Critical Literacy in Indonesian ELT: A Multicultural Approach Based on Banks' Dimensions of Education

Heru Saputra[1], Dolendra Paudel[2]
[1]Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Salatiga, Indonesia
[2]Presidency College of Management Sciences, Purbanchal University, Nepal
Email: herusaputra@uinsalatiga.ac.id, pdldolen@gmail.com

Abstract

In Indonesia's diverse sociocultural landscape, English language teaching (ELT) is crucial in shaping students' understanding of multicultural perspectives. However, ELT materials often lack cultural inclusivity and fail to encourage critical engagement with diverse narratives. This conceptual paper explores the integration of the Critical Literacy Approach in ELT to promote multicultural awareness among secondary school students. Using James A. Banks' Dimensions of Multicultural Education as the analytical framework, this study examines how ELT materials and pedagogical strategies can foster students' ability to question biases, challenge stereotypes, and engage with diverse cultural perspectives. Through a critical review of Indonesian curriculum guidelines, ELT textbooks, and relevant literature, this study identifies how ELT content aligns with content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and school empowerment—the five dimensions outlined by Banks. The analysis highlights key gaps in representation and suggests strategies for integrating critical literacy-based teaching practices, such as selecting diverse texts, encouraging dialogic discussions, and implementing equity-focused instructional methods. This paper contributes to ongoing discussions on multicultural education in ELT. It offers pedagogical insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers to create more inclusive and critically engaging English learning environments.

Keywords: *Critical Literacy, Multicultural Education, ELT, Dimensions of Multicultural Education*

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural education (MCE) has emerged as a pivotal framework in English language teaching (ELT), particularly as classrooms continue to become increasingly diverse. MCE aims to provide equitable educational opportunities to all students by acknowledging and respecting their cultural backgrounds, which in turn enriches the learning environment and promotes social justice (Kustati et al., 2020). The research indicated that multicultural education can significantly enhance understanding and empathy among students from varied backgrounds, fostering an inclusive atmosphere where all learners feel valued.

The significance of multicultural education in ELT can be traced back to its foundational premise that addresses social and cultural inequalities in educational settings. For instance, there is a discussion about the historical dimensions of multicultural education, reflecting a broad social movement advocating for justice and equality, underscoring education's role as a transformative tool for marginalized groups (Jayadi et al., 2022). Similarly, integrating various social aspects, such as race, gender, and class inequalities, into teacher education to better prepare educators to handle multicultural classrooms is emphasized (Haswani et al., 2023; Salimi & Rad, 2024). Such an approach not only aids

teachers in developing sensitivity towards diverse student populations but also equips them with strategies to address the unique challenges that may arise in a multicultural setting.

Furthermore, the intersectionality of identities, including race, ethnicity, and language, plays a crucial role in implementing multicultural education. In teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), educators are increasingly called to adapt their curricular and pedagogical practices to reflect the multiple cultural realities of their students. This adaptation is essential for creating teaching materials that resonate with learners from various backgrounds, thereby facilitating their engagement and comprehension of language as inherently tied to culture (Dewi et al., 2023; Karami, 2021; Mandarani, 2024). Engaging with students' diverse experiences enhances language acquisition and promotes critical thinking skills as students learn to navigate and appreciate complex cultural dynamics.

The push for multicultural education has significant implications for teacher training programs, which must evolve to incorporate comprehensive strategies that reflect the diversity of contemporary educational environments. Research indicates that pre-service teachers often feel inadequately prepared to teach in multicultural classrooms, highlighting the need for more focused training on multicultural competencies (Cherng & Davis, 2017). Addressing this issue involves fostering teachers' awareness of their own cultural biases and equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to apply the principles of multicultural education effectively (Emaliana et al., 2019).

The Critical Literacy Approach (CLA) plays a crucial role in fostering critical thinking and cultural awareness among learners, particularly in educational settings emphasizing multiculturalism. This approach goes beyond conventional literacy teaching by encouraging students to analyze and question the societal structures that produce and maintain inequalities and biases in discourse, thereby linking language education with social justice initiatives (Esau, 2015). One of the central tenets of CLA is its focus on challenging existing power dynamics within texts and society. It emphasizes the importance of integrating critical literacy in the curriculum, which allows learners to interrogate the underlying ideologies present in various texts, fostering a critical awareness that is essential for understanding cultural diversity (Kurtuluş & Arsal, 2023). By engaging with diverse narratives through critical inquiry, students develop their language skills and cultivate an ability to recognize and question the normalization of inequities and prejudices that often pervade mainstream media and educational content.

