



Rethinking Multicultural EFL Instruction in Indonesian Junior High Schools: Teachers' Challenges and Classroom Realities

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Abstract

Multicultural instruction has become increasingly important in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms as students bring diverse cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds into the learning process. However, its classroom implementation remains challenging, particularly in junior high school contexts where teachers must balance language objectives, student diversity, curriculum demands, and limited institutional support. This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate teachers' challenges in implementing multicultural instruction in Indonesian junior high school EFL classrooms. Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving English teachers, school principals, and MGMP Head. The data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to teachers' challenges. The findings reveal three major challenges: limited institutional support, teachers faced a lack of multicultural teaching materials, and Student diversity in Classroom Interaction. The study concludes that multicultural instruction in Indonesian EFL classrooms operates as an adaptive and contextualized pedagogical practice that requires stronger institutional support, culturally relevant resources, and sustained teacher professional development in interacting students' diversity. The findings imply the need for stronger school support, localized multicultural materials, and continues teacher training to strengthen inclusive classroom practice. However, due to the limited number of participants and the specific junior high school context, further research involving broader settings and larger participant group is needed to provide more comprehensive insight into multicultural instruction.

Keywords: *Multicultural, Teacher Challenges*

1. Introduction

The increasing cultural, linguistic, and social diversity of contemporary classrooms has transformed English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education into a more complex pedagogical field. In many educational contexts, students enter English classrooms with different ethnic identities, religious traditions, home languages, cultural practices, learning styles, and levels of confidence in using English. These differences influence not only how students learn English but also how they participate, interact, and construct meaning in classroom communication (Ou & Gu, 2021). In this regard, EFL classrooms are no longer merely spaces for grammar, vocabulary, and skill development; they are also social spaces where learners negotiate identity, culture, values, and communicative belonging. Multicultural education provides an important foundation for responding to this reality

because it promotes equity, prejudice reduction, knowledge construction, and inclusive school culture (Banks, 2008). Similarly, culturally responsive teaching emphasizes the use of students' cultural experiences as meaningful resources for learning (Gay, 2018), while Ladson-Billings (2021) argues that academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness should be developed together. These theoretical perspectives indicate that language teaching in multicultural classrooms should be designed not only to improve linguistic achievement but also to support equitable participation and cultural recognition.

Recent empirical studies further show that multicultural and culturally responsive approaches have become increasingly important in EFL and broader educational contexts. Cancino and Nuñez (2023), in a mixed-method study involving 61 EFL teachers in Chile, found that teachers demonstrated high multicultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity, although they still experienced difficulty in translating intercultural communicative competence into classroom practice. Yoanduanda et al (2025), involving 27 EFL students and two teachers, reported that culturally responsive teaching significantly improved students' language proficiency and classroom engagement. Sutrisno et al (2024) also found that culturally responsive writing instruction improved students' grammar, critical thinking, and vocabulary. In addition, Yeboah et al (2020) with his study of 50 online instructors emphasized that multicultural learning content and institutional support are essential for inclusive learning environments. These findings suggest that culturally responsive and multicultural pedagogy can strengthen both academic and affective dimensions of English learning. However, they also show that awareness of diversity does not automatically result in effective classroom implementation.

Despite the growing recognition of multicultural instruction, one major problem remains the gap between theoretical awareness and practical implementation. Many teachers acknowledge the importance of diversity, tolerance, and inclusion, yet they often lack the pedagogical knowledge, instructional resources, and institutional support required to operationalize multicultural principles in daily classroom practice. Smits and Janssenswillen (2020) found that pre-service language teachers with diversity awareness still struggled to transfer multicultural education theory into authentic teaching practices and sometimes avoided identity-related discussions because of concerns about classroom conflict. Yıldırım (2019) similarly reported that, Turkish EFL instructors generally perceived themselves as competent in multicultural classrooms, but interviews revealed limited formal preparation for meeting students' culturally and linguistically diverse needs. Moreover, Hasnah et al (2024) in the Indonesian EFL context, identified challenges such as limited resources, resistance to sensitive cultural topics, and pressure from standardized curricula. These studies indicate that multicultural instruction requires more than positive teacher attitudes; it requires systematic pedagogical design, reflective teacher agency, and institutional conditions that support inclusive teaching.

