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The Urgency of Multicultural Education in the Teaching and Learning Process of Public Universities in Indonesia and Malaysia

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Abstract:

The integration of multicultural education in the teaching and learning process is essential for promoting equity, fostering intercultural understanding, and preparing students to navigate the complexities of our diverse and interconnected world. This is a comparative study in the context of Indonesia and Malaysia. The participant selection of this study used purposive sampling to select participants who have experienced the phenomenon of multicultural teaching. There are 10 participants from Indonesian public university and Malaysia public university involved in this study. To collect the data, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews, observation, and documents. The researchers analyzed the data using the interactive model by Miles et al. that involves several interconnected steps, i.e., data condensation, data display, and data

conclusion drawing/verification. The research found that the discourse of multicultural education in the teaching and learning process is very urgent for provoking equity, diversity, and social justice, as well as enhancing students' academic achievement. In the teaching and learning process of the Indonesian public university and Malaysia public university, multicultural education was implemented by incorporating culturally relevant content, implementing inclusive pedagogical practices, and fostering collaboration with communities. By embracing cultural diversity and promoting inclusive teaching practices, teachers can create transformative learning experiences that empower students to become informed, empathetic, and socially responsible global citizens.

Keywords: cultural diversity, teaching and learning process, multicultural education

A. Introduction

Teaching and learning process in a multicultural society presents both challenges and opportunities for educators. In such diverse environments, teachers must recognize and embrace the cultural backgrounds, languages, and experiences of their students. Incorporating culturally relevant content, materials, and teaching strategies not only fosters inclusivity but also enhances students' engagement and learning outcomes. Moreover, educators play a crucial role in promoting intercultural understanding, empathy, and respect among students from different cultural backgrounds. By creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment where diverse perspectives are valued and celebrated, teachers can cultivate a sense of belonging and mutual respect among students.

Additionally, teaching and learning process in a multicultural society provides opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and learning, enriching the educational experience for both students and teachers alike¹. Through culturally responsive teaching practices, educators can empower students to navigate the complexities of our interconnected world with confidence and cultural competence.

Some studies have been conducted on teaching and learning process in the global context, they are teaching and learning process in China², teaching and learning

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¹ Shehzad Ahmed and Muhammad Kashif Jalil, "Cross Cultural Aspect of Teaching of English as an International Language," *Competitive Linguistic Research Journal* 1, no. 2 SE-Articles (December 30, 2020), https://clrjournal.com/index.php/clrjournal/article/view/15.

² Deyuan He, "Perceptions of Chinese English and Pedagogic Implications for Teaching English in China," in *Multilingual Education*, vol. 22, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53110-6 9; Patricia Williams-Boyd, "Teaching English in China: Changing Self- Perception," *Training*

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process in Saudi Arabia³, teaching and learning process in Europe⁴. Most of the research focused on the challenges, strategies, or characteristics of teaching and learning process in each country.

Some Indonesian scholars conducted similar research on English teaching in the Indonesian context. Some of them are teaching of English at secondary or primary schools⁵, barriers of teaching and learning process amidst the covid-19 pandemic⁶, Thai EFL pre-service teachers' challenges in teaching and learning process in Indonesian classrooms⁷, research trends of EFL students in English

Language and Culture 1, no. 2 (May 2017): 71–85, https://doi.org/10.29366/2017tlc.1.2.5; Phiona Stanley, A Critical Ethnography of "Westerners" Teaching English in China, Language, Culture and Curriculum, vol. 36 (Routledge, 2013), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203078051.

³ Saleh Mohammad A. Alqahtani, "Teaching English in Saudi Arabia," in *English as a Foreign Language in Saudi Arabia: New Insights into Teaching and Learning English*, 2018, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315688466-6; Tanzin Ara Ashraf, "Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Saudi Arabia: Struggles and Strategies," *International Journal of English Language Education* 6, no. 1 (May 16, 2018): 133, https://doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v6i1.13148; Turki Assulaimani, "The Future of Teaching English in Saudi Arabia," *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 7, no. 8 (2019), https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2019.070801.

