Bridging Cultures and Languages: Pedagogical Strategies for Local Language Use in EFL Learning

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Abstract.
This qualitative case study investigates the implementation of multicultural-based English teaching in ninth-grade speaking classes at SMP Al Falah Jogorogo, involving ten teacher and student participants. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and analysis of speaking materials. The findings show that tasks built around local traditions such as regional foods, festivals, and greetings, combined with global themes, make speaking activities meaningful, increase motivation and engagement, and help students feel less anxious, speak in longer stretches, and participate more actively. However, inconsistent classroom language policy, limited English exposure, and habitual alternation into Indonesian and Javanese reduce opportunities for sustained English use, increase cognitive load, and slow language development. Multicultural-based materials support gradual gains in vocabulary, fluency, and cultural awareness when accompanied by teacher modelling, group work, and space for students to draw on their cultural experiences. The study argues that culturally responsive EFL pedagogy in multilingual rural contexts requires explicit language-use guidelines, purposeful bilingual scaffolding, and systematically designed multicultural speaking materials. These insights offer a situated example of how multicultural principles can be operationalized in junior high school EFL classrooms and point to the need for further practice-oriented research on material design and classroom language management in Indonesia.

Keywords:
Multicultural Education; English as a Foreign Language; Speaking Skills.

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is broadly acknowledged as one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse countries in the globe. Its diverse mosaic, consisting of hundreds of ethnic groups, indigenous languages, cultural traditions, and belief systems, constitutes a fundamental element of the nation's collective identity (Hiswara et al., 2023). Nonetheless, this diversity, although a strength, frequently presents enduring social challenges. Issues including prejudice, stereotyping, intergroup tension, and abuse persist, especially among adolescents who are still undergoing processes of identity development and social integration (Stephens et al., 2018). These dynamics underscore the critical importance of educational strategies that can effectively leverage diversity as a constructive force rather than permitting it to serve as a catalyst for division (Rossi & Brischetto, 2024). In multilingual and multicultural settings such as Indonesia, education assumes a strategic role in fostering mutual respect, dismantling prejudices, and preparing youth to engage effectively in an increasingly diverse society (Abdalla & Moussa, 2024).

Consequently, the role of education becomes crucial not only in transmitting academic knowledge or linguistic skills, but also in fostering empathy, cultural sensitivity, and respect for differences. A growing body of scholarship emphasizes that contemporary education must

cultivate values needed for peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies (Mas'ud, 2021; Mashuri et al., 2024). This perspective aligns with frameworks such as Global Citizenship Education and Intercultural Communicative Competence, which stress preparing learners to interact meaningfully across cultural boundaries (Arfaton et al., 2025; Byram et al., 2002; Malović & Vujica, 2021). Within this perspective, diversity is positioned as a pedagogical resource for deeper learning and social cohesion. Drawing from principles of multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2010) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014), English language classrooms should function not only as linguistic training spaces but as platforms for intercultural dialogue and identity affirmation.

Thus, education plays a vital role in not only conveying academic knowledge and linguistic skills but also in promoting empathy, cultural sensitivity, and respect for diversity. A significant amount of research highlights the necessity for contemporary education to foster values essential for peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies (Hossain, 2024; Maqsood et al., 2024; Megawati & Prahmana, 2025) This viewpoint corresponds with frameworks like Global Citizenship Education and Intercultural Communicative Competence, emphasizing the importance of equipping learners for meaningful interactions across cultural boundaries (Byram, 1997; UNESCO, 2014). Diversity is regarded as a pedagogical resource that enhances deeper learning and fosters social cohesion. English language classrooms should serve as both linguistic training environments and platforms for intercultural dialogue and identity affirmation (Banks & Banks, 2010; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Restricted linguistic resources can lead to identity suppression, increased anxiety, and diminished motivation among students. Contemporary language pedagogy promotes humanizing and culturally responsive approaches that view multilingual repertoires as assets instead of limitations (García & Wei, 2013). The EFL classroom is increasingly viewed as a venue for dialogue, intercultural negotiation, and the affirmation of identity (Darong, 2024; Kiss & Weninger, 2017). This necessitates that educators assume broader responsibilities as facilitators of intercultural learning, creating activities that acknowledge students' backgrounds and promote significant interaction. English learning in Indonesia enhances communicative competence, intercultural competence, and social cohesion, thereby supporting national objectives of fostering unity within diversity (Deiniatur & Hasanah, 2024; Rusdiansyah et al., 2025).