Moreover, studies have highlighted CLA's efficacy in enhancing students' global perspectives. For instance, Sudarwati et al. (2023) found that when EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners are encouraged to consider global issues critically, they are more likely to engage meaningfully in discussions about their world, promoting both linguistic proficiency and critical awareness as socially responsible individuals in a global context. This perspective is in line with a theory about how an awareness of mainstream literacy demands intersects with critical literacies, allowing students to navigate academic expectations while remaining cognizant of cultural contexts (Chang-Bacon, 2017).

The lack of multicultural representation in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials poses significant challenges for educators and learners. This gap limits students'

exposure to diverse cultural contexts and reinforces a monolithic narrative that centers predominantly on Western cultures, leading to inadequate preparation for global citizenship in an increasingly interconnected world. Critical engagement with texts within ELT is essential to address these challenges, fostering critical thinking and a deeper understanding of cultural diversity.

The explanation above is supported by research indicating that traditional ELT materials often exhibit a narrow cultural scope dominated by Western perspectives. Teaching materials must reflect the principles of critical pedagogy, which aim to foster critical thinking and dismantle inequities in English education. Otherwise, students may internalize a limited view of the world, undermining their capacity to engage critically with the content presented in the classroom (Ariawan et al., 2022; Askari & Baumgartner, 2024). Moreover, Ruecker & Ives (2014) discuss how the rhetoric surrounding teacher recruitment often privileges native English speakers, reinforcing systemic biases within ELT. This bias perpetuates the narrative that only certain voices and experiences are valid within ELT discourse. In response, Brittain advocates for teacher training programs to encourage educators to be active creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients, fostering a critical lens toward the materials they consume (Brittain, 2020).

Based on the background above, this research explores how critical literacy can be integrated into ELT to promote multicultural awareness, examine ELT materials through Banks' Dimensions of Multicultural Education, and propose strategies for implementing critical literacy-based ELT in Indonesian secondary schools.

METHODS

This study employs a conceptual analysis approach to explore how the Critical Literacy Approach can be integrated into English language teaching (ELT) for multicultural education in Indonesian secondary schools. Instead of conducting empirical research, this paper synthesizes existing literature, educational policies, and textbook analyses to examine the representation of cultural diversity, power structures, and ideological biases in ELT materials. The study draws upon various sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, Indonesian curriculum guidelines, and English textbooks commonly used in secondary schools. Additionally, case studies and best practices from previous research on multicultural education in ELT are reviewed to provide insights into effective teaching strategies.

This study uses James A. Banks' Dimensions of Multicultural Education as the primary theoretical framework to structure the analysis (Bank, 2004). The evaluation focuses on five key dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and the empowerment of school culture. ELT materials are analyzed to determine whether they incorporate multiple cultural perspectives, encourage students to question dominant narratives, and challenge stereotypes. Furthermore, the study examines whether instructional strategies are inclusive and responsive to students' cultural backgrounds. Based on the findings, this paper proposes pedagogical strategies that align with Banks' framework, such as integrating diverse texts, promoting critical discussions, and

implementing equity-focused teaching methods to foster multicultural awareness in ELT classrooms.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

Multicultural Perspectives of ELT Materials in Indonesian Secondary Schools

The analysis of multicultural representation in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials reveals significant gaps in how cultural diversity is portrayed, often reinforcing Eurocentric narratives. This issue is markedly evident within Indonesian ELT materials, which predominantly reflect Western cultural perspectives, neglecting the rich tapestry of local and global multicultural identities.

A critical examination of existing literature indicates that many ELT textbooks fail to adequately incorporate diverse cultural perspectives, limiting students' exposure to non-Western voices. Incorporating a range of cultural contexts is vital for fostering students' engagement and creating meaningful connections with the learning material (Thumvichit, 2018). Conversely, the absence of such representation leads to a narrow understanding of culture, reinforcing dominant narratives rooted in Anglo-American perspectives. Moreover, the literature underscores how many ELT texts perpetuate stereotypes and marginalize various cultural groups, particularly in terms of ethnicity, religion, and gender. There is a deficiency in ELT materials that embrace rich multicultural content, leading to a gap in developing learners' intercultural competence, which is essential for effective communicators in a globalized world, Meanwhile, the authorized textbooks often exhibit a lack of appreciation for cultural diversity, conveying negative stereotypes and promoting intolerant attitudes toward minority groups (Isnaini et al., 2019; Pratama et al., 2021).

