-teaching, in particular the use of station teaching, was seen as a good way of supporting inclusion without stigmatizing learners. Teachers were constantly shifting the groups for cross-grade work, individualized independent instruction, and collaborative discussion depending upon grade level, ability level or specific learning needs. Thanks to this flexibility, key concepts could then be repeated, overlearned and consolidated over consecutive years. This was considered to be good for consistent learner progress, especially for those with SEN.</p>
<p>Diversity And Inclusion in Rural South African Multigrade Classrooms.</p>	<p>(Taole, 2020)</p>	<p>The research highlighted the fact that the rural setting of multigrade classrooms brings together students from different cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds, which poses challenges and opportunities for inclusion. Such methods as culturally responsive teaching, multilingual supports, and differentiated support were employed by teachers to ensure that all learners felt represented and valued. In particular, the acknowledgements of the learner's background and the resulting egalitarian participation in the classroom encouraged the development of positive learner identities, particularly for students from marginalized backgrounds.</p>
<p>Plurilingual Identity Positioning of Newcomer Children with Emerging Print Literacy.</p>	<p>(Brubacher, 2023)</p>	<p>This study was developed on the basis of a plurilingual and mixed age class of children, and focused on the ways in which newcomer children positioned themselves as learners in spite of their relative lack of print literacy skills. Autonomy was realized when the students made their own linguistic choices, used their own linguistic resources, and</p>

		instigated interactions that led to their own learning. Their ability to participate in group activities, offer support to their peers and adoptive communication showed their responsibility and strengthened their self-respect as active participants in the process of learning.
Peer Interactions During Storybook Reading on Children's Knowledge Construction: An Experimental Study on K2 And K3 Children.	(Wu & Ko, 2024)	In this study, the research looked at the effects of mixed-age peer interactions while reading storybooks on construction of knowledge. Results indicated frequent use of meaning negotiation, interpretation sharing and collaborative building of understanding with respect to the narrative. In the mixed-age setting older students gave more in-depth explanations and younger students were more likely to ask clarifying questions that led to deeper discussions.
Differentiated Instruction in English Lessons: Teacher Challenges.	(Azzahra, 2024)	The study examined teachers' problems faced while teaching differential instruction in English classes. It was illustrated that teachers adapted the content, process, and assessment of lessons in order to meet the variations in learners' needs, particularly in mixed proficiency classrooms. Flexibility was very important when it came to modifying instructional material, lesson pace, and various interventions to help meet student needs as both the fast and slow learners. Nevertheless, it was often an issue for teachers to make these adjustments to their full capacity due to time, large class sizes, and poor resources.
Peer Tutoring to Improve the Speaking Proficiency of Multiage EFL Students.	(Ariesinta & Widyantoro, 2024)	The introduction of peer tutoring approach in a multiage EFL class had a positive effect on both younger and older learners. Older students were given the role of guides, who modeled pronunciation and gave feedback, while the younger students plus their exuberance and fresh eyes were there as debaters. The contact meant that mutual

		respect was fostered and a collaborative learning atmosphere was created, leading to dramatic improvement in speaking of all participating groups.
Effects Of a Nontraditional Multi-Age Learning Environment on Academic and Social-Emotional Learning: A Case Study [Hamline University]	(Black, 2022)	The paper discusses the pilot "School within a School" program for students in grades 2-4 who were considered to have severe academic and social-emotional needs. Results revealed that multi-age small group instruction was contributing to an increase in self-management and self-reflection skills and improved agreement between students' and teachers' perceptions of student progress. Students improved their ability to inhibit impulses and organize materials and to express need in an appropriate way. In many instances teachers remarked that despite near misses, most students improved their capability to be independent, self-directed, with the support of individualized attention, peer role models and a safe and community-based environment.
Multicultural Education Multi-Age Grouping in A Montessori Classroom Effects Positively on A Child's Social and Emotional Development	(Alwi et al., 2021)	The study finds that children in multi-age classrooms engaged in more social and emotional activity than children in the same-age classrooms. Socializing with kids whose ages were in different classes helped build personal confidence, a willingness to try new things, and a sense of teamwork. Younger students developed social skills, empathy and independence through behavioral modeling by older students. After a period of 6 months, the teachers observed that many children had made significant progress in communication, compliance with rules and willingness to help peers. The authors noted that such an environment "helps children gain a confident personality and not be afraid to go outside of their comfort zone."
Pedagogical Challenges and Teaching Practices	(Urma & Callo, 2023)	The study discovered that multigrade teachers routinely modified their methods of instruction, classroom management

