

Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education in *Kurikulum Merdeka*

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to investigate how the concepts of multiculturalism and multicultural education are embedded in *Kurikulum Merdeka*, in particular to the teaching of English at school. This is a qualitative descriptive study in which the curriculum documents were examined through the application of discourse analysis. Based on the analysis of the texts within the document, the conceptualization of multiculturalism and multicultural education is embedded at the Agency Decree about the expected learning outcomes specifically in the elements of general and advanced English learning as well as English for students with special needs. However, there is a variation of how each element allocate the concepts. The research results also reveal the lack of information relating to the development of multicultural awareness and intercultural development within the learning outcomes for English learning at each phase.

Keywords: multiculturalism, multicultural education, *Kurikulum Merdeka*

INTRODUCTION

The term multiculturalism refers to the situation in which a number of people with various elements such as different ethnics, social, cultural, religion and language backgrounds coexist with one another in a society. This is a recent phenomena in the globalized world nowadays since the globalization enables rapid movement and interaction of people from various parts of the world in an unprecedented scale. The diversified societies form multicultural societies. In this kind of of multicultural environment, the boundaries that have been traditionally recognized such as race, ethnics, language, religion and social as well as political differences have been blurred. Consequently, the escalating engagement of people from different culture occurs more frequently. This kind of

interaction among the members of a multicultural society or between one cultural society to another is defined as interculturalism while the relationship between humans with various backgrounds is called intercultural interaction (Masita, 2021b).

In the global world, the multicultural societies and intercultural interaction is almost inevitable. Therefore, multicultural awareness with the inculcation in regards to the importance of intercultural competency development is also unavoidable. This is in line with the definition given by Yates and Grumet (2011) that intercultural skill is the ability to: "to see relationships between different cultures - both internal and external to a society - and to mediate, that is interpret each other in terms of the other, either for themselves or for other people" (p. 245). In doing so, educational institution has an important role in the instillation process of these multicultural awareness and intercultural skills. Students' adequate competencies in understanding pluralism and promoting tolerance will enable them to occupy in the diversified communities.

With regard to English teaching at school, language experts believe that English language does not only consist of words that contain meaning. More than that, the language can also greatly influence and be influenced by the values, ideology, and culture of the language users (Pennycook, 2004; Gray, 2002; Kramsh, 2013; Canagarajah, 2013; Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). Teaching a language, then, is not merely about transferring its grammar as a communication tool without including the values, ideology and culture attached to native speakers of that language. As quoted by Brown (2000): "whenever you teach a language, you also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting" (p. 64). This is in line with what Yates and Grumet (2011) suggest that the embedment of learning materials that support those skills will be able to improve students to engage and interact with others.

Additionally, the multicultural societies and intercultural interactions do not merely occur due to the rapid movement of people from one country to another in this globalized world. As quoted from the Official Website of the Republic of Indonesia (2023), Indonesia is *negara kesatuan* (unitary state) with a great diversity of sociocultural backgrounds such as customs and traditions, cultures and native languages. Consequently, the Indonesian students at schools might also come from various socio-cultural backgrounds. For that reason, the inclusion of English learning materials related to multiculturalism and intercultural education are very beneficial for Indonesian students. Good understanding of multicultural awareness and intercultural skills can help students understand and appreciate Indonesian pluralism of ethnics and cultural diversities. As an effort to achieve the aforementioned objectives in regards to the development of students' multicultural awareness and intercultural skills, the use of learning materials that introduce multi-

ethnics and multi-cultural background as well as behaviors that prioritize respect and tolerance toward different opinions, beliefs, ideas, emotions, cultures, habits, race and gender will be very beneficial for students. This should also be accompanied by learning methods that promotes neutrality, objectivity, and rationale as an effort to improve their empathy and tolerance and at the same time, to reduce negative tension due to different opinion or suspicion towards other people from different background. By doing so, it is expected that students will be able to situate their lives in heterogeneous groups or even in the broader social contexts of the diversified communities both within Indonesia and in the globalized world.

Concerning the urgency of multicultural awareness and intercultural education in the teaching learning process at school, this article is aimed at investigating how the those two elements are conceptualized in *Kurikulum Merdeka* as the official curriculum in Indonesian education system nowadays. Previously, a study by Masita (2021a) reveals significant differences on how the 2004 Curriculum, the 2006 Curriculum, and the 2013 Curriculum view multiculturalism and intercultural education. Apart from that, as the latest official curriculum officially launched in Indonesia since 2022, *Kurikulum Merdeka* plays an important role as the basic and main guidelines of the teaching learning process in Indonesian schools. Consequently, all teaching learning activities in Indonesian schools should comply with the rules and regulations mandated at the curriculum. For that reason, the research in this article is trying to closely examine on how the conceptualization of multicultural awareness and intercultural education is embedded in the curriculum, specifically related to English learning at school.