A comprehensive review of studies indicates that Indonesian ELT materials often lack a robust integration of multicultural perspectives. A substantial demand is required for materials incorporating local and foreign cultural content; however, current textbooks frequently fail to provide adequate cross-cultural understanding (CCU) information (Monica et al., 2024). Earlier discovery of a similar pattern across high school textbooks underscores a persistent Eurocentric bias in ELT resources. Such findings suggest that the current curriculum does little to expose students to diverse cultural narratives reflecting Indonesia's multicultural makeup.

Questioning Dominant Narratives

Many Indonesian ELT materials fail to encourage students to question dominant cultural and historical perspectives. It is argued that greater incorporation of multicultural perspectives is necessary to combat the hegemony of white native speakers in ELT, which restricts meaningful engagement with cultural complexities. Specifically, An analysis of Japanese ELT materials highlights how textbooks often begin with familiar cultural entities, resulting in a disconnect from broader cultural discussions that could promote critical engagement among learners (Davidson & Liu, 2018). Additionally, materials often omit critical dialogue around gender representation. It is asserted that a practical, multicultural ELT approach must address issues of racial equity and gender sensitivity. This point is crucial

for Indonesian contexts, as diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds are significant components of the nation's identity that should be explicitly represented in educational materials.

As articulated in existing literature, critical literacy emphasizes the importance of questioning dominant cultural narratives. Unfortunately, this is an area where Indonesian ELT materials generally fall short. For example, focusing on ethnic minority representation in China's elementary textbooks highlights that textbooks often reinforce stereotypes rather than facilitate critical discussions on cultural diversity. This highlights a similar concern in Indonesian contexts, suggesting a need for materials to allow students to question the discourses presented. In this case, Lestari et al. (2024) examined peace values in ELT materials and highlighted that while they include specific social values, they do not significantly challenge dominant historical narratives or provide a space for critical reflection. This lack of critical engagement diminishes the textbooks' capacity to foster analytical thinking among students regarding the cultural and historical contexts they study.

Representation of Ethnic, Religious, and Gender Groups

The call for critical discourse analysis of multicultural values in Indonesian ELT textbooks as highlighted the need to reassess how cultural narratives are framed within these texts (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). This analysis can reveal underlying biases and offer insights into how different cultural representations impact students' learning experiences. Regarding representation, the portrayal of various ethnic, religious, and gender groups in textbooks often leans toward stereotypes or oversimplified narratives. It is explained that regular exposure to biased imagery in educational materials contributes to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, which can negatively affect students' perceptions of gender roles (Nurcholifah et al., 2023). The findings suggest that portraying both male and female characters lacks balance, potentially constraining students' understanding of gender equality and roles within their cultural context.

Moreover, visual semiotic analysis research illustrates how multicultural values are represented in an ELT textbook, showing diverse attributes such as respect for traditions and appreciation for gender equality. However, the analyses indicate that the books often miss deeper explorations of intergroup dynamics and cultural tolerances crucial for building intercultural communication competence (Isnaini et al., 2019). This limitation constrains students' opportunities to understand and appreciate the complexities of cultural diversity surrounding them.

Critical Literacy and Banks' Dimensions in ELT

In evaluating the extent to which English Language Teaching (ELT) materials align with multicultural education principles, mainly through the lens of Banks' dimensions of multicultural education, it is crucial to identify existing gaps and biases within the content. Banks' framework emphasizes the necessity of integrating diverse perspectives, enhancing knowledge construction, reducing prejudice, implementing equity pedagogy, and promoting an empowering school culture. This evaluation highlights deficiencies in current ELT materials in Indonesia, particularly concerning multicultural representation, critical literacy, and overall pedagogical effectiveness.