Another problem concerns how student diversity affects classroom interaction, participation, and confidence in English learning. Those who are coming from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds may not participate in the same ways because their communication styles, learning preferences, and affective responses are shaped by sociocultural experience. Kihwele et al (2022) found that cultural bias, stereotyping, and dominant cultural perspectives in multicultural classrooms could reduce students' comfort and participation. Jabeen (2019) also emphasized that learners in multicultural EFL classrooms bring different learning styles and classroom expectations, making it difficult for teachers to address all students' needs through uniform methods. From a sociocultural

perspective, while Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning occurs through social interaction and cultural mediation. These perspectives suggest that multicultural EFL instruction should create emotionally supportive, socially interactive, and linguistically accessible classroom environments.

To respond to these problems, previous literature proposes culturally responsive and differentiated instruction as broad pedagogical solutions. Culturally responsive teaching enables teachers to connect classroom content with students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and identities (Gay, 2018). Mandarani and Munir (2021), for instance, argue that multicultural literature in Indonesian EFL classrooms helps students understand diverse cultural perspectives while developing tolerance, cultural awareness, and critical thinking. Liao and Li (2023) also demonstrate that culturally responsive teaching in oral English classrooms can facilitate intercultural competence by encouraging students to explore, share, and construct multiple cultural meanings. Differentiated instruction offers another solution because it adapts content, process, product, and learning environment based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2017). Van Garderen and Whittaker (2006) argue that differentiated multicultural instruction can help teachers respond to students' varied academic abilities and cultural backgrounds, although it requires careful planning and institutional coordination. These approaches suggest that multicultural EFL instruction should combine cultural relevance with pedagogical flexibility.

More specifically, empirical studies indicate that multicultural instruction can be strengthened through contextualized materials, differentiated assessment, collaborative learning, and adaptive teacher agency. Prihartanto et al (2025) found that culturally responsive pedagogy integrated with competency-based education improved learner engagement, self-regulation, and performance through differentiated assessment and contextualized learning tasks. Natasya and Kembaren (2025), in a study of six ELT teachers, showed that teachers used culturally relevant examples, digital tools, differentiated instruction, and adaptive materials to address students' different proficiency levels, learning preferences, and attitudes. Ghaemi and Boroushaki (2025) further emphasize that teacher cultural competence, equity literacy, and critical reflection are central to inclusive classroom practice. Teacher agency is therefore crucial because teachers are not only curriculum implementers but also pedagogical decision-makers who adapt materials, interaction patterns, and learning tasks to students' contexts. McNeal (2005) similarly found that teachers with meaningful multicultural experience were more capable of connecting diversity with classroom practice, while supportive school culture and leadership helped sustain multicultural pedagogy.

Although the literature provides strong theoretical and empirical support for multicultural instruction, several existing researches focuses on higher education, online learning, teacher education, or general intercultural competence rather than on practical classroom implementation in junior high school EFL contexts. Studies such as Kumi-Yeboah et al (2020), Kihwele et al (2022), and Deiniatur and Hasanah (2024) offer important insights, but their contexts do not fully represent the pedagogical realities of secondary-level EFL classrooms. While other studies often examine multicultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, teacher agency, or institutional support separately, whereas classroom practice involves the interaction of all these dimensions (Kieran and Anderson, 2019; Santamaria, 2009). These studies confirm that the value of multicultural instruction in promoting inclusion, cultural awarenesses and intercultural competence, however mostly focus on higher education, online learning

teacher education and separate pedagogical dimensions. Limited attention has been given to how multicultural instruction is implemented in junior high school, especially in relation to the practical challenges faced by teachers in teaching.

Based on these gaps, the present study investigates the implementation of multicultural instruction in Indonesian EFL junior high school classrooms by focusing on teacher challenges. This study is expected to contribute to the development of multicultural instruction in EFL pedagogy in Indonesia. It offers empirical insight into how multicultural instruction operates in real classroom settings and identifies the kinds of support needed to strengthen its implementation. The findings may also inform teachers, school leaders, curriculum developers, and policy makers about the importance of culturally relevant materials, sustained teacher professional development, and inclusive classroom practices.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate teachers' challenges of multicultural instruction in Indonesian EFL junior high school classrooms. This design was appropriate because the study explored a contemporary pedagogical phenomenon attached to its real-life educational context, where the boundaries between teacher practice, student diversity, curriculum expectations, and institutional support were not clearly separated (Yin, 2018). It also enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and interpretations within a bounded educational setting (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Participants involved two schools' principals, two English teachers, and one MGMP Head, and they were selected through purposive sampling because of direct involvement in or knowledgeable of multicultural instruction and could provide information-rich data (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2015). Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify, analyse, and report patterned meanings across the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved repeated reading of transcripts, coding, theme generation, theme review, and theme definition (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). To enhance trustworthiness, the coding process was cross-checked by a second researcher, and any differences were resolved through discussion. By comparing perspectives from English teachers, school principals, and MGMP head, the resulting themes were refined and interpreted systematically. Then, finally the theme was interpreted to explain how teachers' challenges in implementing multicultural instruction in the English classroom.