⁴ Hessel Luxen, "Taking It to the Next Level: A Research on How to Improve Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Europe," 2014; Susanne Mohr, Sandra Jansen, and Julia Forsberg, "European English in the EFL Classroom?," *English Today* 37, no. 2 (June 19, 2021): 85–91, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078419000403; Alexandra Esimaje et al., "Challenges of Teaching and Learning English in Higher Education in Africa," in *African Perspectives on the Teaching and Learning of English in Higher Education*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003279433-2; Martha A S Qorro, "The Challenges of Teaching English in Africa: With Reference to Tanzania Public Secondary Schools," *Utafiti Journal* 8, no. 2 (2011).

⁵ Ahmad Jazuly, Ninuk Indrayani, and Nostalgianti Citra Prystiananta, "The Teaching of English in Indonesian Primary Schools: A Response to the New Policy," *Linguistic, English Education and Art (LEEA) Journal* 3, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.31539/leea.v3i1.609; Didi Sukyadi, "The Teaching of English at Secondary Schools in Indonesia," in *Secondary School English Education in Asia*, ed. Bernard Spolsky and Kiwan Sung (London: Routledge, 2015), 139–63, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315760636-18.

⁶ Sri Wahyuningsih, "Barriers of Teaching English Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: Voices of English Teachers in Indonesian Secondary Schools," *ELT-Lectura*, 2022, https://doi.org/10.31849/elt-lectura.v9i2.9839.

⁷ Mr Hilman Mamat, "Thai EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English in Indonesian Classrooms," *AL LUGHAWIYAAT* 3, no. 2 (March 21, 2024), https://doi.org/10.31332/alg.v3i2.5245.

education program⁸, teaching of listening for elementary school students⁹, critical perspectives in teaching speaking¹⁰, the implementation of strategies, techniques, or methods in teaching and learning process¹¹, the use of media in teaching and learning process¹².

Not too many studies have focused on the comparative study between Indonesia and Malaysia on multicultural perspectives in the teaching and learning process and the ideologies that are developed in the teaching and learning process. This current study was trying to fill in the research gap, which is to find out the discourse of multicultural education in the teaching and learning process of public universities from Indonesia and Malaysia.

B. Literature Review

According to Banks¹³, multicultural education is a pedagogical approach that aims to foster equity, social justice, and cultural pluralism in educational settings. It involves integrating diverse perspectives, histories, and experiences into the

Erna Iftanti and Arina Shofiya, "Research Trends of EFL Students in English Education Program: A 2005-2015 Survey," *Dinamika Ilmu*, 2017, https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v17i1.636.
Sitti Hadijah, "Songs in the Teaching of Listening for Elementary School Students,"

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Umar Fauzan, "Inducing Critical Discourse Analysis in Speaking Syllabus for EFL Students of Indonesian Islamic Universities," *Dinamika Ilmu*, 2017, https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v17i1.785.
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Tubagus Zam Zam Al Arif, "Indonesian University Students' Perception and Expectation towards ICT Use in Learning English as a Foreign Language," *IJELTAL (Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics)* 4, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v4i1.348; Aprilia Elok Puspita Dewi, Umar Fauzan, and Nadia Nadia, "The Use of Social Media in Learning English Writing of Indonesian English Department Students," *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics* 7, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v7i1.882; Umar Fauzan and Luluk Humairo Pimada, "ICT-Based Teaching of English at Madrasah Aliyah in Kalimantan," *TARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim Society* 5, no. 2 (2018), https://doi.org/10.15408/tjems.v5i2.10414.

¹³ James A. Banks, "Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice," *Review of Research in Education* 19 (1993), https://doi.org/10.2307/1167339.

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curriculum, promoting the appreciation of cultural diversity, and challenging bias and discrimination.

Nieto¹⁴ defines multicultural education as a transformative process that seeks to create inclusive learning environments where all students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, feel valued, respected, and empowered. It involves acknowledging and affirming students' cultural identities, addressing social inequalities, and promoting critical thinking and social action.

