English for Multicultural Competence on Higher Education Students

Sekar Mayang Fitria Budianto[1], Ana Maghfiroh[2]✉, Diyah Atiek Mustikawati[3], Niken Reti Indriastuti[4], Siti Asiyah[5]

[1-5]Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo, Indonesia

✉*Corresponding Email: ana_maghfiroh@umpo.ac.id*

Abstract

In an era of globalization, English proficiency is essential for effective communication among diverse cultural groups, making English for Multicultural Competence (EMC) a vital component of English language education. This research aims to (1) investigate the effectiveness of EMC teaching among higher education students, and (2) explore the impact of English language teaching on developing multicultural competence in higher education students. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative data from a Likert scale questionnaire and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. Participants include Indonesian students studying abroad and those engaged in overseas exchange programs. The results indicate a positive correlation between English proficiency and multicultural competence, highlighting that students who actively participate in multicultural activities and utilize English in their campus life develop better intercultural communication skills. Challenges such as time constraints and limited interaction with international peers were also identified. Overall, the results affirm the significance of EMC programs in promoting cultural sensitivity, critical thinking, and empathy among students, ultimately preparing them for success in the global workforce. This research provides insights into effective practices and the impact of English language teaching on enhancing multicultural competence in higher education contexts.

Keywords: english, higher education, multicultural competence, study abroad

Introduction

English competence has become a crucial skill in the current era of globalization (Smith & Jones, 2020). In contemporary writing on higher education, globalization and internationalization are increasingly prevalent and are often used as frameworks for higher education research (Wati et al., 2013; Tight, 2019; Ayu et al., 2024). In Indonesia, English is widely used alongside Bahasa Indonesia

in educational settings and is a mandatory subject from junior high school to university level. It is learned by millions of Indonesian students in thousands of schools and universities (Hapsari & Puspitasari, 2021; Rachman et al., 2021). Higher education institutions expect students to develop strong English language skills to effectively engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Adams & Smith, 2021). This necessity highlights the importance of English for Multicultural Competence (EMC) in higher education (Williams, 2022; Efendi & Suswanta, 2017; Lestari et al., 2024; Muamaroh, 2009).

EMC significantly enhances students' academic and social experiences in higher education. It improves intercultural communicative competence by developing students' behavioral and cognitive abilities for effective interaction in multicultural settings (Chen & Young, 2022; Indriastuti et al., 2023). EMC equips students with essential skills for success in diverse environments, enhancing communication, cultural sensitivity, and critical thinking (Bretas & Alon, 2021; Retnasari & Hidayat, 2018; Maghfiroh et al., 2024). It fosters a deeper understanding of different cultural perspectives, leading to a more inclusive campus environment (Li & Wang, 2021). EMC programs also reduce cultural biases and prejudices, promoting harmonious interactions among students from diverse backgrounds (Brown, 2020; Setyaningrum et al., 2023; Indriastuti, 2023). English language education and multicultural competence aim to produce globally minded graduates who can communicate and collaborate across cultural boundaries (Smith & Martin, 2022). This holistic approach enhances communication skills, promotes empathy, critical thinking, and appreciation of global cultures (Williams et al., 2021; Asiyah, 2018). Graduates with strong multicultural competence are better prepared for the global workforce, as employers value these skills for success in today's interconnected world (International Education Association, 2022; Ratrina et al., 2022; Aji, 2017).

This research aims (1) to assess the effectiveness of English Multicultural Competence teaching among higher education students and (2) to explore the impact of English language teaching on developing multicultural competence in higher education contexts. Multicultural competence is increasingly crucial in the context of globalization and cultural diversity on university campuses. This includes identifying the most effective teaching methods that instructors can employ to enhance students' multicultural competence (Mustikawati et al., 2023). By providing insights into the best practices for teaching EMC, this research will help equip students with the necessary skills to interact

constructively in a culturally diverse society (Asiyah, 2018).

Method

1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from interviews with students who have engaged in multicultural settings. The data will be analyzed to determine the correlation between English proficiency and the development of multicultural competence.

Quantitative data is gathered from a Likert scale questionnaire with seven basic questions about the effectiveness of teaching English for multicultural competence among university students (Field, 2018). Qualitative data is obtained from semi-structured interviews with three questions related to experiences and the identification of the most effective teaching methods that instructors can use to enhance students' multicultural competence (Silverman, 2013).