3. Result

3.1 Finding

The findings reveal that the implementation of multicultural instruction in Indonesian EFL junior high school classrooms was shaped by three major challenges: limited institutional support, insufficient multicultural teaching materials, and classroom complexities arising from student diversity. These challenges indicate that multicultural instruction was not yet fully institutionalized as a formal pedagogical system. Instead, its implementation depended strongly on teachers' agency, contextual judgment, and ability to adapt classroom practices to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For further details, the research findings are presented as follows:

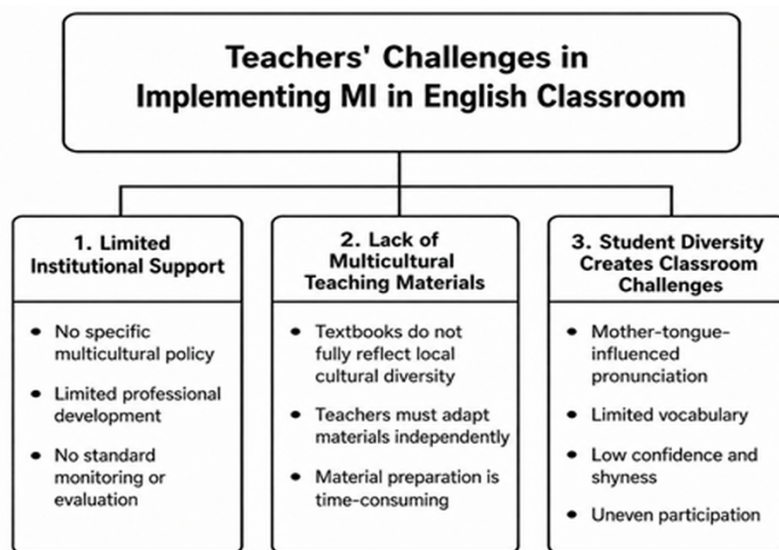


Figure 1. Teachers' Challenges of MI in English Classroom

3.1.1 Limited Institutional Support

The first challenge concerns limited institutional support for multicultural instruction. Although the schools had already introduced culture-based learning practices in general ways, the findings show that there was no specific policy, standard guideline, or systematic evaluation mechanism for multicultural English teaching. One school principal explained:

"There has not been any specific policy regarding multicultural education; however, in general, our school has implemented culture-based learning within the school environment for a long time." (1st Principal)

Another principal added:

"The school does not yet have standard guidelines to monitor and evaluate the implementation of multicultural English teaching specifically." (2nd Principal)

These responses indicate that multicultural values were present in school culture but had not been translated into formal institutional structures. As a result, teachers implemented multicultural instruction based largely on personal initiative rather than on clear school policy. This finding supports the discussion point that multicultural instruction in this context emerged as an adaptive classroom practice rather than as a fixed or fully institutionalized model.

In line with principals' interview, according to school curriculum documents, cultural values were incorporated as part of inclusive education programs rather than as a distinct multicultural instruction framework. As a result, no specific guidelines and evaluation mechanisms for multicultural instruction were formally established.

The absence of specific professional development also became a major concern. Teachers had received training related to inclusive education, but not training specifically focused on multicultural English teaching. One teacher stated:

"Actually, multicultural teaching methods in English subjects have not yet been structured because there has never been any training; it has only been limited to inclusive learning." (1st teacher)

Similarly, a school principal noted:

"So far, there has been no training and development program for teachers in multicultural English teaching, but there has been training from the teacher

community related to inclusive learning, although it is still new and has only recently been introduced.”(1st principal)

MGMP Head, added:

“Some schools have started implementing multicultural learning, but not evenly (MGMP head)

These findings show that teachers were expected to address diversity in English classrooms without sufficient pedagogical preparation. Consequently, teachers’ ability to implement multicultural instruction depended on their own experience, creativity, and participation in professional communities such as MGMP. This condition confirms the importance of teacher agency, but it also shows that agency alone is insufficient without structured institutional and professional support.

