

Teaching English to EFL Students in A Culturally - Specific Context: A Comparative Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English in particular cultural contexts requires supporting skills, such as situating teaching strategies and learning material with students' conditions and intercultural sensitivity. This study explores how the lecturers teach English to EFL Students in a culturally specific context. The design of this study used multiple case studies. This study's data collection uses semi-structured interviews through Zoom meetings with two English lecturers who taught English in Gorontalo and Papua. Then the data analysis used a thematic analysis. The findings of this study show that teaching English in Gorontalo and Papua needs some supporting competencies, such as intercultural competence (lecturers' ability to adapt to the new culture and environment and understand how students behave, think, and interact) and pedagogical competence (lecturers' ability in formulating, adapting, and negotiating appropriate teaching method and learning material with students need). The results of this study expand the discourse surrounding the instruction of English as a foreign language within culturally-specific contexts, highlighting the significance of multilingual education in the Indonesian context. Therefore, this study implies that lecturers who teach in a culturally different context should have those competencies so they are not culture shock.

Keywords: Teaching English, EFL Students, Specific Context

INTRODUCTION

English is a lingua franca language by academics, governments, traders, etc. (Bennett, 2013). It is used by people worldwide for conducting transactions, sharing knowledge, bilateral relations, etc. This statement also

showed that English learning is necessary for the 4.0 era. In Indonesia, English is a foreign language that must be learned from elementary school to university. It is one of the compulsory subjects that must be studied. However, learning English is not an easy thing for most students, such as those students who are in certain areas. There are many challenges in learning English for students living in a country that uses English as a foreign language. The first challenge students commonly face is understanding the English pronunciation expressed at average speed through listening to the material (Hasan, 2010). Second, the ability to speak is due to little vocabulary knowledge (Megawati & Mandarani, 2016). Third, students' reading literacy is so low that they cannot understand the reading text well and do not know how to connect ideas between sentences (Rawmawati, 2011). Fourth is writing short and paragraph sentences (Rukmini, 2011).

Additional obstacles to learning English include students' disinterest in English lessons, inadequate support for English learning from parents and the surrounding environment, and the perceived low quality of English teachers (Harlina & Nur Yusuf, 2020; Wiramarta, 2021). Creating proficient English speakers requires competent language educators who foster high-quality learning. Furthermore, achieving a balance between a comprehensive understanding of the material and ample practice is crucial. However, establishing an ideal language class proves to be a challenging endeavour. Moreover, a teacher teaches a language in a specific cultural context that requires sufficient effort to achieve the goal. In addition to having to master enough material, a teacher should also know each student's language mastery level. Achieving the expected learning goals will be difficult if all conditions are equalized. Essentially, every student possesses unique traits, interests, perspectives, aptitudes, learning methods, and levels of comprehension, exemplifying the concept of individual differences (Kubat, 2018) and multiple intelligence (Stanford, 2003). Therefore, students' abilities can be improved by choosing teaching strategies that suit students' learning styles (Reilly, 2017).

Teaching English in a specific cultural context differs from teaching English in general, especially for English teachers from different regions with students. In addition, to mastering various materials and having a variety of strategies, they must also understand and get to know the students' character, the mother tongue they use, and background knowledge of their culture. This will help teachers to build learning motivation and build rapport with them. However, understanding student culture is difficult for teachers because they are never equipped with intercultural competence. Therefore, multicultural education is one solution to assist teachers in teaching in certain areas.

Then understanding students' local languages is also one of the critical factors in helping them improve their English skills. Because in certain cultural conditions, some students cannot use Indonesian properly,

meaning that they are more dominant in using their regional language than Indonesian in daily communication and formal conditions. This condition requires a teacher to understand and use the students' vernacular and dialects in delivering material other than Indonesian and English. But these conditions are quite challenging for teachers. Therefore, multicultural education is one of the alternative solutions (Ikhsan & Giwangsa, 2019).