METHOD

This is a qualitative study of document analysis in which the text is analysed through Discourse Analysis. As the recent educational curriculum in Indonesia, *Kurikulum Merdeka* has been officially launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Riset and Technology in February 2022. (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022a). This curriculum comprises a number of official documents released by *Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan* (the Agency of Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assesments), an agency within the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Riset and Technology with the main function to organize the preparation of educational standards, curriculum, and assesments as well as the management of the bookeeping system (*Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan*, no date). More specifically, the sources of data in this research is the Agency Decree No. 008/H/KR/2022 entitled *Capaian Pembelajaran dalam Pendidikan pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Jenjang*

Pendidikan Dasar dan Jenjang Pendidikan Menengah Pada Kurikulum Merdeka juncto the Agency Decree No. 033/H/KR/2022 entitled *Perubahan Atas Keputusan Kepala Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Nomor 008/H/KR/2022 tentang Capaian Pembelajaran Pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar, dan Jenjang Pendidikan Menengah Pada Kurikulum Merdeka* (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022d). Both documents are about the educational learning outcomes in early childhood education, elementary education, and secondary education of *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As quoted from the the Agency of Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assesments (2022d), the Decree No. 033/H/KR/2022 contains five appendixes, one for each category of the educational institutions; starting from the learning outcomes for the pre-school level, (*Lampiran I*), the elementary and secondary levels (*Lampiran II*), the vocational schools (*Lampiran III*), the special education (*Lampiran IV*) and non-formal education (*Lampiran V*). The learning outcomes for English learning at school, however, are only identified at the *Lampiran II* and *Lampiran IV*.

Each *lampiran* contains a number of sub-sections entitled *Capaian Pembelajaran* (learning outcomes) of every school subjects within each school levels. This article, however, only focuses on the English learning as a school subject listed in the curriculum document. The learning otucomes of English as a school subjects are identified in three different part of the curriculum document. The first two parts are available in *Lampiran II* entitled *Capaian Pembelajaran Untuk SD/MI/Program Paket A, SMP/MTS/Program Paket B, dan SMA/MA/Program Paket C Pada Kurikulum Merdeka* (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022e); they are (1) *Capaian Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris* (the Learning Outcomes of English for all students in elementary Schools, junior high levels, and senior high leveles to learn general English (pp.150-165). The second element is (2) *Capaian Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Tingkat Lanjut* (the Learning Outcomes of Advanced English) which is taught as a complimentary school subject for students who have great interest in Enlish language and choose to learn the language more comprehensively (pp. 166-174). Moreover, the learning outcomes of English is also identified in *Lampiran IV* (special education) which is used to teach students with special needs. learning otucomes *Capaian Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris* (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022f, pp. 106-117). Each of the aforementioned sub-section contains the same elements as: (1) *rasional pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris* (the rationales of English learning), (2) *tujuan mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris* (the objectives of English Lesson) (3)

karakteristik mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris (the characteristics of English lesson), and (4) *capaian pembelajaran mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris setiap fase* (the learning outcomes of English lesson in every phase).

Multicultural Awareness and Intercultural Skills of General English Learning

The expected learning outcomes of English lesson in *Lampiran II* (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022e) are addressed for general English teaching for students from Class I to Class XII in all Indonesian public and private schools, including the vocational schools, religious-based schools, and community-based educational institutions. The investigation of the first element in this document in regards to the rationale of English learning in the curriculum document indicates that multicultural awareness and intercultural skills are conceptualized as one of the rationales of why English learning is required as a school subject in Indonesian schools. The first paragraph of this part is:

Bahasa Inggris adalah salah satu bahasa yang dominan digunakan secara global dalam aspek pendidikan, bisnis, perdagangan, ilmu pengetahuan, hukum, pariwisata, hubungan internasional, kesehatan, dan teknologi. Mempelajari bahasa Inggris memberikan peserta didik kesempatan untuk berkomunikasi dengan warga dunia dari latar belakang budaya yang berbeda. Dengan menguasai bahasa Inggris, maka peserta didik akan memiliki kesempatan yang lebih besar untuk berinteraksi dengan menggunakan berbagai teks. Dari interaksi tersebut, mereka memperoleh pengetahuan, mempelajari berbagai keterampilan, dan perilaku manusia yang dibutuhkan untuk dapat hidup dalam budaya dunia yang beraneka ragam. (p.150)

Which is translated in English as:

English is one of the dominant languages used globally in education, business, commerce, science, law, tourism, international relations, health and technology. Studying English gives students the opportunity to communicate with citizens of the world from different cultural backgrounds. By mastering English, students will have greater opportunities to interact using various texts. From these interactions, they can achieve knowledge, learn various skills and human behavior required to be able to live in a diverse world culture. (p.150)

It is noted that this paragraph articulates the terms related to the concepts of multiculturalism such as “globally” and “international

relations". Apart from that, the concept of interculturalism is also identified from the sentence of "Studying English gives students the opportunity to communicate with citizens of the world from different cultural backgrounds." In addition, the next sentence explains that through these interactions of various texts, student will be able to learn any required knowledge and skills in order to understand human behavior from "a diverse world culture" (p. 150).

The importance of adequate intercultural skills toward the multicultural societies within the recent globalized world is emphasized further in the second paragraph of the rationale of English learning as follows:

Pembelajaran bahasa Inggris umum pada jenjang Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah (SD/MI/Program Paket A; SMP/MTs/Program Paket B; dan SMA/MA/Program Paket C) dalam kurikulum nasional memberikan kesempatan bagi peserta didik untuk membuka wawasan yang berkaitan dengan diri sendiri, hubungan sosial, kebudayaan, dan kesempatan kerja yang tersedia secara global. Mempelajari bahasa Inggris memberikan peserta didik kemampuan untuk mendapatkan akses ke dunia luar dan memahami cara berpikir yang berbeda. Pemahaman mereka terhadap pengetahuan sosial- budaya dan interkultural ini dapat meningkatkan kemampuan berpikir kritis. Dengan memahami budaya lain dan interaksinya dengan budaya Indonesia, mereka mengembangkan pemahaman yang mendalam tentang budaya Indonesia, memperkuat identitas dirinya, dan dapat menghargai perbedaan. (p. 150)

The English translation of the paragraph is:

Learning general English at the Elementary and Secondary Education levels (SD/MI/Package A Program; SMP/MTs/Package B Program; and SMA/MA/Package C Program) in the national curriculum provides opportunities for students to open insights related to oneself, social relations, culture, and global employment opportunities. Studying English gives students the ability to get access to the outside world and understand different ways of thinking. Their understanding of this socio-cultural and intercultural knowledge can improve their critical thinking skills. By understanding other cultures and their interactions with Indonesian culture, they develop a deep understanding of Indonesian culture, strengthen their identity, and can appreciate differences. (p. 150)

In line with the previous paragraph, the texts within the second paragraph mention the terms related to multiculturalism and

interculturalism in different perspectives. For instance, by interrelating students' English competencies with the opportunities to work in the global world. This is caused the fact that English is the most used language in the world and becomes the most prominent language as a means of communication among people all around the world. Additionally, the texts also address the contribution of English for students' development in getting access to "the outside world" as well as in developing their understanding of "different ways of thinking". The document claims that those things would be very beneficial for the development of their "socio-cultural skills" and "intercultural skills". Those two skills support the development of students' critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the adequate multicultural awareness and intercultural skills are believed to be able to contribute for students in understanding and appreciating Indonesian culture, strengthening their national identity and developing their appreciation and tolerance toward differences.

Apart from the aforementioned terms addressed earlier, an interesting term in regards to the concept of multiculturalism is identified in the rationale of the English learning, that is, the term of "*kebinekaan global*" (p. 152) translated as "global diversity" as one of the expected profile of the "*Profil Pelajar Pancasila*" (the Profile of Pancasila Student). No further explanation of this term is available in the maining of the document. However, the diction is interesting as the term "*kebinekaan*" is not really an Indonesian term commonly use in Indonesian daily convesation. Instead, the term "*keberagaman*" is more common to use to referring to its translated English term of "diversity". Additionally, the term "*kebinekaan*" is very similar in the Indonesian motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" (Unity in Diversity) written at the Indonesian National Emblem, Garuda Pancasila.

Furthermore, there are four main objectives of English learning at schools as suggested at the *Lampiran II* of the curriculum document, they are: (1) to develop communicative competencies in English with a variety of multimodal texts (oral, written, visual and audiovisual), (2) to develop intercultural competencies to understand and appreciate Indonesian and foreign cultural perspectives, practices and products, (3) to develop students' self-confidence in expressing themselves as an independent and responsible individual, and (4) to develop critical and creative reasoning skills (pp. 152-153). As identified from the list, the development of intercultural competencies becomes the second objective of the teaching of English for Indonesian students as schools among the development of what is called as the required life skills for the students to help them in their future studies (p. 151) comprasing communicative competencies, intercultural competencies, self-confidence, and critical skills.