Despite these developments, many Indonesian EFL teachers still struggle with the complexities of managing multilingual and multicultural classrooms (Boy Jon et al., 2021; Rusdiansyah et al., 2025). Although translanguaging and multicultural English education (MEE) have gained recognition, existing literature remains heavily theoretical with limited guidance on practical classroom implementation(Pawapootanon et al., 2025). Research in Indonesia tends to be fragmented, focusing on isolated interventions or general attitudes rather than structured teaching materials or systematically designed learning models (Rahmi & Rassanjani, 2025). Much of the previous work examines multicultural values abstractly, without developing concrete pedagogical tools that teachers can use, particularly in speaking lessons where cultural expression is most visible (Rahmatika et al., 2023; Szelei et al., 2019). Moreover, empirical studies on how multicultural values can be integrated into English activities in distinct sociocultural settings: such as rural, peripheral, or culturally heterogeneous regions are scarce (Szelei et al., 2019; Zein et al., 2020).

A significant gap is evident in the development and practical testing of Multicultural-based English Teaching materials, particularly for speaking classes, within Indonesia's culturally diverse educational contexts. Although prior research discusses multiculturalism conceptually, scholars highlight that empirical and practice-oriented studies remain limited, especially those that offer concrete pedagogical models for classroom use (Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025; Trisha et al., 2025). Existing literature rarely integrates vocabulary development, speaking fluency, and intercultural competence into a unified instructional design, despite calls for more contextually grounded materials that reflect learners' cultural identities (Gilmore, 2007; Zammit, 2025). Furthermore, Boy Jon et al., 2021 and Rusdiansyah et al., 2025) also found that multicultural-

based materials function across different Indonesian regions, including rural and multiethnic communities, where cultural dynamics are more pronounced. This absence of practice-oriented and context-sensitive research restricts teachers' capacity to effectively implement multicultural pedagogy and limits progress toward equitable and culturally responsive EFL education.

This study's novelty is found in its context-sensitive integration of multicultural education within English speaking instruction, specifically conducted in the culturally diverse Jogorogo subdistrict. This research presents multicultural-based English teaching materials aimed at improving students' vocabulary, speaking fluency, and cultural awareness concurrently, rather than viewing multiculturalism as a mere abstract concept. It employs a comprehensive framework that views English not only as a linguistic system but also as a medium for cultural expression, mutual understanding, and identity affirmation. This study provides empirical evidence regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of multicultural-based pedagogy, an area that is underexplored in Indonesian EFL research, especially in rural contexts. This study enhances theoretical and practical discourse on culturally responsive EFL pedagogy by focusing on local cultural realities and diverse linguistic identities.

Accordingly, this research seeks to explore the implementation of Multicultural-based English Teaching in speaking classrooms, examine the challenges faced by teachers in integrating multicultural values into English learning, and investigate the role of multicultural-based materials in enhancing students' speaking proficiency and cultural awareness.

Through these inquiries, the study aims to bridge theoretical and practical perspectives on multicultural language teaching and to contribute to the design of culturally responsive pedagogy in EFL contexts.

B. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how multicultural-based English teaching materials enhance students' speaking competence and cultural awareness in a junior high school context. The case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth investigation of a bounded system specifically, one English classroom at SMP Al Falah, Jogorogo within its real-life educational environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2003). Through this approach, the research sought to understand the complexities of integrating multicultural perspectives into English teaching practices, including the strategies teachers employ and how students respond to culturally enriched materials during learning activities.

The study was conducted at SMP Al Falah, a private junior high school in the Jogorogo Subdistrict area. The school's cultural diversity made it an appropriate setting for investigating the connection between multicultural education and language learning. Out of a total population of 22 ninth-grade students, 10 were purposively selected along with one English teacher as participants in this case study. The selection was based on their active involvement in English speaking classes and their willingness to participate in multicultural learning activities. This focused participant group aligns with the case study design, which prioritizes in-depth exploration over generalization.

Data were collected through three primary methods: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The classroom observations were carried out over four sessions to record how multicultural elements were incorporated into English speaking lessons and to capture authentic classroom interactions between the teacher and students (Anyichie et al., 2023). Detailed field notes were taken to document observable behaviors, instructional techniques, and student engagement. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with the English teacher and ten selected students to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions and experiences. The students were chosen purposively based on their active participation in speaking activities, their responsiveness during class discussions, and their willingness to engage in multicultural learning tasks. The flexible nature of the interviews allowed participants to express their views freely, providing nuanced insights into the effectiveness and challenges of integrating multicultural education into English learning.

Additionally, documents such as teaching materials, lesson plans, and students' written outputs were analyzed to identify how multicultural content and values were embedded in the instructional design.