Some previous researchers reported teaching English in different cultural contexts; for example Jawas (2020) reports the influence of cultural differences in teaching English. The results showed that cultural differences between students and lecturers hindered learning. The study suggests choosing materials that can encourage students to increase student participation in the classroom. The research conducted by Ahmed et al. (2019) supports the research recommendations, suggesting that teachers should incorporate cultural elements into English language instruction. Another study, conducted by Suryani et al. (2020), investigated the instruction of English within social and cultural contexts. The results show that local and foreign cultures' role in English language teaching is essential to raising teacher awareness. The study's results still lack attention to teaching English in different cultural contexts. Therefore, this study aims to fill the theoretical gap, namely explore teaching English in a culturally specific context.

METHOD

This study used multiple case studies. It aims to compare the teaching of English on two campuses in two different areas. The informants in this study were lecturers who taught English in the Gorontalo and Papua areas. The two lecturers come from two different tribes, namely the Bugis (South Sulawesi) and Batak (North Sumatra) tribes. The informants of the study were chosen using purposive sampling. The data collection technique of this study used semi-structured interviews through Zoom meetings. Then, the alleged data analysis is a thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) with the help of ATLAS.ti software. The steps of its analysis are described in the following table:

Table 1.
Steps of Them Analysis

Processes	Explanations
Listening to the recording	1. Snooze several times the audio recording to become familiar with the content of the interview data
Coding	2. Making codification of the data relating to the research question.
Making Axial Coding	3. Look for themes by grouping them by semantic relationships.

Analyzing	4. Double-checking the theme formed to make sure it fits the group. 5. Provide the name and definition of each theme 6. Write the extract of each coding data contained in each theme. 7. Looking for an exciting extract to analyze
Making a report	8. and interpret all research data 9. Create a report based on the results of the analysis performed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings from the thematic analysis, we draw two important themes; 1) teachers' experience of teaching English for the first time and 2) the creative teaching strategies of EFL teachers. The two friends explained how the teacher taught English in an area where students had different linguistic, social, and cultural backgrounds. In addition, these findings confirm that teachers should be equipped with pedagogical abilities and must have cross-cultural understanding knowledge. This will help them mingle and interact with people in certain areas of Indonesia.

Teachers' Voice of Teaching English For the First Time

Teaching English in a particular cultural context must not only master the material, applying a wide variety of strategies that have been understood and commonly used in other contexts without having to identify the social and cultural conditions of the student. However, teachers must also have other abilities, such as choosing strategies that suit the student's ability level, negotiated strategy, intercultural communication, and knowledge of students' culture. Otherwise, teachers will be unable to survive, causing ethnocentrism and affecting student motivation, participation, and ability. Therefore, teachers should use other approaches, such as building good emotional relationships with students before teaching and understanding various social and cultural conditions. This encourages them to participate in learning activities and improve their academic abilities. Ratna is a lecturer from the Batak tribe who teaches English in Papua. He recounted the experience of teaching in the area in the first semester.

Ratna: Teaching English cannot provide material directly without establishing an emotional connection with the student. The first thing to do is to build a good relationship with the students (psychological aspect) and then provide material for the cognitive aspect. Because if it does not recognize attitudes and build emotional connections, then it is impossible to get good results and expect them to participate in learning activities

Building good relationships with students encourages them to participate and motivates them to follow the learning process. Within the field of education, this facet is referred to as the psychological dimension, which holds great significance in the learning process as it can yield beneficial outcomes for both students and educators. Similarly, Agus, an English lecturer hailing from the Bugis ethnic group, undertook a similar endeavour by imparting English instruction in the Gorontalo region. Agus also shed light on the prevailing circumstances observed in Gorontalo.

Agus: When I first came to the Gorontalo area, at the first and second meetings, I frankly didn't teach first; I mostly kept telling stories in class. Maybe in Makassar or Java at the first meeting directly gives the material, but here it can't.

Ratna and Agus recounted the same experience teaching English for the first time in different cultural contexts. In this case, they come without knowing the cultural background knowledge and recognizing students. Nonetheless, they try to build relationships with students by using a personal approach and storytelling in the classroom. This aims to understand how they interact, behave, and think. In addition, this approach helps them to manage the whole class effectively. Agus further remarked, stating that he required a full semester to comprehend the nuances of their language, primarily due to the prevalent use of the local language within the classroom. This implies that during the initial semester, their emphasis is primarily on comprehending psychological, social, economic, and cultural elements rather than cognitive aspects. Then Ratna confirms, "I must understand their vernacular and communication style so that I can adapt and blend into their environment". These two quotes claim that the role of the local language in teaching English, especially in the area, is significant, and even teachers should be able to understand and communicate using their style and accent.