<p>of Multigrade Teachers in Rural Public Elementary Schools.</p>		<p>strategies, and remedial actions to meet the specific difficulties of teaching several grades simultaneously. Various teaching methods were integrated, lesson planning was differentiated, and content was adapted to learners' readiness levels, demonstrating flexibility. In light of resource limitations, teachers also adapted their teaching methods to ensure that lessons were still engaging and accessible despite the constraints.</p>
<p>English First Additional Language: Teachers' Written Feedback Practices in Multi-Grade Classrooms in Rural South African Primary Schools.</p>	<p>(Taole, 2022)</p>	<p>Whilst this article is largely focused on written comment, and we can now see the problems with learner flexibility around instruction in a multi-grade environment. The teachers had difficulty in altering the timing and form of their feedback as they taught multiple grades simultaneously and this led to delayed feedback on the work of their students. The time constraints and the requirements of the curriculum reduced the opportunities for developmental and interactive feedback, thereby placing the emphasis on the written comments which were standardized and often vague. The lack of responsiveness of teaching and assessment practices was linked to structural constraints, suggesting that scheduling and flexibility of teaching practices were necessary to enhance learning outcomes.</p>
<p>Exploring Learning Opportunities During Mixed-Age Peer Interactions in Mixed-Age Secondary School EFL Classrooms in Germany.</p>	<p>(Kos, 2020)</p>	<p>The study found that the behavior between the age groups often led to Language-Related Episodes (LREs) where the students came together to solve linguistic problems. While older learners exhibited correct forms or gave explanations, younger learners were active learners by asking questions or agreeing to show they understood. The activities provided authentic language learning opportunities for incidental learning and facilitated cooperative relationships in the classroom.</p>

Exploring Young Learners' L2 Development and Perceptions of Mixed-Age and Same-Age Peer Interactions in EFL Mixed-Age Classrooms.	(Kos, 2021)	This research suggested that both mixed-age and same-age groupings supported L2 learning, while other conditions like age and proficiency level as well as interpersonal relationships impacted peer relationships. Due to comfort and familiarity, a number of students valued working with other students of their own age and many students valued the assistance and patterns of thinking offered by older partners and younger partners. The findings underpin the importance of the social context of pairing decisions in which the quality of interaction is high.
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Figure 2. Data Extraction

3. Result & Discussion

Classroom composition and teachers' effectiveness reveal the results of a systematic review of selected studies examining the characteristics of multi-age classrooms and single-age classrooms. The purpose of this review was to identify important aspects of multi-age learning arrangements as well as to understand the issues and practical strategies involved in implementing these arrangements. From the analysis, five major categories were found: (1) peer learning and interaction, (2) learner autonomy, (3) identity and Inclusivity, (4) instructional flexibility, and (5) social-emotional development.

No	Sub Category	Number of Studies	Focus of Studies
1	Peer learning & Interaction	4	Speaking, social scaffolding, language practice, peer interaction in EFL classes, and learning strategies.
2	Learner Autonomy	2	Learning development, autonomy in EFL learning contexts, student choice in tasks and speed, and independent goal-setting.
3	Identity & Inclusivity	1	Cultural and linguistic representation, identity development, social belonging, and inclusive teaching methods.
4	Instructional Flexibility	4	Flexible classroom management, levelled task scaffolding, and differentiated teaching design.
5	Social-Emotional	2	Empathy and prosocial behavior,

	Development		confidence and emotional regulation, age-integrated social dynamics, emotional safety
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Figure 3. The Overview of Reviewed Articles

Several studies highlight distinct differences between multi-age and single-age classrooms, especially in terms of student roles, interaction patterns, and teaching methods. The following sections describe five main features that distinguish multi-age classrooms from single-age ones.