A further institutional challenge was teachers limited conceptual understanding of multicultural instruction. Some teachers had already practiced culturally responsive teaching, but they were not fully familiar with multicultural instruction as a formal pedagogical framework. One teacher explained:

“Actually, I do not really know much about the multicultural approach, but I have applied a cultural approach in English teaching for a long time, and it has been very beneficial.”(2nd teacher)

This statement suggests that multicultural instruction was often implemented implicitly. Teachers used cultural examples, inclusive interaction, and differentiated activities, but these practices were not always guided by explicit theoretical understanding. Therefore, the finding indicates a gap between practical awareness and conceptual clarity. In the context of the article, this strengthens the argument that multicultural instruction in Indonesian junior high school EFL classrooms is still developing as contextualized practical knowledge rather than as a fully articulated pedagogical model.

3.1.2 The Lack of Multicultural Teaching Materials

The second major challenge concerns the lack of multicultural teaching materials. Teachers reported that available English textbooks did not sufficiently represent the cultural diversity of their students. Many textbook materials were perceived as culturally distant because they focused on general national stories or foreign cultural content rather than local culture.

Principal stated:

“There is not specific regulation to monitoring in teaching English at multicultural classroom” (2nd principal)

One teacher stated:

“The challenge is the lack of reference books on local culture, so it is necessary to adjust the materials to the local cultural context.”(1st teacher)

Another teacher explained:

“I face several challenges in finding and using multicultural materials in the English classroom. One of the main challenges is that textbook materials often do not reflect the diversity of students in my class, which consists of Bugis, Chinese, Buol, Tolitoli, Gorontalo, and Manado students, so they feel less relevant to them.”(2nd teacher)

These responses show that textbook materials were not always aligned with the multicultural composition of the classroom. When students’ cultural backgrounds were absent from learning materials, teachers needed to modify content so that students could connect English learning with familiar experiences. This finding directly supports the

discussion point that local cultural material adaptation became a central strategy in sustaining multicultural instruction. Teachers also identified the cultural distance of textbooks as a specific problem. MGMP head commented:

"We need authentic learning resources from local cultural communities" (MGMP head)

One teacher stated:

"Textbooks often present common folktales such as Cinderella or Malin Kundang." (2nd teacher)

Another teacher added:

"However, it is still limited to references from cultures outside our region, for example, Malin Kundang and Western culture." (1st teacher)

These statements indicate that available materials tended to privilege mainstream or external cultural references. Although such materials may still have educational value, they did not fully represent students' local cultural realities. As a result, teachers had to add local examples, ask students to share personal experiences, or redesign tasks around students' cultural backgrounds. This finding shows that multicultural instruction was sustained through teacher adaptation rather than through ready-made curriculum resources. However, adapting materials was time-consuming. Teachers needed to search for local cultural references, translate local stories, simplify language, and adjust materials to students' English proficiency. One teacher explained:

"When I want to present local stories, I need additional time to translate them and adjust the language." (1st teacher)

Another teacher stated:

"In addition, I also need more time and effort to find or adapt materials so that they fit the local context." (2nd teacher)

Meanwhile, to support teacher interview. Based on document analysis, it was found that the English textbooks and teaching modules used in both schools predominantly contained national and international cultural content, with limited representation of students' local cultural backgrounds. The documents also showed that teachers frequently adapted and supplemented materials with local cultural examples to make learning more relevant and meaningful for students.

These findings demonstrate that teacher agency played a crucial role in adapting materials, but this agency also created additional workload. Teachers were not merely delivering textbook content; they acted as curriculum mediators who localized, translated, and redesigned materials to make English learning more meaningful. This confirms the article's discussion that multicultural instruction in this context was closer to an adaptive and contextualized approach than to a fully transformative curriculum reform.

