

**Multicultural Literacy in School: English Teachers' Perspectives on
Multicultural Education at SMA AL Azhar 30 Salatiga**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perspectives of English teachers at SMA AL Azhar 30 Salatiga on multicultural education, a critical aspect in Indonesia's diverse society for nurturing global citizenship and social harmony. The research explores teachers' beliefs and practices regarding multicultural literacy by employing qualitative methods—semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations. Findings indicate that while teachers recognize the value of adapting teaching to diverse students and promoting cultural pride, there is ambivalence about the curriculum's focus on multicultural education and extended family involvement. Challenges such as resource constraints, language barriers, and cultural biases are identified, underscoring the necessity for targeted interventions and enhanced teacher training to foster inclusive learning environments. The study recommends comprehensive teacher education programs to equip educators with the skills to navigate multicultural education effectively, promoting a culturally responsive and equitable education system.

Keywords: Multicultural literacy, multicultural education, teachers' perspective

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, education has undergone significant transformations influenced by globalization, technological advancements, and increased mobility (Zaily, 2024; Gay, 2013). One notable change is the heightened diversity in schools worldwide, exemplified in places like Indonesia, where educational institutions mirror society's rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions (Gay, 2013). This diversity enriches the learning experience by bringing together students from varied backgrounds, fostering a more engaging educational environment that celebrates Indonesia's societal heterogeneity.

Research indicates that teachers' instructional practices are significantly shaped by their attitudes and beliefs regarding student diversity (Gay, 2013). Moreover, perceptions of discrimination among students are influenced by gender, language proficiency, school-ethnic diversity, and teaching staff composition (Benner & Graham, 2011). Schools with greater ethnic diversity are associated with enhanced safety, reduced victimization, lower loneliness levels, fair treatment by teachers, and decreased intergroup distance (Juvonen et al., 2017).

Embracing cultural and linguistic diversity in education is highlighted as a means to equip students with the skills needed to navigate an increasingly interconnected global landscape sensitively and proficiently (Akintayo, 2024). Studies on intentionally diverse public schools underscore the importance of specific practices like setting diversity goals, employing non-competitive admissions processes, maintaining racially diverse faculty, conducting targeted outreach, and publicly emphasizing diversity's value (Seifert et al., 2022).

Efforts to promote cultural competence in education aim to establish inclusive learning environments that acknowledge and celebrate diversity, fostering equitable opportunities for all students (Eden, 2024). Understanding student perceptions of school climate, particularly in ethnically diverse settings, can guide the implementation of culturally responsive school improvement strategies (Parris & Neves, 2018).

The role of school and classroom diversity in mitigating peer victimization during middle school years is highlighted, emphasizing that the effects of structural school diversity and dynamic classroom diversity are not merely additive (Graham, 2023). Furthermore, multicultural education initiatives are recognized as essential components of educational reform efforts, emphasizing the importance of cultural diversity in curricula (Chandransu, 2019).

Hence, the evolving landscape of education underscores the significance of embracing diversity in schools to create inclusive and enriching learning environments that prepare students to thrive in a multicultural world

In addition, the importance of fostering multicultural literacy among students transcends mere recognition or tolerance of diversity (Elias & Mansouri, 2023). It represents a fundamental skill set crucial for navigating the complexities of our interconnected societies. Multicultural literacy goes beyond surface-level understanding; it encompasses engaging with diverse cultural backgrounds effectively, fostering meaningful connections and relationships across cultural boundaries. By equipping students with these skills, educators empower them to thrive in diverse environments and contribute positively to an increasingly interconnected global community (Muslim et al, 2021).

In the context of 21st-century education, multicultural literacy has emerged as a cornerstone of global citizenship and social cohesion. As societies become more diverse and interconnected, individuals must possess the skills and competencies to navigate multicultural environments with empathy, respect, and cultural sensitivity. Multicultural literacy enables students to engage with diverse perspectives and experiences, laying the foundation for inclusive and harmonious interactions within their communities and beyond. Moreover, it fosters a sense of belonging and mutual understanding, which is essential for building cohesive and resilient societies in an era characterized by cultural pluralism and global connectivity (Franch, 2020).

Schools are pivotal in cultivating multicultural literacy among students, serving as hubs for education, socialization, and community engagement (Kurdi, 2023). Through a variety of educational initiatives, including multicultural curriculum development, intercultural exchanges, and inclusive pedagogical practices, schools have the opportunity to instill in students the values and skills necessary to become culturally competent global citizens. By fostering an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment, schools not only prepare students for success in an increasingly diverse world but also promote social justice and equity within their communities.