Many ELT materials used in Indonesia often reinforce Eurocentric narratives instead of promoting multiculturalism. A critical need is indicated for a multiliteracies approach that bridges cultural divides, suggesting that current materials frequently fail to address the richness of local cultures and perspectives (Nabhan, 2021). This gap is critical, especially in a multicultural society like Indonesia, where diverse voices should shape the learning process. Research by Sun emphasizes the importance of cultivating critical global citizenship through education that connects learning to local and global contexts. However, without adaptive materials that reflect a range of cultures, students are deprived of the opportunity to engage with literature that encourages critical awareness of their identities and societal roles (Sun, 2023). This lack of representation can alienate students from their learning processes, limiting their engagement and ability to think critically about the texts they encounter.

A significant gap identified in Indonesian ELT materials is the inadequate portrayal of ethnic, religious, and gender diversity. Salimi and Rad found that existing content often does not reflect equitable representations of different groups, potentially perpetuating stereotypes. This gap emphasizes the need for the inclusion of voices from various ethnic minorities to promote understanding and empathy while dismantling prejudiced views. Moreover, Altinsoy et al., (2022a) reveal a hesitance among pre-service teachers to confront cultural diversity in their training, which correlates with the tendency of textbooks to neglect multicultural issues. This tendency to provide a singular narrative undermines students' ability to think critically and engage with the complexities of their cultural landscapes, leaving them at a disadvantage in navigating a globalized world. Critical literacy is necessary in the curriculum that empowers students to "read the world," not just texts. This perspective encourages the questioning of dominant narratives, a practice often sidelined in conventional curriculum designs. The lack of inquiry-based learning opportunities and dialogic discussions in current ELT materials hinders critical engagement with texts, preventing students from challenging societal norms and inequities.

To address these gaps and biases, a pivotal recommendation involves enhancing ELT materials to cultivate a critical literacy framework reflecting diverse perspectives. Weng (2021) discusses the importance of incorporating critical literacy into the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) environment, notably in EFL contexts. In the context of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) environment, incorporating critical literacy is important. This incorporation could empower teachers and students with the tools to interrogate the texts presented, allowing them to contextualize their learning. Additionally, integrating reflective writing and project-based learning, as highlighted in the literature, supports deeper engagement with multicultural themes (Gustine, 2018; Hidayat, 2020). Educators can foster an inclusive classroom environment that promotes critical thinking and cultural awareness by engaging students in discourse around varied viewpoints and encouraging personal reflection on their cultural identities.

Discussion

Implications: Diverse Content for ELT Curriculum and the Need for Teacher Training

The integration of diverse and inclusive content in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials and teacher training is essential for fostering a holistic educational environment that reflects the multicultural realities of Indonesia. As the country is home to numerous ethnicities, languages, and cultures, implementing multicultural education in ELT can significantly enhance students' understanding of and engagement with their society. The following analysis explores the implications for ELT curriculum design and teacher training programs in Indonesia, based on the existing literature.

Findings from multiple studies underscore the necessity to incorporate diverse cultural perspectives into the ELT curriculum. Integrating multicultural content into various subjects, including educational psychology and instructional materials, can significantly elevate preservice teachers' attitudes toward multicultural education (Arsal, 2019). This highlights a critical pathway for embedding multicultural education throughout teacher education programs, ensuring that future educators can facilitate inclusive learning environments.

A focused approach to curriculum development is needed to align with the principles of multicultural education. The continuous training that permeates multicultural education into all teacher education curricula is crucial (Egne, 2020). In Indonesia, this could mean revising ELT textbooks to include authentic representations of local cultures and languages, providing students with relatable content, and fostering a deeper appreciation for their identities. Such revisions can improve engagement and enhance students' critical thinking and intercultural communication skills. Additionally, It is indicated that implementing rich multicultural programs within teacher education courses empowers pre-service teachers to engage actively with diversity and inclusion as part of their pedagogical practices (Saranza, 2020). This calls for an educational adjustment that facilitates understanding cultural nuances as educational and social necessities.

Meanwhile, teacher training programs centered on critical literacy and multicultural education are essential to prepare educators for the challenges of diverse classrooms. The need for comprehensive training not only enhances educators' literacy and numeracy skills but also equips them with strategies for integrating multicultural insights into their teaching practices (Humairah et al., 2024). Therefore, Successful literacy programs must reflect pedagogies that meet educational and cultural needs, enabling teachers to build a literacy-rich environment that acknowledges and celebrates diversity. Moreover, the findings regarding teachers' attitudes toward multicultural education underscore the importance of training that challenges preconceived beliefs and expands educators' understanding of cultural sensitivity. Implementing training programs that focus on critical multicultural literacy can help educators recognize their biases and foster a more inclusive educational atmosphere.