In contrast to the comprehensive discussion of multicultural awareness and intercultural skills as the rationales as well as the acknowledgment of those two elements as one of the objectives of English

learning as schools, no information relating to multiculturalism and interculturalism identified at the third part of the document, the characteristics of English lesson (pp. 153-155). There are four characteristics listed in this sub-section but none of them refers to students' development of multicultural awareness and intercultural skills. Instead, the first characteristic is about the various text types for students to learn such as narrative, descriptive, exposition, procedural, argumentative, discussion, specific texts (SMS, advertisement), dan authentic texts in varieties of learning modes (verbal, visual, audiolingual, and multimodal modes). In line with that, the second one explains about the methods of teaching the English texts to students. Additionally, the third characteristic is about the implementation of learner-centred approach while the last one focuses on the learning stages and six elements of English learning of Listening, Reading, Viewing, Speaking, Writing, and Presenting. Moreover, this sub-section attributes the six learning phases of students in learning English at school namely Phase A (Class 1 and Class 2), Phase B (Class III and Class IV), Phase C, (Class V and Class VI) Phase D (Class VII, Class VIII and Class IX), Phase E (Class X), and Phase F (Class XI and Class XII).

The expected learning outcomes of each phase is explained as well at the fourth part of this document section (pp. 155-165). Among the six phases, however, the conceptualizations of multicultural awareness and intercultural skills are only identified at element of Listening and Speaking in Phase F as "they use English to express opinions on social issues and to discuss youth-related interests, behaviours and values across cultural contexts" (p. 162). This is quite interesting considering that the concepts of multicultural awareness and intercultural skills are explained comprehensively at the rationale of the curriculum while no further explanation is available at the remaining parts of the curriculum document in relation to this lack of information.

Multicultural Awareness and Intercultural Skills of Advanced English Learning

As stated in the *Lampiran II* of the curriculum document, the advanced English learning is only available as an optional school subject for students in Phase F (Class XI and Class XII) who show great interest and motivation to learn English in a more advanced level (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022e, pp. 166-174). At the same track with the aforementioned general English learning section, the advanced English in the curriculum documents comprises the same four sub-sections of the rationales of English learning, the objectives of English Lesson, the characteristics of English lesson, and the learning outcomes of English lesson in every phase.

The discourse analysis of the texts reveals that in general, the

explanations at each sub-section the four sub-sections of those two sections (general English and advanced English learning) are very much alike. Despite that, there is a number of new information is included. For instance, the rationale of the advanced English learning include the description of what is called as targeted life skills with the emphasis on what is called as "*keterampilan abad 21*" (the 21th century skills) of critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration along with the character development and required literacy skills (p. 166). However, the comprehensive explanation of multicultural and intercultural concepts as provided at the sub-section of the rationale of general English teaching is not available at the section of the advanced English learning at all. The only term identified in as the rationale of the advanced English learning is "*kebinekaan global*" (p. 167) that is translated as "global diversity". Just like in the rational of general English learning, this term is used in the description of the "*Profil Pelajar pancasila*" (the Profile of Pancasila Student).

On the other hand, among the three objectives listed at the advanced English learning section (pp. 168-169), the third objective contains two specific terms related to multicultural in the globalized world such as: "*menjadi warga masyarakat global yang tetap memegang teguh nilai-nilai Pancasila sebagai falsafah hidup bangsa dengan mengedepankan Profil Pelajar Pancasila seperti beriman dan berakhlak mulia, mandiri, bernalar kritis, kreatif, gotong royong, dan berkebhinekaan global*" (to become a global citizen who still adheres to Pancasila values as the nation's philosophy of life by prioritizing Pancasila Student Profiles such as having faith and noble character, being independent, critical thinking, creative, mutual cooperation, and global diversity). As can be seen from the statement, the first phrase relating to multiculturalism is "*warga masyarakat global*" (global citizen) at the beginning of the sentence as well as the term "*berkebhinekaan global*" (global diversity), the same term used in the previous section of the general English.