The data collected from these multiple sources were analyzed using thematic analysis as proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process began with familiarization, in which all transcripts, observation notes, and documents were carefully read and reread to gain an overall understanding of the data. The next step involved coding, where significant segments of data were labeled based on emerging ideas related to multicultural learning, student engagement, and language development. The codes were then organized into broader categories, which were developed into key themes reflecting the pedagogical practices and outcomes observed in the classroom. The final stage involved interpretation, where the themes were examined in relation to existing theories of multicultural education and EFL pedagogy. This iterative process ensured that the findings accurately represented the realities of the research context.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were implemented, following Lincoln & Guba's (1985). Credibility was established through triangulation of data sources: observations, interviews, and documents, which allowed the researcher to cross-validate findings. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview transcripts and preliminary analyses with participants to verify accuracy and authenticity. Peer debriefing with fellow researchers provided external perspectives and helped refine interpretations. Furthermore, detailed and thick descriptions were used to enhance transferability, while an audit trail of decisions, procedures, and reflections was maintained to ensure dependability and confirmability throughout the research process. The use of a qualitative case study method enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon of multicultural-based English learning in depth, capturing not only the linguistic outcomes but also the cultural and social dimensions of teaching and learning in a diverse classroom. By combining observation, interviews, and document analysis, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how multicultural education principles can be effectively integrated into English language teaching.

C. RESULT & DISCUSSION
Implementation of Multicultural-Based English Teaching in the Speaking Classroom

The implementation of multicultural-based English teaching at SMP Al Falah Jogorogo reflects a deliberate effort to integrate cultural and linguistic diversity into speaking activities. Teaching materials incorporated topics related to local traditions, such as regional foods, festivals, and greetings alongside global themes, allowing students to compare cultural experiences and express them in English. This approach aligns with Gay's, (2000) assertion that culturally responsive pedagogy increases students' motivation and sense of relevance. One of the students clarified it in the interview session:

> *"In the beginning, I was very quiet and only said a few words. After we started talking more about our daily life and how it is in other countries, I feel it is easier to speak, I can make longer sentences, and I am not as nervous as before."* (26/09/25)

Classroom observations indicated that English was not consistently maintained as the main medium of instruction. Teachers and students frequently alternated between English, Indonesian, and Javanese to ensure comprehension (Hapsari et al., 2025; Kuncoroningtyas et al., 2025; Setyowati, 2023). While language alternation can facilitate understanding (García & Wei, 2013; Usman et al., 2025), it was largely unstructured and habitual rather than intentionally pedagogical. The teacher acknowledged this during an interview:

> *"Sometimes, students get confused when switching languages too often, and it slows down the lesson."* (26/09/25).

This finding highlights that, although language alternation supports comprehension, excessive or unplanned switching increases cognitive load and interrupts the flow of communication. Therefore, structured management of language alternation is necessary to

optimize English immersion while preserving comprehension.

Challenges in Integrating Multicultural Values into English Learning
a. Language Policy Problem

Managing classroom language policy remains a central challenge for promoting English use among students. This difficulty arises from students' varying language abilities, limited classroom hours for English, and inconsistent policy guidelines from both the government and teachers. Consequently, students tend to rely on the languages they find most comfortable, reinforcing avoidance of English during daily classroom activities. Although teacher attempt to implement English-use rules, for instance, requiring students to speak English when requesting permission to go to the restroom, these rules are seldom enforced consistently. The teacher noted:

> *"The challenge is how to reduce the use of languages other than English, of course." (26/09/25).*

This statement demonstrates teachers' awareness of the problem but also reveals a lack of systematic strategies to manage it. Classroom observations further indicated that English use was largely limited to short and simple sentences among ninth-grade students. Peer interactions were dominated by local languages to clarify meaning or express ideas more comfortably. Using the first language can facilitate understanding, especially of grammar (Al-abbasi, 2022; Alqahtani, 2024; Hossain, 2024); however, overreliance on it can hinder English development (Blasi et al., 2022; Kavaliauskienė, 2018).

The absence of structured guidelines for language alternation leads to inconsistent English use, as both teachers and students often revert to their native languages, restricting opportunities for English practice (Hall & Cook, 2012). Establishing and enforcing clear classroom language policies is therefore essential for improving English learning outcomes.

b. Lack of English Exposure

Limited exposure to English, both inside and outside school, remains a persistent challenge. Students reported minimal use of English beyond class sessions and few extracurricular opportunities for speaking practice. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) theory that continuous exposure to comprehensible input is crucial for sustained language acquisition.