1. Peer Learning and Social Interaction

Peer learning and interaction frequently stand out as key and defining characteristics of multi-age classrooms, supported by evidence from at least four studies (Ariesinta & Widyantoro, 2024; Kos, 2020, 2021; Wu & Ko, 2024). Rich peer scaffolding across age groups was made possible in these classrooms, enabling students to take on flexible roles as mentors and learners. In the secondary EFL classrooms in Germany, older students often mentored their younger peers, particularly when it came to group writing assignments and oral presentations (Kos, 2020). A 15-year-old student was helping a 13-year-old with pronunciation. The teacher observed that this type of peer modeling happened naturally without any encouragement from an adult.

On the other hand, single age classrooms tend to have more homogeneous peer relationships, mainly whereby students interact with similar age, development, and linguistic proficiency students, reducing opportunities for cross-level scaffolding. As a result, peer learning in homogeneous environments often requires explicit guidance from teachers, whereas in multi-age environments, it occurs more organically due to the diversity of existing abilities and experiences.

Mixed-age primary EFL learners felt empowered in helping the younger students and valued the opportunity to learn from their more experienced peers (Kos, 2021). Results of the interviews with 12 students showed, of the 12, 10 students preferred the mixed-age groups because they were able to learn together, felt less pressure and had an opportunity to develop as leaders. These findings were consistent to Ariesinta & Widyantoro (2024) which examined peer tutoring strategies within multi-age EFL context in Indonesia. Twenty students from different age groups were split into cross-grade pairs for peer tutoring, as part of their quasi-experimental design. According to the researchers, 80% of the participants informed that they feel more comfort speaking in front of their peers, which shows a significant increase in speaking fluency and confidence.

The influence of peer relationships in mixed-age Montessori classrooms for cognitive and social development of children is also discussed by Wu & Ko (2024). The samples for the experimental study comprised 64 participants, consisting of 32 K2 students in the age group of 4.5-5 years and 32 K3 students in the age group of 6-6.5 years who were randomly divided into eight groups according to age

composition and conservation ability. The results showed that mixed-age groups and those with equal participant numbers as well as those balanced in terms of conservation and nonconservers had the most gains in conservation knowledge.

For example, in the group with balanced K3, there was an increase in the average scores of participants moving from a pre-test of participants to a post-test. Specifically, the pre-test average was 38.19 and the post-test average was 51.88. Transportation also taught nomenclature, representative dialogue, role of the author, and societal engagement, through mutual training by way of the shared dialogue as well as the collaborative reading based on the young storybooks, which were also an effective method of promoting interaction and social skills. The research highlights that when multi-age is done with structured opportunities to gain knowledge from peers, both social interaction and academic success abound.

This helps us to know that multi-age classrooms provide a dynamic learning environment with a variety of experiences of peers taking on different roles which are helpful and meaningful.

2. Learner Autonomy and Responsibility

Research by Cerda et al. (2020) and Brubacher (2023) allowed them to demonstrate that multi-age classrooms allow students to become more autonomous than single-age classrooms. In the bilingual class the participants selected their own task, and organized their time taking as per the need by the students themselves and even sought help from their classmates according to Cerda et al (2016). This was evident that they were confident and were capable of taking charge of their learning. Behaviors observed included students working independently with learning tools, initiating work without prompts and defending usage of the learning tools and working collaboratively to solve problems. Both teachers and students felt independence is a great quality of multi-age classrooms.

Brubacher (2023) discovered that multi-age classrooms assist new students who are native speakers of a language other than English to achieve independence and become collaborative even if English and reading language skills are not on par. For instance, one student consulted a bilingual dictionary for new words, and while others assisted each other without the teacher's intervention. The relaxed rules under the multi-age classrooms allow students to be the masters of their own learning.

Traditional single-age classrooms are usually guided by a teacher and have a static curriculum. However, Cerda et al. (2020) remarked that such a rigorous method will cause students to lose motivation for their own educational management. In contrast to traditional school classrooms, where students have little control over their learning, in the multi-age classroom students can explore the ways that they learn and in so doing gain confidence in thinking about their learning.

3. Identity Formation and Inclusivity

Multi-age classrooms provide a space in which students, in particular, who come from different language and cultural backgrounds can develop their identity. As an example, how problems concerning diversity and inclusion are dealt with in the rural South African multigrade classrooms through a qualitative multi-case study in which classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers were done (Taole, 2020).