Sleeter¹⁵ describes multicultural education as an educational philosophy and practice that recognizes the interconnectedness of race, ethnicity, culture, language, and social class. It aims to prepare students to function effectively in a diverse society by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to navigate cultural differences, challenge stereotypes, and work towards social justice.

Gay¹⁶ defines multicultural education as an educational reform movement that seeks to transform schools and educational systems to reflect the cultural diversity of society. It involves incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum, promoting cultural competence among educators, and engaging students in meaningful learning experiences that foster intercultural understanding and respect.

From the definitions provided above by Banks, Nieto, Sleeter, and Gay¹⁷, it is evident that multicultural education is a multifaceted approach aimed at promoting equity, social justice, and cultural pluralism in educational settings. Multicultural education involves acknowledging and affirming students' cultural identities, integrating diverse perspectives into the curriculum, and challenging bias and discrimination. It emphasizes creating inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to engage in critical thinking and social action.

¹⁴ Sonia Nieto, Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical C0ntext of Multiciltiral Educationty, Longman, 2004.

¹⁵ Donna Y. Ford and Christine E. Sleeter, "Multicultural Education as Social Activism.," *The Journal of Negro Education* 65, no. 3 (1996), https://doi.org/10.2307/2967357.

¹⁶ Geneva Gay, "Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice. Third Edition. Multicultural Education Series.," *Teachers College Press*, 2018.

¹⁷ Banks, "Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice"; Gay, "Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice. Third Edition. Multicultural Education Series."; Nieto, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Educationty*; Ford and Sleeter, "Multicultural Education as Social Activism."

From those definitions, it might be concluded that there are some indicators of multicultural education¹⁸ include: 1) Curricular Diversity: Multicultural education is reflected in the curriculum through the inclusion of diverse perspectives, histories, and contributions from different cultural groups. This includes diverse literature, historical narratives, and cultural artifacts that provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the world's cultural diversity. 2) Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Teachers employ instructional strategies that acknowledge and value students' cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and linguistic abilities. This involves incorporating culturally relevant examples, facilitating discussions on social justice issues, and creating inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued and respected. 3) Equitable Learning Environments: Multicultural education promotes equity and social justice by addressing issues of bias, discrimination, and inequality within the school community. This includes implementing policies and practices that ensure all students have equal access to resources, opportunities, and support services, regardless of their cultural background or identity. 4) Intercultural Competence: Multicultural education aims to develop students' intercultural competence—the ability to interact effectively and respectfully with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This involves fostering empathy, tolerance, and understanding of cultural differences, as well as providing opportunities for students to engage in cross-cultural exchanges and dialogue. 5) Community Engagement: Multicultural education extends beyond the classroom to engage families, community organizations, and cultural institutions in the educational process. This includes collaborating with community stakeholders to ensure that curriculum and instructional practices reflect the cultural diversity of the local community, as well as providing opportunities for students to connect learning to real-world contexts and experiences.

C. Research Methodology

This is a comparative study between Indonesia and Malaysia on multicultural perspectives in the teaching and learning process. The participant selection of this study used purposive sampling to select participants who have experienced the phenomenon of multicultural teaching. There are 10 participants from Indonesia public university and Malaysia public university involved in this study, where the researchers ensure in-depth exploration of each individual's experiences.

¹⁸ Banks, "Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice"; Gay, "Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice. Third Edition. Multicultural Education Series."; Nieto, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Educationty*; Ford and Sleeter, "Multicultural Education as Social Activism."

To collect the data, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant to elicit rich descriptions of their experiences related to multicultural education. The researchers also used open-ended questions to encourage participants to reflect on their experiences, emotions, perceptions, and meanings attached to multicultural education. The researchers also used participant observation to supplement the interview data and provide additional insights into participants' experiences with multicultural education.

The researchers analyzed the data using the interactive model¹⁹ who provide a comprehensive framework for data analysis in qualitative research that involves several interconnected steps, i.e., data condensation, data display, and data conclusion drawing/verification.