3.1.3 Student diversity in Classroom Interaction

The third major challenge relates to student diversity in classroom interaction. Students came from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, which influenced pronunciation, confidence, participation, and peer interaction. One teacher explained that students' mother tongues affected their English pronunciation:

"There are also difficulties in pronouncing English words because of the influence of the mother tongue" (1st teacher)

This finding shows that linguistic diversity influenced oral English performance. Differences in pronunciation and intonation sometimes became sources of teasing, which could affect students' confidence. Therefore, multicultural instruction required teachers not only to teach pronunciation but also to manage classroom attitudes toward linguistic difference. Students' limited vocabulary also created communication difficulties. One teacher stated:

"In addition, students have limited vocabulary, which causes difficulties in communication."(1st teacher)

This indicates that student diversity was not only cultural but also linguistic and academic. Students differed in their readiness to communicate in English, and this required teachers to provide differentiated support. In multicultural EFL classrooms, limited vocabulary may increase anxiety and reduce students' willingness to speak, especially when combined with fear of making pronunciation mistakes. Low confidence and shyness were also identified as major challenges. One teacher stated:

"Sometimes they want to ask the teacher, but they feel shy."(2nd teacher)

Another teacher explained:

"Especially regarding stress and intonation, they sometimes really want to speak and express their opinions, but they feel shy because of those weaknesses."(1st teacher)

These responses show that students' silence was not always caused by lack of interest. In many cases, students wanted to participate but were inhibited by fear, embarrassment, or awareness of their linguistic limitations.

Similarly, the observation notes, several students showed low confidence in expressing their ideas in English. This was mainly due to limited vocabulary and concerns about being ridiculed for pronunciation influenced by their mother tongue. Consequently, classroom participation tended to be uneven, with some students remaining reluctant to speak.

This finding aligns with the article discussion that multicultural instruction needs to be emotionally supportive and developmentally appropriate, particularly for junior high school students who are still developing communicative confidence. To respond to these challenges, teachers created classroom agreements and inclusive norms. One teacher explained:

"At the beginning of the semester, I usually make a class agreement with students, such as not mocking their friends' accents or backgrounds and listening to one another when speaking."(2nd teacher)

This finding shows that teachers used classroom management strategies to prevent ridicule and protect students' emotional safety. Such practices indicate that multicultural instruction involved not only cultural content but also the creation of respectful interactional norms. Uneven participation was another challenge in multicultural classrooms. Some students were active, while others were more reserved or rarely involved. One teacher stated:

"Bugis students who are usually active continued to participate, while Chinese students who tend to be quieter began to speak more confidently. Likewise, students from other ethnic groups such as Buol or Tolitoli, who were previously rarely involved, started to share stories about their customs."(2nd teacher)

This finding indicates that participation was shaped by students' confidence, personality, and cultural communication tendencies. However, when classroom tasks were connected to students' own culture, previously quiet students became more willing to

participate. Thus, culturally relevant tasks functioned as a practical strategy to reduce participation gaps. Teachers also used differentiated products to accommodate different confidence levels and learning strengths. One teacher explained:

“Differences in students’ basic abilities and diverse learning styles will result in different products...” (1st teacher)

To support teachers’ view, Principal and MGMP Head added:

“School culture teaches students to respect one another regardless of background (2nd principal)

“Teacher training is needed to address linguistic diversity” (MGMP head)

Overall, the findings indicate that teachers’ challenges in implementing multicultural instruction were not isolated technical problems. They were interconnected across institutional, material, and classroom dimensions. Limited policy and training made implementation dependent on teacher initiative; insufficient multicultural materials required teachers to adapt textbooks and localize content; and student diversity demanded sensitive classroom management, differentiated tasks, and inclusive interaction.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that multicultural instruction in Indonesian EFL classrooms cannot be understood merely as the inclusion of cultural topics in English lessons, but should be viewed as a contextualized pedagogical practice shaped by institutional conditions, teacher agency, material adaptation, student diversity, and classroom interaction. This interpretation is consistent with Deiniatur and Hasanah (2024), who argue that multicultural instruction in Indonesian EFL settings involves intercultural understanding, local wisdom, inclusive learning, and global communication skills. However, the present study extends this argument by showing that multicultural instruction at the junior high school level is not implemented as a fixed or fully institutionalized model. Instead, it emerges through teachers’ practical decisions in lesson planning, classroom interaction, material selection, and student engagement. This indicates that multicultural instruction in Indonesian secondary EFL classrooms is still strongly dependent on teachers’ pedagogical awareness and contextual judgment rather than on explicit institutional policy. Such a finding is important because it reveals a tension between the normative value of multicultural pedagogy and the actual conditions under which teachers attempt to implement it.