Moreover, the characteristics of advanced English learning comprises seven characteristics (pp. 169-171) with a number of new ones such as at the suggested texts types for students to focus on the learning process (narrative, exposition, and discussion texts) in varieties of learning modes (verbal, visual, audio-lingual, and multimodal modes) along with the rationale of the choices as well as how the expected methods and strategies in teaching advanced English to students. In addition, this part also acknowledge Vgotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), language as a social process, the importance of scaffolding in the teaching process and the implementation of "*program magang*" or apprenticeship for students. Among the listed characteristics, the concept of interculturalism is embedded in the third characteristic through the term of "*lintas budaya*" which can be translated as "cross-culture" in English. The statement (p. 170) is: "*Pengajaran sastra dan lintas*

budaya menjadi bagian dari pengajaran Bahasa Inggris Tingkat Lanjut, karena teks merupakan konstruksi sosial, pembahasan teks tidak akan terlepas dari pembahasan budaya yang direfleksikan dalam setiap teks yang dibahas" (the teaching of literature and cross-culture is part of the advanced English teaching, because a text is a social construction, therefore, the discussion of a text cannot be separated from the discussion of the culture reflected from the text).^[1]

However, in spite of the acknowledgement of the multiculturalism and intercultural education as the elements of the rationales, objectives, and characteristics of the advanced English learning, the investigation of the text document shows that those two concepts are not embedded at all at the fourth sub-section, that is, the learning outcomes of English lesson in every phase (pp. 172-174). As mentioned before, there is only phase listed in the advanced English learning namely Phase F which is usually administered for student as Class XI and Class XII. Similar to the general English learning at the previous section, the learning outcomes of the advanced English learning is classified into four elements namely Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, but none of them addresses the development of students' intercultural awareness or intercultural skills.

Multicultural Awareness and Intercultural Skills of English Learning for Students with Special Needs

The discussion of English learning for students with special needs is located at the in *Lampiran IV* of this curriculum document. (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022f, pp. 106-117) In general, the rationale sub-section (pp. 106-107) comprises a number of information just like the ones identified in the advanced English learning of *Lampiran II* that has been addressed earlier, such as the required life skills and of the 21st century, the development of six Elements of English skills (Listening, Speaking, Viewing, Reading, Writing, and Presenting) and the varieties of multimodal texts. However, the only term that refers to the multicultural concept in this sub-section is only the term "*berkebinekaan global*" (p. 107) or global diversity within the same statement as identified at the general English learning and advanced English learning at *Lampiran II*.

Despite the lack of multicultural and intercultural education concepts within the rationale part of the curriculum document, there are one objective among the six listed objectives contains the terms related to the concept of intercultural competencies within the statement of: "*mengembangkan kompetensi interkultural untuk memahami dan menghargai perspektif, praktik, dan produk budaya Indonesia dan budaya asing*" that can be translated as: "developing intercultural competencies as an effort to understand and appreciate Indonesian as well as perspective,

practice, and cultural products of Indonesia as well as foreign culture” (p. 107).

Different from the presence of that those two concepts within the rationale and objectives of the English learning for students with special need in this curriculum document, however, the remaining two sub-sections of the characteristics of English teaching for students with special needs (pp. 108-109) as well as the expected learning outcomes of each phase (pp. 109-117) do not acknowledge the concept of multiculturalism or intercultural education at all. Among the six learning phases for student from Class I to Class XII, there is no term or statement referring to the development of multicultural awareness or intercultural skills. This is an interesting yet a concerning phenomenon in *Kurikulum Merdeka* especially due to the lack of those two concepts within the section of general English learning and the absence of them in the advanced English learning as well in the English teaching for students with special needs. However, no further information is identified at the remaining of the curriculum document in regard to this findings.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research confirms that the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism are embedded in *Kurikulum Merdeka*. In fact, based on the analysis of the texts within the curriculum document, the first three sub-sections within the curriculum document (the rationales, the objectives and the characteristics) of English learning at every category of general English teaching, advanced English teaching, and English teaching for students with special needs supports the development of students’ multicultural awareness and intercultural skills.

Despite that, however, very limited information in regards to the development of students’ multicultural awareness and intercultural skills are presented at the fourth sub-section, the learning outcomes of each learning phase. It is noted that those two concepts are only explained at Phase F (Class XII) of General English and advanced English learning in *Lampiran II* while there is not mentioned at all at the teaching of English for students with special needs in *Lampiran IV*. The lack of multicultural awareness and intercultural education as the expected learning outcomes of English learning at school raises a big concern. If they are not mandated as expected learning outcomes within the curriculum documents, are students’ development of multicultural awareness and intercultural skills presented as learning materials of the English school textbooks and

moduls? If so, how are teachers' efforts in the process of instilling them to the students?

Due to the concern and questions raised from the findings, it is suggested that the investigation of multiculturalism and interculturalism in *Kurikulum Merdeka* should be followed up with other research related to this research topic. It is expected that further studies with broader scopes such as teachers' teaching modul and preparation, school textbooks and classroom observation are strongly suggested in order to achieve more comprehensive findings regarding the conceptualization of multicultural and intercultural education within *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

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