In line with this, a structured approach to teacher education that emphasizes social justice and equality for all students must be advocated to encourage educators to advocate for change within their classrooms. By engaging in professional development focused on

multicultural education, teachers can adopt practices that support diverse student populations and empower them to question and challenge inequities within their learning environments.

Pedagogical Strategies: Selecting diverse text, encouraging dialogue, and deepening students' engagement

In Indonesia, the pedagogical landscape for English Language Teaching (ELT) is evolving, increasingly recognizing the significance of integrating critical literacy approaches and diverse perspectives into educational practices. To enhance student engagement and understanding, it is essential to implement strategies that encompass selecting and adapting texts that reflect various cultural contexts, fostering dialogic discussions and inquiry-based learning, and utilizing reflective writing and project-based learning.

The first crucial pedagogical strategy involves carefully selecting and adapting texts that represent various cultural perspectives. Selecting culturally relevant materials encourages students to engage meaningfully with the text and promotes critical literacy skills by allowing them to analyze differing viewpoints. This approach aligns with the goals of multicultural education, as it exposes students to texts from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering a deeper understanding of global perspectives. Moreover, teachers must be well-versed in critical literacy to effectively choose and adapt texts that accurately reflect diverse cultures and avoid reinforcing stereotypes (Nurfaidah et al., 2017) . This necessitates ongoing training for educators to understand the principles of critical literacy, enabling them to identify resources that provide balanced representations of ethnic, religious, and gender groups. By integrating such texts into the curriculum, teachers can create a classroom that values diversity and facilitates critical discussions on social justice issues.

The second important strategy is fostering dialogic discussions, which is essential for promoting critical understanding among students. Dialogic teaching encourages learners to engage with one another in meaningful conversations about the texts they encounter, as supported by research on the importance of dialogue in establishing critical understanding. Effective dialogue allows students to express their opinions, counter-narratives, and question assumptions, inviting multiple perspectives into classroom discussions. Implementing inquiry-based learning complements dialogic discussions by encouraging students to explore topics deeply and critically. Zhang highlights that inquiry-based approaches empower students to investigate social issues through the lens of critical literacy, thus linking classroom learning to real-world challenges. This form of learning helps students develop critical thinking skills as they analyze the cultural and social implications of the texts and issues presented, promoting a culture of inquiry and reflection.

Lastly, reflective writing is another powerful strategy that deepens student engagement with texts and encourages critical reflection. Structured journal writing can significantly enhance reflective practice, enabling students to evaluate their learning experiences and articulate their thoughts on cultural diversity. Teachers can prompt students to regularly reflect on their readings, considering their cultural backgrounds and personal biases while engaging with diverse perspectives. Additionally, project-based learning allows students to create artifacts that represent their understanding of multicultural themes.

Hidayat et al. emphasize that implementing critical literacy through project work can help students cultivate awareness of social issues while actively engaging them in collaborative learning experiences (Hidayat et al., 2020). Students can apply their learning in authentic contexts by working on projects requiring critical analysis and creative expression, reinforcing their understanding of multicultural principles.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of integrating critical literacy in English language teaching (ELT) to foster multicultural awareness among Indonesian secondary school students. Using Banks' Dimensions of Multicultural Education, the analysis reveals that ELT materials often lack cultural inclusivity, reinforcing dominant narratives while offering limited opportunities for students to engage with diverse perspectives critically. To address these gaps, ELT curricula should move beyond surface-level multicultural content and actively incorporate pedagogical strategies that empower students to question biases, challenge stereotypes, and develop intercultural competence. Teachers and curriculum designers must integrate diverse texts, facilitate dialogic discussions, and implement equity-focused instructional methods that align with Banks' framework. In contrast, teacher training programs should emphasize critical literacy-based approaches to enhance educators' ability to guide students in analyzing texts critically. Although this study provides a conceptual foundation for integrating critical literacy in ELT, future empirical research is needed to examine the impact of these strategies on students' critical thinking and multicultural awareness. By fostering an inclusive and critically engaged learning environment, ELT can contribute to a culturally responsive education system that prepares students to navigate and appreciate diverse perspectives in an increasingly globalized world.

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