D. Results and Discussion

This study tried to uncover the discourse of multicultural education in the teaching and learning process of Indonesian public university and Malaysia public university. The data were gathered by using interviews, observations, and documentations. The data were presented and analyzed below.

1. Curricular Diversity

From the use of the instruments, it was found that the Indonesian public university promotes curricular diversity by integrating a wide range of perspectives into all academic disciplines. It opens not only Islamic academic disciplines but also general disciplines, such as Math, Biology, Computer, and so forth. In the context of Islamic history, the students learn about diversity issues in the era of Prophet Muhammad and how diversity was developed and maintained in society. The Islamic literature courses include works by authors from various backgrounds, offering students a wide array of voices and narratives to examine. The students learn cultural awareness by the narratives and stories of the Islamic golden age and the perspectives of Islam in culture and humanity. Those are not only for the Islamic curriculum, but they are also applied as content in the Teaching and learning process.

Indonesian public university welcomes students from different ethnic groups, people of color, and indigenous communities. In the teaching and learning process, the students learn to engage proficiently and respectfully

¹⁹ M. B. Miles, A. M. Huberman, and J. Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis, A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (USA: Sage Publication, 2014).

with individuals from varied backgrounds. The students come from various ethnic groups; Javanese, Bugisness, Banjaresse, Kutainess, Maduresse, Amboness, Balinese, and so forth. It incorporates cultural competency training by engaging students in activities, discussions, and projects that foster self-exploration of their own cultural identities and promote understanding of diverse perspectives. In class, the students blend in with all programs and the teaching-learning processes.

In the teaching and learning process of the Indonesian public university promotes curricular diversity by encouraging students to engage in critical thinking, question stereotypes, challenge bias, and analyze issues from various perspectives. It cultivates critical thinking about social justice, equity, and power dynamics in society by exposing students to a range of perspectives and experiences. This program facilitates the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary for students to transform into well-informed and actively involved citizens who actively contribute to promoting positive social transformation. Those are implemented, particularly in the Islamic subjects and English-speaking classrooms.

2. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy is an instructional method that acknowledges the cultural variety among students and aims to integrate their cultural heritage, experiences, and viewpoints into the educational experience.

Indonesian public university opens the space for inclusive classroom environments that foster a sense of worth, respect, and empowerment among students, thereby facilitating their learning. There is no different policy for the students, whether they are Javanese, Buginese, Banjaresse, Kutainess, Maduresse, or others. They are all the same under the same policy and engagement. Some students come from overseas; they have the same opportunity to learn the same knowledge on campus, the same instructional learning. Whether the students wear a closed hijab or not, they have the same opportunity to dig the knowledge on the campus.

In the teaching and learning process, Indonesian public university employs culturally responsive pedagogy through the creation of a curriculum that accurately represents the cultural variety of the students. In the teaching and learning process, the lecturers involve integrating literature, history, and social issues that reflect the experiences and contributions of various cultural groups. From the observation, it was found that the teacher utilized students'

cultural knowledge and language proficiency to create a meaningful and captivating learning experience. The teacher asked the students to talk about their culture. Sometimes, the teacher asked them to use their mother language. The goal of this is to afford students the chance to express their cultural viewpoints.

3. Equitable Learning Environments

In the teaching and learning process, Indonesian public university provides a sufficient learning environment for teachers, classrooms, the internet, books, learning applications, teaching aids, libraries, and learning media- to enhance the knowledge and proficiency of the students. The students may use the learning environment to create a positive atmosphere for successful learning.

Indonesian public university promotes the policy for all students, including those who are learning in the Teaching and learning process, to use all facilities and learning environments equally for all students. All students may use the same internet access, learning resources (books and eBooks), learning media, and learning applications, such as online learning management system (LMS) and online student administration. The students may also use Turnitin to check the similarity of their academic scientific works. While learning the subjects, the students may download rich sources from online journals provided by the campus. Doing assignments, answering mid and final examinations, or working on the final report may be very useful and trigger the on-time graduation of the students. From the the interview and observation, it was found that the positive learning environment enhance the students' proficiency.