3.2.1 Limited Institutional Support

One of the most significant issues emerging from the findings is the limited institutional support for multicultural instruction. Although teachers recognized the importance of inclusive and culturally relevant English learning, their implementation was constrained by curriculum demands, limited resources, a lack of specific professional development, and standardized assessment practices. This finding aligns with Deiniatur and Hasanah (2024), who found that Indonesian EFL teachers experienced difficulty in balancing multicultural sensitivity with standardized curriculum requirements and limited resources. It also supports Muslimin and Khan (2024), who reported that Indonesian junior high school EFL teachers responded positively to a differentiated curriculum but struggled with insufficient administrative support, learning facilities, and teacher training. Similarly, Arsyad and Suadiyatno (2024) found that the standardized testing culture limited teachers’ ability to develop differentiated and equitable assessments. These studies collectively show that multicultural instruction cannot be sustained through teacher initiative alone.

Instead, Institutional structures, school leadership, curriculum flexibility, and professional learning communities are necessary to transform multicultural instruction from individual practice into a more systematic pedagogical framework.

The findings also demonstrate that teacher agency plays a central role in sustaining multicultural instruction despite limited formal support. Teachers in this study showed adaptive capacity by modifying materials, connecting local culture with English learning, and adjusting classroom interaction according to students' needs. This supports Munandar (2019) finding that Indonesian EFL teachers developed interculturally informed pedagogy despite hegemonic language policy and limited formal preparation. Teacher agency was reflected in teachers' ability to connect home culture and target culture, adapt classroom materials, and respond to students' sociocultural contexts. Kidwell (2021) further shows that novice Indonesian EFL teachers may position themselves either as "protectors" of local cultural values or as "preparers" who help students engage with global cultural diversity. The present study suggests that these roles are not mutually exclusive, as teachers may simultaneously protect students' local values and prepare them for broader intercultural communication. This dual role is particularly important in junior high school EFL contexts, where students are still developing cultural identity, communicative confidence, and social awareness.

3.2.2 Lack of Multicultural Teaching Materials

Another important discussion point concerns the adaptation of local cultural materials. The findings indicate that teachers attempted to contextualize English learning by using familiar cultural references, local examples, and culturally meaningful tasks. This practice is consistent with Ditasari and Prasetya (2023), who found that teachers' selection of intercultural content was influenced by teacher beliefs, student characteristics, curriculum requirements, and collegial influence. Hasnah et al (2024) also show that locally produced EFL textbooks in Indonesia contain local cultural values represented through cultural products, practices, and persons, which can strengthen learner engagement and intercultural literacy. At the same time, the findings correspond with Sabillawati and Putra (2023), who argue that global EFL textbooks often privilege inner-circle cultures over local and outer-circle cultural representations. This imbalance makes teacher material adaptation necessary. In this study, local cultural adaptation served not only as a way to make lessons more interesting but also as a strategy to bridge students' lived experiences with English learning objectives. This reinforces Setyono and Widodo (2019) argument that teachers need multimodal and contextualized materials to develop students' cultural awareness.

3.2.3 Students' Diversity in Classroom Interaction

The relationship between student diversity, participation, and classroom interaction also emerged as a central theme. The findings suggest that multicultural instruction contributed to more inclusive participation when students' cultural backgrounds were recognized in classroom tasks. Students became more willing to share ideas when English learning was connected to familiar cultural experiences. This supports Yoanduanda et al (2025), who found that culturally responsive teaching significantly improved EFL students' language proficiency, classroom participation, learner confidence, and engagement. Shafa (2022) similarly reported that students from different ethnic backgrounds generally supported multicultural education, although some still had a limited understanding of multicultural values. This implies that multicultural instruction should not assume that

students automatically possess intercultural awareness; rather, such awareness needs to be developed through guided interaction, reflection, and classroom dialogue. Raja et al (2022) also show that multilingual and multicultural understanding enables learners to accept different English varieties and adjust communication styles across cultural contexts. Therefore, multicultural instruction can support both language development and intercultural identity formation when teachers intentionally design participatory and dialogic classroom activities.

However, the findings also indicate that cultural diversity may generate pedagogical tension when local values and global or Western cultural content intersect. Teachers sometimes needed to negotiate which cultural examples were appropriate, how far intercultural comparison should be encouraged, and how sensitive issues should be discussed in the classroom. This supports Munandar (2019) finding that Indonesian EFL teachers often negotiate tensions between local culture and Western cultural values in English teaching. Such tensions may affect learner confidence and participation, particularly when students feel uncertain about discussing unfamiliar or sensitive cultural topics. Therefore, multicultural instruction requires careful mediation rather than simple exposure to cultural difference. Teachers need to facilitate intercultural learning in ways that are respectful, developmentally appropriate, and connected to students' social realities. This finding also strengthens the argument that multicultural instruction in EFL should not be reduced to cultural celebration. Instead, it should involve critical but sensitive engagement with difference, identity, and communication.