Moreover, multicultural literacy extends beyond traditional classroom settings, influencing all aspects of school life and student interactions. Schools provide a fertile environment for students to engage with diverse perspectives, fostering inclusivity and mutual respect (Khalifa et al., 2016). By embracing diversity and promoting multicultural understanding, educational institutions create inclusive environments that enable students to learn from one another and develop essential interpersonal skills necessary for success in a multicultural society.

Research emphasizes the significance of integrating culturally responsive practices into educational frameworks to advance social justice and equity (Khalifa et al., 2016). Understanding various dimensions of multicultural education, such as teaching methods reflecting cultural diversity, human relations strategies, and the

inclusion of multicultural content in the standard curriculum, is crucial for promoting pluralism and equality in schools (Ogbu, 1992).

Digital literacy, encompassing scientific, economic, technological, visual, information, and multicultural literacy, is crucial in equipping students with the skills to navigate a diverse and interconnected world (Asrizal et al., 2018). Initiatives in multicultural education aim to enhance students' cultural literacy, fostering a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and promoting inclusivity (Arga, 2023).

Efforts to enhance multicultural literacy encompass various literacy practices, including multilingual and multimodal literacies that reflect cultural practices of mutuality among students (Ghiso, 2016). The development of critical race algorithmic literacy introduces a new dimension to digital literacy, empowering students to navigate and challenge AI-mediated racism in educational settings (Tanksley, 2024).

Incorporating multicultural education into literacy instruction is essential for cultivating students' awareness of diverse perspectives and fostering critical thinking skills (O'Byrne & Smith, 2015). A pedagogy of multiliteracies underscores the necessity of a broader view of literacy that includes cultural and linguistic diversity, aligning with the multitude of communication channels in today's world (Group, 1996)

The promotion of multicultural literacy in Indonesia is crucial due to the country's rich cultural diversity and pluralistic society (Raihani, 2017). Indonesia, with its hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, and religions, epitomizes human diversity, highlighting the necessity of integrating multicultural literacy into the educational system. By doing so, Indonesian schools can embrace diversity as a source of strength, resilience, and national unity amidst cultural pluralism (Raihani, 2017). Schools play a vital role in fostering social cohesion and national unity by equipping students with the necessary skills and attitudes to navigate Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape.

Research by sheds light on how education in Indonesia can contribute to creating tolerant and multicultural citizens through the analysis of policies and practices (Raihani, 2017). This research aligns with the imperative for promoting multicultural literacy in Indonesian schools, emphasizing the importance of preparing students for success in a globalized world while contributing to the establishment of a more equitable, inclusive, and interconnected society. Nurturing multicultural literacy among students not only enhances their readiness for the 21st century but also plays a crucial role in fostering a just and harmonious society where diversity is celebrated as a source of richness and strength.

Multicultural literacy goes beyond being an educational necessity; it emerges as a moral imperative crucial for fostering inclusivity, understanding, and unity in a diverse society like Indonesia. By embracing multicultural literacy, schools can pave

the way for a more cohesive and harmonious future, where diversity is not just accepted but celebrated as a fundamental aspect of societal richness and strength.

The term multicultural education describes a wide variety of programs and practices related to educational equity, women, ethnic groups, language minorities, low-income groups, and people with disabilities. Multicultural education may mean making changes within the curriculum in one school but a total change in leadership in another school. adopting a culturally responsive pedagogy with trained instructors facilitating it. Nieto (1996) defined multicultural education as “antiracist education” which is “a process important for all students

SMA AL Azhar 30 Salatiga stands as a microcosm of Indonesia's rich cultural tapestry. Situated in the heart of Salatiga, Central Java, this institution welcomes students from various ethnicities, and linguistic backgrounds. Within this vibrant mosaic of cultures, English language teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' perspectives on diversity and promoting multicultural understanding. Through innovative teaching methods and cross-cultural activities, these teachers foster an inclusive learning environment where students can appreciate and celebrate their differences while also recognizing their shared humanity.