Teaching English in a Particular Cultural Context

Creative teaching strategies discuss how teachers situate teaching strategies with students' characteristics and need so that it has favourable implications for students' academic abilities and learning motivation, participation, and interest. The following quote reinforces the statement;

Ratna: At the first meeting, I taught using English and formal Indonesian. However, it turned out that the result did not match expectations. Then, in the second semester, I adjusted to the students' dialect and colloquial language, such as '*pele pace ko bisa ini kah*'.

According to Ratna, using the local language is very important for students because about 70% come from remote areas, so they cannot digest

Indonesian properly. Then, Agus also revealed the same thing. He stated as follows

Agus: Teaching in front of the class, I usually explain using bilingual and even translanguaging, namely Indonesian and English. However, I teach in the area and tuck in their Indonesian and vernacular or even use English according to their accent. That is one of the tricks that they can learn.

The quotes above show that Ratna and Agus use strategy code-switching, code-mixing, and translanguaging in teaching English in specific cultural contexts. This strategy is one of the most effective and can be used to make students understand the teaching material. Moreover, the local language dominated the teaching language. In addition, Agus also use another approach to increasing students' learning motivation. Agus claim that "using comedian videos is a productive strategy to build students' interest before coming to the main topic of learning."

Conversely, Ratna contends that incorporating group learning methodologies involves the intentional integration of students from diverse backgrounds, encompassing both urban and rural locales, to promote a sense of inclusivity and mitigate potential feelings of embarrassment among students with distinct physical attributes or regional origins. Ratna further asserts that without proactive measures, such as assigned study groups, students tend to form cliques based on their ethnic or racial identities. In addition, they used the emotional approach by building relationships and inviting them to eat together. This approach motivates students to engage in the process of teaching and learning actively.

The quote emphasizes the significance of implementing inclusive instructional methods in order to foster an environment that values and encourages the active participation of all students in the learning process. Ratna's approach to group learning involves deliberately mixing students from different backgrounds to create a more diverse learning environment. This approach becomes especially crucial in situations where students originate from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, potentially experiencing feelings of exclusion or marginalization.

Ratna's use of the emotional approach, which involves building relationships and inviting students to eat together, also creates a sense of community and fosters a positive learning environment. By creating opportunities for students to interact and get to know one another, the dynamic approach can help to break down social barriers and promote inclusivity.

Moreover, the quote draws attention to the issue of racial and ethnic segregation within classrooms. When students are left to form study groups based on their preferences, they may unconsciously segregate themselves along racial and ethnic lines, leading to a less diverse and inclusive learning environment. Ratna's approach of deliberately mixing students from

different backgrounds helps to counteract this tendency and promotes diversity and inclusivity.

Situated EFL Material

another essential aspect that should be considered is EFL material. In this part, EFL teachers negotiated and situated learning material by adapting from some sources. In other words, learning material must meet students' interests, need, language level, etc., as Agus comments, "I usually used material related to the folklore in their area. In addition, I also use funny stories to draw their attention to the material." While Ratna said, "I usually do a needs analysis first and then adopt teaching materials from various sources. I even develop materials based on local wisdom culture." This quote indicates that the textbooks developed by the authors do not meet their level of ability, so teachers must adopt textbooks from various sources and even develop teaching materials.

The quote emphasizes the significance of EFL materials in the educational process. The Effective EFL material should be tailored to meet students' interests, needs, and language levels and incorporate local culture and wisdom. However, the authors' comments suggest that existing EFL textbooks may not always meet these requirements. As a result, teachers must negotiate and situate learning material by adapting from various sources, including developing their teaching materials.

Agus's approach to EFL material involves using folklore from the students' area and funny stories to engage students and make the material more interesting and accessible. This approach recognizes the importance of catering to students' interests and creating a positive learning environment encouraging participation and engagement.

Ratna's approach involves conducting a need analysis to identify students' specific language needs and then adapting teaching materials from various sources to meet those needs. This approach recognizes the importance of tailoring material to meet students' language levels and ensuring that the material is relevant and engaging.