The results showed that instructors used differentiated assessment and same-grade grouping with great frequency in response to different needs among learners. However, large class sizes and limited resources were challenges to the implementation of inclusive practices. Although many teachers relied on teacher-centred methods, to succeed in creating true inclusivity there needed to be ways in which the culture, social and educational backgrounds of their students were recognised to create a sense of belonging and help their pupils to arrive at positive identity formation.

Strategies such as customizing curriculum content from the real-life context of learners, the use of diverse curricula techniques such storytelling, dramatization, use of visual and other forms of instruction, as well as safe and welcoming classroom conditions were found as instrumental in ensuring that all learners can feel valued and supported. The study underlines that within multigrade settings inclusivity is more than the element of equal access. It also entails creating a classroom identity that confirms and glorifies each student's individuality.

Teachers in that study noted that multi-age classrooms promote academic and emotional inclusion. Unlike the strict and often exclusive routines in homogeneous classes, multi-age classrooms' diversity helped break down usual academic ranks and allowed students to develop different and flexible learner identities.

4. Instructional Flexibility

Several studies point to the importance that teachers need to be flexible in the planning of lessons and the organization of the classroom (Azzahra, 2024; Taole, 2022; Tiernan et al., 2020; Urma & Callo, 2023) In multi-age classrooms, however, teachers do not quantify one fixed way of teaching for all students. Instead, they choose methods according to the need and situation of the different students.

For example, two teachers in Indonesia were tried with tiered model for learning of Merdeka Curriculum (Azzahra, 2024). The lessons that they participated in had guided sentence frames for writing, texts at varying levels to read from, and vocabulary activities of varying degrees of complexity. One teacher said "Without this differentiation, some students would get lost and others bored."

In rural Irish primary schools, Tiernan et al. (2020) noted the practice of teachers setting up rotating learning centres in which children of different grades are engaged in the same tasks at varying levels of difficulty. In four classrooms the

teachers reconfigured group makeups based on the subject area and student needs. They would often meet in groups and one-on-one as a means to support different types of learners. One teacher who taught four grade levels in one room stated, "I couldn't do anything without the flexibility [in planning]."

Taole (2022) obtained similar results in rural South African schools. Teachers altered their approach to the feedback they provided in terms of easier language for younger students and more difficult questions for older ones. This helped the students in different stages to understand and learn better.

The pedagogical challenges and instructional practices of 59 multigrade teachers who work in rural public elementary schools in Laguna, Philippines were investigated (Urma & Callo, 2023). The results of the survey revealed that educators experienced conditions judged to be "very challenging" in regards to teacher expertise ($M = 3.68$), teaching and learning processes ($M = 3.63$), school instruction ($M=3.62$) and school resources ($M=3.72$). Nevertheless, their teaching practices were rated "outstanding" in preparatory activities ($M = 3.67$), instructional delivery ($M = 3.71$), classroom management ($M = 3.63$) and remedial/enrichment activities ($M = 3.66$).

Evidence of instructional flexibility manifested itself in the use of instructional strategies such as collaborative learning structures, differentiated instruction, incorporation of technology, and linking lessons to real-life situations. The study highlights that the effective multigrade teaching largely depends on a teacher's ability to accommodate diverse and simultaneous learning needs with respect to content, instructional approaches and classroom management techniques.

Overall, these studies demonstrate a significant change from a rigid approach to teaching in which each student learns the same material at the same pace in what is essentially a one-size-fits-all approach, as it is common in single-age classrooms, to a flexible approach to teaching that focuses on each student individually in multi-age classrooms. Here, the role of teacher is to guide students and differentiate teaching to each student's level and readiness.

5. Social-Emotional Development

Black (2022) and Alwi et al. (2021) had done their studies in classrooms of different age groups, revealing that age mixing can promote social and emotional development of learners. These classrooms build student confidence, teach compassion to students, and make them emotionally stronger. For instance, in the Montessori classrooms teachers observed that children were more caring and patient when they were engaged in working with the children of different ages (Alwi et al., 2021).

Older students also assisted younger students in completion of daily routine and school-related work, naturally. Older students were also observed to initiate prosocial behavior (helping younger peers with things like shoe-tying, reminding others of things to do, or offering a shoulder to cry on) without any prompting from

adults.