2. Participants

The participants will include Indonesian students currently studying abroad and those participating in overseas exchange programs from various universities in Indonesia. A sample of 8 students will be selected using simple random sampling to ensure proportional representation from diverse cultural backgrounds. Simple random sampling is a probability sampling method that allows researchers to select participants randomly and without bias (Golzar & Noor, 2022).

3. Research Instruments

In collecting data, researchers used:

a. Questionnaire: To collect quantitative data on students' perceptions of English language teaching and their multicultural competence, a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale will be used to measure various dimensions of multicultural competence.

b. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with three students to gather qualitative data about their experiences with English language learning and its influence on their multicultural competence.

4. Data Analysis

a. Quantitative Data: Data from questionnaires will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to explore the relationship between variables related to multicultural competence among higher education students.

b. Qualitative Data: Interview data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes related to the development of multicultural competency.

Result and Discussion

1. The Effectiveness of Teaching English on Multicultural Competence

In simple terms, international education exposes students to the objective, material cultures of others, including their political and social institutions, language, art, and literature (Savicki, 2023). The relationship between international study experiences, English language teaching, and the development of multicultural competency in students is crucial for facilitating communication between students from different countries.

We surveyed eight participants about how frequently they use English, their language skills, their participation in multicultural activities, and their comfort in communicating in English with friends from different countries.
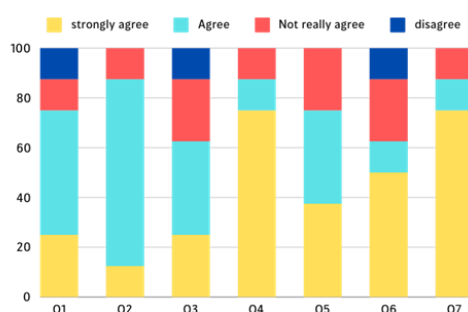

Figure 1. Frequency of Communicating Using English in Daily

Fifty percent of participants often use English in their campus life. English is necessary for communication with students from various countries. Allport's (1954) "contact theory" helps explain why group work may be negatively perceived by students; it proposes that under certain conditions, active, positive, and purposeful interactions with people from different cultures can reduce intergroup prejudice and anxiety, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and tolerance (Denson & Zhang, 2010; Liang & Schartner, 2022).

Six out of eight participants felt they had good English skills, one felt their skills were adequate, and another felt their skills were very good. This indicates that exchange students, on average, possess good English language proficiency. Speaking is considered a crucial skill because it is necessary for oral communication. Speaking is important for conversations, descriptions, and it works in tandem with listening. Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information (Florez, 1999; Ahmad & Islam, 2022). The importance of speaking skills cannot be overstated. Speaking is also critical as it is directly related to communication and interaction, and competency in any language largely depends on how well

an individual speaks that language (Islam et al., 2022; Riwasanti et al., 2021).

On average, participants frequently engage in multicultural activities or events organized on their campus. These extracurricular activities are beneficial in fostering high-quality human resources and should not be overlooked. Multiculturalism is a vital aspect of social life, serving as the foundation for harmonious coexistence despite differences in ethnicity, race, and religion (Alfarisi & Darmiyanti, 2023). Six out of eight participants believe that the influence of using English on the development of multicultural competence is significant, though it ultimately depends on individual experiences.

As a universal language, English is a crucial factor for academic success, global careers, international communication, and obtaining academic degrees from overseas universities (Focho, 2011; Jenkins, 2006; Diem & Abdullah, 2020). Proficiency in English opens doors to a wealth of academic resources and professional networks, enabling students to participate more fully in the global academic community. It facilitates cross-cultural exchanges and collaborative research. On average, participants feel comfortable interacting with international students in English. This comfort suggests that students have attained sufficient proficiency in English, allowing them to engage in conversations and collaborative activities with peers from different cultural backgrounds. Such interactions are essential for developing intercultural communication skills and enhancing multicultural competence (Adams & Smith, 2021).