The findings further reveal a tension between differentiated multicultural teaching and standardized educational expectations, where teachers recognized the need to adjust instruction based on students' language proficiency, confidence, and cultural backgrounds. They also had to meet curriculum targets and assessment expectations. This finding is supported by Sentia and Febriani (2025), who found that Indonesian EFL teachers implemented differentiated instruction through adaptive planning and spontaneous classroom adjustment, although time limitations, facilities, and curriculum expectations made consistent implementation difficult. Maruf (2023), in his study involving 100 Indonesian EFL teachers, found a strong positive correlation between teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward differentiation and the implementation of differentiated instruction. These findings suggest that differentiated multicultural teaching has strong pedagogical potential, but its effectiveness depends on teachers' beliefs, autonomy, and institutional support. Without these conditions, differentiation may remain partial or inconsistent.

The findings also indicate that multicultural instruction in this study was closer to an adaptive and contextualized approach than to a transformative curriculum reform. Khotbi et al (2023), in their analysis of 560 lesson plans from 39 EFL teachers in Morocco, found that many teachers used cultural content primarily for language acquisition rather than for deeper multicultural exploration. Their study suggests that teachers often apply an additive approach to multicultural content without fully reaching transformative multicultural curriculum reform. A similar pattern can be observed in the present study. Teachers incorporated cultural materials and inclusive activities, but institutional constraints and curriculum demand limited the extent to which multicultural instruction could become transformative. Nevertheless, this should not be interpreted as a weakness of teacher practice alone. Rather, it reflects the broader structural context in which teachers work. The finding suggests that transformative multicultural instruction requires alignment among teacher competence, curriculum design, assessment systems, school leadership, and policy support.

Overall, the challenges of multicultural instruction faced by teachers in junior high school are shaped by three main issues. The first is limited institutional support, where multicultural instruction has not been fully supported through clear school policies, teacher training, systematic evaluation, lack of multicultural teaching materials, and students' diversity in classroom interaction. The second issue is the lack of multicultural teaching material, in which the textbook does not fully represent students' local cultural backgrounds. Therefore, teachers need to adapt, translate, and contextualized materials. The third is student diversity in classroom interaction. Students have different pronunciation patterns, vocabulary levels, confidence levels and participation patterns. However, teachers respond through inclusive classroom rules, differentiated tasks, and culturally relevant activities. The result shows that multicultural instruction is still adaptive and contextual, not yet fully institutionalized. It is similar to the previous studies which emphasize culture, inclusion, and learner diversity in classroom learning.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that teachers' challenges in implementing multicultural instruction in Indonesian junior high school EFL classrooms are shaped by three interconnected dimensions: limited institutional support, insufficient multicultural teaching materials, and student diversity in classroom interaction. The findings show that multicultural instruction has not yet been fully supported by specific school policies, structured professional development, or systematic evaluation guidelines. At the same time, teachers face difficulties because available textbooks do not sufficiently represent students' local cultural backgrounds, requiring them to adapt, translate, and contextualize materials independently. Classroom diversity also creates pedagogical challenges, including mother-tongue-influenced pronunciation, limited vocabulary, low confidence, shyness, and uneven participation. However, teachers responded to these constraints through agency, inclusive classroom norms, differentiated tasks, and local cultural adaptation. Thus, multicultural instruction in this study operates as an adaptive and contextualized pedagogical practice rather than a fully institutionalized teaching model.

These findings directly address the study objective by showing that the implementation of multicultural instruction depends not only on teachers' awareness of diversity but also on institutional support, culturally relevant resources, and strategies for managing student participation. The study contributes to multicultural EFL pedagogy by demonstrating that multicultural instruction should be understood as a framework that shapes planning, material selection, classroom interaction, assessment, and reflection. Future research may involve broader school contexts across different Indonesian regions, include students' and parents' perspectives, and examine how school policy can support multicultural English learning more systematically. Further studies may also develop and test locally grounded multicultural teaching materials or a contextualized multicultural instruction model that can be applied across various English topics, not only culture-related lessons.

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