The quotation highlights the importance of using relevant, engaging, and culturally appropriate EFL material to promote effective teaching and learning. It also emphasizes the need for teachers to be flexible and adaptable in their approach to EFL material, recognizing that existing textbooks may not always meet students' needs and that a more personalized approach may be necessary. Through the utilization of a versatile and adjustable approach towards EFL materials, educators can contribute to the establishment of a learning environment that is both inclusive and effective, catering to the diverse needs of all students.

Thus, the findings of this study confirm that teaching English in a specific cultural area is not easy. It has various challenges, including students' linguistic factors (grammar understanding), psychological factors (motivation, confidence, and anxiety), and external factors (environment).

(Purwati et al., 2023). Furthermore, teachers face additional hurdles, such as intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which refers to the aptitude to effectively employ a language to communicate with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Bella et al., 2020). Knowledge of other people's cultures and how people communicate is an essential cognitive aspect that encourages us to be open-minded and reflective of differences (Williams-Gualandi, 2020). Therefore, the success of the teaching and learning process in a particular cultural area depends on our intercultural sensitivity (Çiloğlan & Bardakçı, 2019; Moradi & Ghabanchi, 2019; Segura-Robles & Parra-González, 2019).

Indonesia is an archipelagic country. It has a wide variety of tribes, languages and cultures. Education must encourage people to learn about multicultural education (Ikhsan & Giwangsa, 2019). Multicultural education emerges as a response to the requirements of a comprehensive education that encompasses the cultivation of competencies in knowledge, attitudes, diverse learning encounters, and the establishment of both individual and collective identities. (Amery et al., 2022). Hence, the study suggests that the formulation of multicultural educational systems can make a substantial contribution towards enhancing the educational quality in underdeveloped and remote regions, commonly referred to as the 3T regions (outermost, remote, and underdeveloped). Policymakers and governments should pay attention to this suggestion and take steps to implement it in their education systems.

Multicultural education refers to an approach that recognizes and values cultural diversity and promotes respect for different cultures. It can include incorporating diverse perspectives and materials into the curriculum, encouraging dialogue and understanding across cultures, and addressing social justice and equity issues. By integrating multicultural education into their systems, policymakers and governments can help ensure that all students, regardless of their background, receive an inclusive and relevant education.

This approach is particularly relevant for underdeveloped and outermost regions, where students may come from diverse cultural backgrounds and face unique challenges in accessing quality education. By incorporating multicultural education into their systems, policymakers and governments can help to bridge cultural divides and promote social cohesion. They can also help to empower students from marginalized backgrounds by providing them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in a diverse and globalized world.

In addition, multicultural education is designed to realize the equitable distribution of education for students of different cultures, races, languages, and socio-classes (Jayadi et al., 2022). However, the success of multicultural education will be determined by the curriculum, goals, government support, cooperation between departments, etc. (Abduh, 2018). In addition, it includes teachers' willingness to implement a

particular methodology or curriculum (Calafato, 2022). Enabling each school to design depending on its philosophy and demographics (Tannenbaum et al., 2020). Some previous studies showed that a multicultural education curriculum increases cultural awareness, creativity, academic value, social adjustment, and tolerance of indigenous languages (Gulnoza, 2023). Adding L1 into formal schooling has positive impacts (Benson & Wong, 2019).

CONCLUSION

These findings show that English language teaching in different cultural areas requires teachers to have intercultural and pedagogical competence. These competencies are crucial for education in a country with various tribes, languages, and cultures. Consequently, the findings of this study will provide valuable insights for policymakers, curriculum designers, teacher trainers, textbook authors, and other stakeholders involved in the education system. So, they can use the results of this study as information to make meaningful policies, provide training to teachers, and write contextual-based textbooks. The implications of this study suggest developing multicultural-based education policies, providing school and regional autonomy in developing curricula based on social and cultural conditions, developing contextual-based materials, and providing teacher training. More importantly, researchers can look at other aspects, such as teachers' and policymakers' perceptions, challenges, student responses, impacts, and other variables about teaching English in other culturally specific contexts, to obtain more comprehensive data.

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