Comfort in using English as a medium of communication also reflects the effectiveness of English language education in preparing students for real-world scenarios where they must navigate diverse cultural settings (Hapsari & Puspitasari, 2021). Half of the participants feel that higher education institutions strongly support the development of multicultural competence through student exchange programs and other activities. Support from these institutions is crucial in enhancing students' multicultural abilities. Developing intercultural competence can be part of any university subject but requires intervention and guidance to succeed. In linguistically and culturally diverse classes, various learning styles must be accommodated, and a variety of tasks offered to build intercultural competence (Haerazi & Nunez, 2022).

Among several challenges, 75% of participants identified a lack of interaction with international students as the main obstacle to developing their multicultural competence. Other challenges include limited proficiency in the Indonesian language, a lack of programs or activities, time constraints, cultural and social factors, and the diversity of English dialects. Students' cultural backgrounds affect their

problem-solving approaches. When faced with the same problem, students from different cultural backgrounds are likely to propose a diverse range of solutions (Korenetskaya, n.d.; Permono et al., 2019).

Overall, the use of English in campus life and student exchange programs has a significant impact on the development of students' multicultural competence. Effective English language teaching must incorporate cultural context and provide direct experiences through interactions with people from diverse backgrounds. To support the development of multicultural competence, curricula should include practical experiences, global discussions, and opportunities for international collaboration.

2. The Impact of English Language Teaching on Developing Multicultural Competence

According to Hackett et al. (2023), the model defines multicultural effectiveness as "success in the fields of professional effectiveness, personal adjustment, and intercultural interactions." Researchers have used the model in various contexts to measure intercultural competence development (Leong, 2007; Schartner, 2016; van der Poel, 2020). Therefore, we asked the opinions of three students from several campuses about the influence of English teaching methods on improving multicultural understanding and skills.

"I think it is very effective, as language itself is the gateway to understanding different cultures. Only knowing one language is like a barrier to gaining an understanding beyond the culture of that language." (Participant A)

"In my opinion, English language teaching can be highly effective in enhancing someone's multicultural understanding and skills by focusing on English as a communication tool. English language teaching should emphasize methods where students apply what they have learned in actual interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds, whether through direct conversation or other mediums such as text. I believe this approach would not only improve their understanding of English but also give students an opportunity to learn about other cultures and how those cultures influence the use of the English language." (Participant B)

"Speaking from a national perspective, I feel that the teaching methods currently used have not succeeded in improving multicultural understanding and skills. This is because many teachers and educational staff still focus primarily on sentence structure, rather than on the origins or philosophy behind the language." (Participant C)

Based on the interview results, participants expressed diverse perspectives on the effectiveness of

English language teaching in enhancing multicultural understanding. Participant A viewed language learning as highly effective in opening the door to understanding other cultures. In contrast, Participant B emphasized the value of methods that promote real interactions with various cultures. However, Participant C argued that national teaching methods are ineffective, as they focus too much on sentence structure while neglecting the cultural origins of the language.

Additionally, participants were asked to provide suggestions for curriculum development that could better support multicultural competence among higher education students.

"I believe exchange programs are the best because they provide direct experience in meeting and interacting with people from different cultures and backgrounds. However, an alternative could be having online sessions with international participants, presented in a fun way, to foster multicultural exchange more effectively!" (Participant A)

"My suggestion would be to provide more hands-on experiences with people from different cultural backgrounds, either offline or online. This can help students see firsthand how others do things, approach problems, and interact socially. In my experience, people learn more effectively when they can apply what they've learned. By recognizing the importance of cultural

competence in everyday interactions, students may organically enhance their cultural competence without needing extensive intervention from teachers or lecturers." (Participant B)

"Based on my experience and the brief research I conducted during my activities, one possible approach is to create a foreign language learning space for students that not only focuses on language comprehension but also on understanding the culture and philosophy behind that language." (Participant C)

This indicates that the use of English in campus life and participation in multicultural activities varies among respondents. Proficiency in English often correlates with comfort in interacting with international students and the development of multicultural competence. The challenges students face include time constraints, limited English proficiency, and minimal interaction with international students.

These findings are consistent with Ahmad et al. (2020), which emphasize the importance of developing multicultural or intercultural competence through cultural interaction and relevant learning strategies. The study also highlights that effective teaching must consider various aspects of competence to enhance students' communication skills in a multicultural environment. In contrast, Hackett et al. (2023) focus more on developing intercultural competence through

international collaborative online learning.