Black (2022) also reached similar conclusions in her case study of an atypical public elementary school in the United States. Five teachers were interviewed in the research while focus groups involved parents and children. According to the teachers, mixed-age grouping resulted in "family-like communities" in which the children were significantly more connected and trusted and less anxious. After coming out of a regular same age classroom, one parent witnessed their child develop confidence which they say was due to the support and emotional safety surrounding their older classroom peers.

The competitive and performance-based philosophy that is frequently seen in classrooms of same-age children is counter to the emotional advantages of multi-age classrooms. Teachers in both studies reported that multi-age classrooms are more responsive to the development of students and that students felt emotionally safer in the multi-age classrooms, particularly those with social anxiety or learning disabilities. Aside from thinking, these classrooms allow students to have an emotional competence, a caring environment relying on empathy and peer collaboration.

Although the benefits of multi-age classrooms are apparent, real issues do need to be considered, particularly in economically sparse schools. Urma and Callo (2023) examined twelve teachers of the multigrade teachers in the Philippines who were stressed due to the conflicting curricula demands and lack of teaching materials. For many, it was not intentional, it was necessary to teach multiple grades at once. One teacher described it as being "juggling four grade levels and very limited resources and support."

Tiernan et al. (2020) found that multigrade teachers in rural Irish classrooms had difficulty in teaching whole class as they were expected to serve individual students. This was complicated by lack of support in the schools, and minimal opportunities for special training. Many of the teachers felt alone and not valued, and therefore had lower levels of motivation/job satisfaction.

Azzahra (2024), as cited in Indonesia, on the contrary experienced similar problems when applying the Merdeka Curriculum as an English language teacher (EFL). Two junior high teachers said it was hard to create different lessons for diverse students because they had little time and many other responsibilities. Overall, these findings show that although multi-age classrooms have many teaching benefits, their success depends on enough support from schools, special training, and proper resources. One educator had to develop three different activity levels for the same lesson which greatly doubled her workload.

Furthermore, South African teachers were forced to rely on intuition rather than framework-based evaluation techniques since they lacked explicit assessment criteria for multigrade classrooms (Taole, 2020). The psychological impact that teaching plurilingual newcomer students who had varied literacy requirements and no prior exposure to English (Brubacher, 2023). Teachers in her study

expressed feeling "emotionally exhausted" and overwhelmed by the task of juggling curricular pacing and differentiated support.

Considering these drawbacks, a number of research also reported on naturally occurring adaptive teaching techniques for handling student variety. In German EFL classrooms, Kos (2020) observed structured peer collaboration, where senior students were designated as group leaders and regularly led group discussions. This strategy empowered students to help one another while decreasing the workload for the teacher. Azzahra (2024) emphasized the use of formative check-ins and graded assignments in Indonesia to allow students with different levels of proficiency interact meaningfully with the same lesson. The usage of scaffolded learning stations and rotating centers, which let students work on their own while the teacher concentrated on small-group instruction (Tiernan et al., 2020)

The belief that multi-age classrooms represent a pedagogical space with both great promise and high complexity are favored by both these difficulties and teacher-led innovations, despite the fact that they are not the main focus of this review. Looking at the current challenge of the structural constraints in many education systems and emergence of innovative and locally developed practices, there is a great need for more research in this area. More importantly, the findings point out the need that curriculum designs should be a good fit to the reality of the conditions of different learning environments. In order to facilitate the creation of multi-age classrooms, particularly when the context is English as a foreign language (EFL), policies regarding education have to be responsive and teachers have to be consistently trained professionally.

4. Conclusion

This systematic literature review explains the most important features that differentiate multi-age classrooms from the traditional single-age group setting. Based on thirteen peer-reviewed studies, five major characteristics were observed: learner autonomy and agency, social-emotional development, learner inclusivity and identity development, learner flexibility and learning in peer-development, and peer learning and social interaction. Together, these elements highlight how multi-age classrooms support cooperative learning, student-centered learning, multi-identity and holistic development outcomes, something that is most often less present in age-homogeneous classrooms.

This review is limited by language and database restrictions, but it contributes comparative insight that may inform future policy and classroom practice in EFL settings teacher preparation should include training in differentiated instruction and curriculum materials may allow more flexible pacing and mixed-age interaction. In addition to make the pedagogical uniqueness of multi-age classrooms more evident, these results underscore the urgent need for further empirical research and governmental support in order to ensure their

maximum application.

5. References

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