No matter the students' ethnical background, socio-economic status, language, or ability, they may use it equally. No doubt, this campus prioritizes equitable learning environments to reach its education goal. From the observation of the learning environment, it was found that Indonesian public university provides learning facilities and special areas for disabled students. It proactively strives to eradicate obstacles to learning and guarantee equitable access to top-notch education for all students, irrespective of their socio-economic or cultural background.

4. Intercultural Competence

Various culture comes from various ethnic groups. In the teaching and learning process of Indonesian public university, the students interact and

communicate with each other, typically showing their cultural background. Sometimes, they use their mother language and ethnic habits. This situation promotes intercultural competence through the integration of cultural diversity. The teacher incorporates a wide range of viewpoints and contributions from various cultural groups into different academic topics and discussions. The atmosphere enhances students' comprehension of cultural diversity and fosters appreciation for cultural disparities by immersing them in a diverse array of cultural experiences and perspectives when they are in a discussion.

In the teaching and learning process, it fosters the development of students' cross-cultural communication skills. It offers students the chance to participate in dialogue, collaboration, and interaction with peers from various cultural backgrounds. They made a group from different ethnic group like from Java, Bali, Bugis, Kutai, or Banjar. They engaged in group projects, discussions, and cultural exchanges. Here, the students acquire the skills to communicate proficiently, not only in order to master a certain discipline, but also navigate their cultural disparities and establish relationships founded on mutual respect and comprehension.

5. Community Engagement

In the teaching and learning process, the teacher of Indonesian public university provides multicultural education through community engagement by actively promoting cultural exchange and facilitating meaningful dialogue, not only in the teaching and learning process but also outside the Teaching and learning process, like promoting the dialogue among the community members in the form of forum of the religious assembly. The forum members come from different religious backgrounds.

The forum of a religious assembly, with members from diverse religious backgrounds, serves as a dynamic space for interfaith dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared spiritual exploration. Here, individuals from various faith traditions come together to engage in respectful discourse, exchange perspectives, and cultivate relationships based on common values of compassion, empathy, and respect for one another's beliefs. Through dialogue and collaboration, members deepen their appreciation for the rich tapestry of religious diversity and foster a sense of unity amidst differences. The forum becomes a platform for finding common ground in their shared quest for meaning and transcendence. The forum facilitates collaborative efforts to address social issues, promote peace, and advance human rights,

as members work together to enact positive change in their communities. In this inclusive and welcoming environment, the forum of the religious assembly becomes a beacon of hope, fostering bonds of friendship and solidarity.

The forum of a religious assembly, comprising members from diverse religious backgrounds, plays a vital role in addressing religious problems and conflicts through dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation efforts. This inclusive space provides a platform where individuals can come together to discuss contentious issues, clarify misunderstandings, and seek common ground based on shared values and principles present in their respective faith traditions. Members engage in constructive dialogue, drawing upon the wisdom and teachings of their religions to find peaceful and equitable solutions to religious conflicts. Moreover, the forum fosters mutual respect, empathy, and understanding among participants, facilitating the resolution of conflicts through peaceful means rather than resorting to violence or coercion. Through collaborative problem-solving and conflict-resolution initiatives, the forum of the religious assembly promotes interfaith harmony, fosters reconciliation, and contributes to building a more just and compassionate society where diverse religious perspectives are valued and respected.

E. Conclusion

Multicultural education aligns with the principles of equity and social justice, ensuring that all students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, have equitable access to educational opportunities. By integrating diverse perspectives, voices, and experiences into the curriculum, multicultural education validates students' identities and fosters a sense of belonging, which is essential for their academic success and socio-emotional well-being. Multicultural education enhances teaching and learning by promoting student engagement, critical thinking, and creativity. By incorporating diverse voices and perspectives into the curriculum, educators can create opportunities for meaningful discussions, inquiry-based learning, and collaborative projects that empower students to explore their own identities and connect with others in meaningful ways.

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