Conclusion

The results from both the questionnaire and the interview indicated that the use of English and participation in multicultural activities were effective in improving students' English and multicultural skills, as well as their overall impact.

The limitation of this study lies in the number of participants, which included only eight Indonesian students studying abroad who participated in an international exchange program. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from participants, which may have been influenced by subjective bias and their personal perceptions of the English learning experience and the development of multicultural competence.

For future research, it is recommended to involve a larger and more diverse group of participants, including students from different institutions and cultural backgrounds. Future studies could also consider using more in-depth mixed methods, such as longitudinal studies, to explore the development of multicultural competence over time. Furthermore, incorporating the perspectives of instructors or lecturers in the analysis may provide a more holistic insight into the effectiveness of English language teaching in improving multicultural competence.

References

Adams, P., & Smith, R. (2021). Challenges in Multicultural Education. *International Journal of Education Development, 19*(4), 321-335.

Ahmad, N. F., Suhaimi, N., Saidin, K. N., Azim, A., & Mahda, N. A. R. (n.d.). Multilingualism and Multiculturalism Impact on Shaping Oral Literacy and Communicative Competence.

Aisyah, S. (2018). Exploring ESP Students' English Skills by "English Talent Competition." *JALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy, 2*(2). https://doi.org/10.25157/jall.v2i2.2198

Aisyah, S. (2018). Public Speaking dan Konstribusinya Terhadap Kompetensi Dai. *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah, 37*(2), 198-214.

Aji, M. P. P. (2017). English Listening Blended Learning: The Implementation of Blended Learning in Teaching Listening to University Students. *Kajian Linguistik dan Sastra, 2*(1), 25-32.

Alfarisi, S., & Darmiyanti, A. (2023). Integration of Multicultural Educational Values in Islamic Elementary School North Cikarang, Bekasi, West Java. *EDUKASI: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam,*

11(2), 245-262.

Asiyah, S. (2018). Implementasi Komunikasi Verbal dan Non Verbal dalam Kegiatan Public Speaking Santri di Pondok Pesantren Darul Falah Amtsilati Putri Bangsri Jepara. *An-Nida: Jurnal Komunikasi Islam, 10*(2).

Ayu, R. I., Asiyah, S., Indriastuti, N. R., & Ayu Indah, R. P. (2024). The Effectiveness of Flipped Classroom Model Towards Students' Listening Comprehension in the Tenth Grade of SMAN 1 Badegan. *Paraplu Journal, 1*(3).

Bretas, V., & Alon, I. (2021). Language and Communication in International Students' Adaptation: A Bibliometric and Content Analysis Review. *Higher Education*.

Brown, R. (2020). Reducing Prejudice Through Multicultural Education. *Journal of Social Issues in Education, 14*(3), 301-315.

Diem, C. D., & Abdullah, U. (2020). Promoting Multiculturalism: Teachers' English Proficiency and Multicultural Education in Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 10*(1), 46-58.

Efendi, D., & Suswanta, S. (2017). Politics of Education: Multiculturalism Practice in Universitas Muhammadiyah Kupang, NTT. *Iseedu: Journal of Islamic Educational Thoughts and Practices, 1*(1), 47-72.

Field, A. (2018). Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics. *Sage Publications*.

Garcia, M., & Nguyen, T. (2022). Preparing Global Citizens: The Role of Multicultural Competence in Higher Education. *Global Education Review, 9*(1), 44-59.

Golzar, J., & Noor, S. (2022). Simple Random Sampling.

Hackett, S., Janssen, J., Beach, P., Perreault, M., Beelen, J., & Van Tartwijk, J. (2023). The Effectiveness of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) on Intercultural Competence Development in Higher Education. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 20*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-022-00373-3

Haerazi, H., & Nunez, J. L. (2022). Promoting Intercultural Competences and Communication Skills Through English Textbooks Within Multilingual Education. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies, 1*(2), 75-82. https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v1i2.610

Hapsari, Y., & Puspitasari, I. (2021). Promoting Multicultural Competence Among EIL Learners. *European Alliance for Innovation*.