> Unstructured language alternation in the classroom exacerbates the lack of English exposure. Heavy reliance on the first language reduces opportunities to acquire new vocabulary, internalize grammar, and engage with cultural contexts (Alisoy, 2024; Jaekel et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2024). Overuse of the native language limits practice time in English, hindering development of speaking fluency, grammatical accuracy, and comprehension (Alnaeem, 2025; Truong Tran Minh, 2024).
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> A teacher explained during an interview:
>
> > *"Yes, the challenge when we teach English, because we use various languages, so the main language, English, is what is lacking for them. Because they are dependent on using Indonesian. That is the challenge" (26/09/25).*

This emphasizes that students' preference for their comfortable, daily languages reduces English exposure, restricting both their confidence and communicative competence in real-life situations.

c. Habitual Language Alternation in the Classroom

Students' use of multiple languages has become a habitual practice in the EFL classroom. They frequently switch between English and their native languages spontaneously, without instructional guidance. While occasional use of the first language can clarify complex concepts (Luo, 2019; Mujiono et al., 2013; Zainil & Arsyad, 2021), habitual reliance on native languages restricts consistent English practice and slows language development (Murphy et al., 2020; Sadigzade, 2025).

Daily use of Indonesian and Javanese dominates informal interactions. While this reflects strong cultural identity and comfort, it limits opportunities to practice English fluently. First language use can support conceptual understanding but may impede communicative

confidence if overused (Orfan, 2023; Rahim & Benlahcene, 2024). The teacher confirmed:

"Sometimes, students get confused when switching languages too often, and it slows down the lesson." (26/09/25).

These findings underscore the need for a balanced bilingual approach, in which native and target languages complement rather than compete with each other. Structured strategies can transform language alternation into a purposeful pedagogical tool that enhances English proficiency (Budiman et al., 2023; Sukying, 2021).

The Role of Multicultural-Based Materials in Enhancing Speaking and Cultural Awareness

The multicultural-based materials developed in this study significantly improved students' motivation and engagement. Speaking activities such as describing local culture, narrating ceremonies, and discussing regional food traditions enabled students to connect English learning with personal and communal identity. The teacher's assertion indicates that the students' speaking proficiency has progressively enhanced. Classroom observations further corroborate that students now exhibit more relaxation and comfort when required to speak publicly. The teacher additionally noted that, although there is no distinct assessment for speaking, students are now capable of responding appropriately in discussions and have begun to engage more actively during everyday English courses. This approach aligns with Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative competence framework, which emphasizes developing both linguistic skills and intercultural awareness.

Interviews revealed that students felt more confident expressing themselves in English when discussing familiar cultural topics. One student shared that speaking about their own culture in English "felt easier" because they already understood the content, which reduced anxiety. These results confirm that integrating local culture into English tasks fosters communicative confidence and pride in cultural identity.

Overall, These findings indicate that culturally responsive and inclusive English instruction enhances students' language proficiency while simultaneously promoting empathy and intercultural awareness, both of which are crucial for thriving in a diverse and multicultural society.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that multicultural-based English teaching at SMP Al Falah Jogorogo enhances the accessibility and significance of speaking tasks by linking global themes to students' local cultural experiences, as evidenced by classroom observations and interview data. Engaging in speaking activities that required learners to describe regional foods, ceremonies, and everyday practices in English allowed them to utilize their existing knowledge. Data from student interviews suggest that this familiarity facilitated the production of longer utterances and reduced anxiety during speaking tasks. Teacher interviews and observation notes corroborate these impressions, indicating that students exhibited increased relaxation in class and participated more actively in both whole-class and small-group discussions when tasks were rooted in their cultural contexts.

The findings indicate that the pedagogical benefits were limited by unresolved issues in classroom language policy and insufficient exposure to English as a consistent medium of interaction. Observation records indicated that the use of English was frequently limited to brief, formulaic expressions, whereas Indonesian and Javanese prevailed in peer interactions and teacher-student exchanges. Data from teacher interviews indicate that students relied heavily on their first language to comprehend instructions and negotiate meaning, thereby limiting their opportunities for sustained practice in English during lessons. The dataset revealed a consistent pattern of unstructured and frequent alternation among English, Indonesian, and Javanese. While this practice facilitated immediate comprehension, it hindered the flow of communication and restricted opportunities for internalizing new vocabulary, grammatical structures, and discourse patterns in English.

The study demonstrates that multicultural-based materials enhance prolonged and confident student discourse when speaking tasks are explicitly linked to learners' cultural backgrounds, as supported by consistent findings from student and teacher interviews and classroom observations. Nonetheless, the data indicates a necessity for clearer classroom language policies, intentional management of language alternation, and increased opportunities for meaningful English use both during and outside formal lesson time to achieve sustained improvements in students' speaking proficiency in multicultural-based instruction.

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