The globalization of economies, advancements in technology, and increased mobility have intensified cultural exchanges and interactions, making multicultural competence a valuable asset in today's society. As such, English language teaching is a unique platform for promoting multicultural literacy. Through the exploration of diverse literary works, language activities that encourage intercultural communication, and cross-cultural discussions, English teachers have the opportunity to expose students to a wide range of perspectives, narratives, and experiences from around the globe. By incorporating multicultural content into their lessons, English teachers not only enhance students' language proficiency but also cultivate their empathy, respect, and appreciation for cultural diversity.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of multicultural education, challenges persist in its implementation. English teachers at SMA AL Azhar 30 Salatiga face various obstacles, including limited resources, linguistic barriers, and cultural biases. Moreover, the standardized curriculum often prioritizes linguistic proficiency over intercultural competence, creating tensions between academic requirements and the broader goals of multicultural education. In light of these challenges, there is a pressing need to understand English teachers' perspectives on multicultural education and their experiences integrating it into their teaching practices. By exploring their beliefs, attitudes, and instructional strategies, educators can gain valuable insights into the complexities of multicultural literacy in Indonesian schools

and develop targeted interventions to support teachers in fostering inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments.

This article intends to fill this gap by delving into the perspectives of English teachers at SMA Al-Azhar 30 Salatiga regarding multicultural education. It aimed to investigate the questions on how English teachers perceive multicultural education in SMA AL Azhar 30 Salatiga. This study provides valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of multicultural literacy in education. It underscores the importance of this aspect of education and highlights areas that need further exploration and research. The findings have important implications for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers in promoting multicultural literacy and creating inclusive, respectful, and effective learning environments for all students.

Method

The SMA AL Azhar 30 Salatiga research focuses on English teachers' perspectives on multicultural education using a qualitative methodology to explore their beliefs and practices within their natural context (Arsal, 2019). Qualitative research is suitable for understanding participants' diverse viewpoints relevant to the research questions. The study involves four English teachers to capture a broad range of insights regarding multicultural education.

Data collection methods include semi-structured interviews, questionnaires adapted from Ford & Quinn (2010), and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to elaborate on their perceptions and experiences, while classroom observations offer insights into instructional strategies and teacher-student interactions (Arsal, 2019). The interviews, conducted either in-person or via video conferencing based on participants' preferences, will be audio-recorded with consent, and detailed field notes will be taken during classroom observations to capture significant observations and reflections.

Thematic analysis will be used to interpret the qualitative data gathered from interviews and classroom observations. Thematic analysis helps identify patterns within data, enabling researchers to uncover trends and variations in participants' perspectives and practices related to multicultural education. This process involves data immersion, coding, theme development, and interpretation, facilitating the identification of overarching themes encapsulating key aspects of the English teachers' viewpoints and instructional approaches.

Results

The researcher used a questionnaire with 17 questions, and the results can be seen in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1. Result of the Questionnaire about multicultural literacy

No	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Teaching culturally diverse student groups is personally rewarding.	3	1			
2	Successful teaching for culturally diverse students requires that teaching methods be adapted to meet their needs.	3	1			
3	Multicultural education must be emphasized.		1	2	1	
4	Teachers have a responsibility to be aware of their students' cultural backgrounds.		4			
5	When I become a teacher, I will frequently invite extended family members (e.g. cousins, grandparents, godparents) to attend parent-teacher conferences.		2	1	1	
6	Teachers have a responsibility to encourage culturally diverse students to have pride in their own culture.	2	2			
7	As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes increasingly challenging.	3	1			
8	I believe that the teacher's role needs to be redefined to address the needs of students	1	3			

	from culturally diverse backgrounds.			
9	Teachers should only use multicultural instructional practices when the students are culturally diverse.		3	1
10	I will be successful in teaching culturally diverse students because I have no cultural biases.	1	3	
11	Having students with culturally different backgrounds can be a great learning experience for me.	3	1	
12	Learning the goals and instructional methods of multicultural teaching is a necessary part of teacher training.	2	2	
13	Teaching students about cultural diversity will not create conflict in the classroom.		4	
14	Multicultural awareness is needed for the subject areas or grade level I plan to teach.	1	3	
15	I am aware of my own culture and its values.		3	1
16	I feel I have the ability to teach poor minority students successfully.	1	2	1
17	I am comfortable being with people culturally different from me.	1	3	

The table presents the results of a questionnaire about multicultural literacy. The questionnaire consists of 18 questions, and the responses are categorized into five

options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Here is the interpretation of the data:

Question 1

Most respondents find teaching culturally diverse student groups personally rewarding, with 3 strongly agreeing and 1 agreeing.

Question 2

Most respondents believe that successful teaching for culturally diverse students requires that teaching methods be adapted to meet their needs, with 3 strongly agreeing and 1 agreeing.

Question 3

Respondents have mixed views on whether multicultural education must be emphasized, with 1 agreeing, 2 being neutral, and 1 strongly disagreeing.