Hoff, H. E. (2020). The Evolution of Intercultural Communicative Competence: Conceptualizations, Critiques, and Consequences for 21st Century Classroom Practice. *Intercultural Communication Education, 3*(2), 55-74. https://doi.org/10.29140/ice.v3n2.264

Hofhuis, J., Jongerling, J., Van Der Zee, K. I., & Jansz, J. (2020). Validation of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire Short Form (MPQ-SF) for Use in the Context of International Education. *PLOS ONE, 15*(12). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0244425

Indriastuti, N. R. (2023). The Content Analysis of Students' ER Material Based on Course Learning Outcome. *International Social Sciences and Humanities, 2*(1), 109-116.

Indriastuti, N. R., Mustikawati, D. A., & Asiyah, S. (2023). Analysis on Students' HOTS Through Extensive Reading in English Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo. *Premise: Journal of English Education and Applied Linguistics, 12*(2), 507-521.

Institute of International Education (IIE). (2020). Project Atlas: Japan.

International Education Association.

(2022). Employer Perspectives on Multicultural Competence in Graduates. *Global Workforce Journal, 15*(1), 34-47.

Islam, W., Ahmad, S., & Islam, M. D. (2022). Investigating the Problems Faced by University EFL Learners in Speaking English Language. *International Journal of TESOL & Education, 2*(2), 47-65. https://doi.org/10.54855/ijte.22223

Ji, Y. (2020). Embedding and Facilitating Intercultural Competence Development in Internationalization of the Curriculum of Higher Education. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching, 9*(3), 13. https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v9n3p13

Johnson, K. (2023). Integrating Multicultural Elements Into Higher Education Curricula. *International Journal of Higher Education, 12*(1), 67-81.

Klyukanov, I. E. (n.d.). Principles of Intercultural Communication (2nd ed.).

Korenetskaya, I. (n.d.). Developing Multicultural Communicative Competence in English as a Foreign Language Classroom.

Lestari, D., Maghfiroh, A., & Mustikawati, D. A. (2024). Motivation of Learning English: A

Case of Indonesian Migrant Workers' Children in Malaysia. *Ta'dib, 27*(1), 1-12.

Li, X., & Wang, Y. (2021). Enhancing Language Proficiency and Cultural Awareness Through Multicultural Education. *Journal of Educational Development, 15*(2), 112-127.

Liang, Y., & Schartner, A. (2022). Culturally Mixed Group Work and the Development of Students' Intercultural Competence. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 26*(1), 44-60. https://doi.org/10.1177/10283153 20963507

Maghfiroh, A., Unaiziah, E. A. N., Mustikawati, D. A., & Susilowati, T. (2024). Students' English Learning Strategies Assisted With E-Resources in Blended Learning. *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching, 12*(1), 535-545.

Muamaroh, M. (2009). Oral English Proficiency: Obstacles and Solution for University Students on Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

Mustikawati, D. A., Pratama, D. Y., & Harmanto, B. (2023). Innovative Learning to Improving Students' Motivation at SMKN 2 Magetan. *ELTT, 9*(1), 45-55.

Permono, S. H., Maghfiroh, A., & Mustikawati, D. A. (2019). The Investigation of 2013 Curriculum in English Teaching Process at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Ponorogo. *Edupedia, 3*(2). https://doi.org/10.24269/ed.v3i2. 303

Rachman, A. N., Maghfiroh, A., Mustikawati, D. A., & Indriastuti, N. R. (2021). Community of Inquiry for Students' Autonomy in English Language Learning: A Case of Philippines High School. *IJELTAL (Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 6*(1), 61. https://doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v 6i1.849

Ratrina, C., Maghfiroh, A., Indriastuti, N. R., & Asiyah, S. (2022). Learner Autonomy in Accessing Web-Based EFL Learning: Case at English Department Students. *Journal of English Education Studies, 6*(1), 79-92.

Smith, A., & Jones, B. (2022). The Role of Multicultural Competence in Conflict Resolution Among Diverse Groups. *Conflict Management Journal, 5*(2), 112-129.

Thompson, G. H. (2023). Strategies for Integrating Multicultural Competence Into English as a Foreign Language Programs. *International Journal of Educational Research and Development, 14*(3), 210-228.

Ullah, I., & Ashraf, H. (2020). Learning

Strategies in Multicultural Education: Approaches and Practices. *Education and Society Journal, 3*(4), 87-101.

Waluyo, A. (2023). Investigating Translation Procedures of Cultural Words Found in English-Indonesian Google Translate. *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching, 11*(2), 253-261.