Question 4

All respondents agree that teachers have a responsibility to be aware of their students' cultural backgrounds.

Question 5

Respondents have mixed views on whether they will frequently invite extended family members to attend parent-teacher conferences when they become teachers, with 2 agreeing, 1 being neutral, and 1 disagreeing.

Question 6

Most respondents believe that teachers have a responsibility to encourage culturally diverse students to have pride in their own culture, with 2 strongly agreeing and 2 agreeing.

Question 7

Most respondents believe that as classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes increasingly challenging, with 3 strongly agreeing and 1 agreeing.

Question 8

Most respondents believe that the teacher's role needs to be redefined to address the needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds, with 1 strongly agreeing and 3 agreeing.

Question 9

Most respondents believe that teachers should only use multicultural instructional practices when the students are culturally diverse, with 3 being neutral and 1 agreeing.

Question 10

Most respondents believe that they will be successful in teaching culturally diverse students because they have no cultural biases, with 1 strongly agreeing and 3 agreeing.

Question 11

Most respondents believe that having students with culturally different backgrounds can be a great learning experience for them, with 3 strongly agreeing and 1 agreeing.

Question 12

Most respondents believe that learning the goals and instructional methods of multicultural teaching is a necessary part of teacher training, with 2 strongly agreeing and 2 agreeing.

Question 13

Respondents have mixed views on whether teaching students about cultural diversity will create conflict in the classroom, with 1 strongly agreeing, 2 being neutral, and 1 strongly disagreeing.

Question 14

Most respondents believe that multicultural awareness is needed for the subject areas or grade level they plan to teach, with 1 strongly agreeing and 3 agreeing.

Question 15

Most respondents are aware of their own culture and its values, with 3 agreeing and 1 strongly disagreeing.

Question 16

Respondents have mixed views on whether they feel they have the ability to teach poor minority students successfully, with 1 strongly agreeing, 2 agreeing, and 1 being neutral.

Question 17

Most respondents are comfortable being with people culturally different from them, with 1 strongly agreeing and 3 agreeing.

Discussion

The majority of respondents have a positive view towards multicultural education and believe in the importance of adapting teaching methods to cater to culturally diverse

students. However, there are mixed views on certain aspects such as the emphasis on multicultural education and the potential for conflict in the classroom when teaching about cultural diversity.

The results of the questionnaire indicate a general consensus among the respondents on the importance of multicultural literacy in education. Most respondents find teaching culturally diverse student groups rewarding and agree that teaching methods need to be adapted for these students. There is also a strong agreement on the need for teachers to be aware of their students' cultural backgrounds and to encourage cultural pride among students. However, there are mixed views on certain aspects such as the emphasis on multicultural education, the involvement of extended family in education, and the ability to teach poor minority students successfully.

These findings have significant implications for the field of education. They highlight the need for teachers to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to teach culturally diverse students effectively. They also underscore the importance of creating an inclusive and respectful learning environment where students feel valued, and their cultural backgrounds are acknowledged and appreciated.

The findings are consistent with previous research highlighting multicultural education's benefits (Banks, 1993; Gay, 2000). However, they also reveal some areas of contention, such as the role of extended family in education and the perceived challenges of teaching poor minority students, which have not been extensively explored in previous studies.

Future research could delve deeper into these contentious areas to gain a better understanding of the underlying issues and potential solutions. It would also be beneficial to investigate the strategies that teachers are currently using to adapt their teaching methods for culturally diverse students and the effectiveness of these strategies. Furthermore, research could explore how teacher training programs can better prepare teachers for multicultural teaching, given the strong agreement among respondents on the necessity of this aspect of teacher training.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the teachers at Al-Azhar demonstrate a positive perception of multicultural education, recognizing its value in teaching culturally diverse student groups and advocating for adaptive teaching methods to cater to these students. While there are mixed views on certain aspects of multicultural education, such as the emphasis on its importance and involving extended family in education, there is a consensus on the need for multicultural literacy in education. The teachers acknowledge the benefits of learning from students with diverse backgrounds and the necessity of multicultural awareness for effective teaching practices.

This aligns with findings by Huang et al. (2017), which highlight teachers' highly positive and affirming attitudes toward multicultural education literacy. The positive perception of multicultural education among the teachers at Al-Azhar reflects a broader trend where educators recognize the importance of embracing diversity and adapting their teaching approaches to create inclusive learning environments. By acknowledging the significance of multicultural education and being open to adapting their practices, teachers can better serve culturally diverse student populations and prepare them for success in a multicultural society.

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