

From Multicultural Experiences to Teaching Practices: Insights from Pre-Service English Teachers in Indonesian ELT Contexts

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study explores the multicultural experiences, attitudes, and efficacy of pre-service English teachers (PSETs) along with their reflections on teaching practices. **Method:** The study employed the Multicultural Efficacy Scale survey and semi-structured interviews. 107 PSETs from nine public universities and five private universities in West Java, Indonesia, participated in the survey. **Results:** The study identified two key findings. Firstly, most PSETs acquired background knowledge and experiences related to diversity and multiculturalism mainly through media ($M=2.99$, $SD=0.82$), diverse classmates ($M=2.96$, $SD=0.82$), and social interactions ($M=2.78$, $SD=0.81$). 84 (78.5%) of them exhibited moderate attitudes, and 56 of them (52.34%) demonstrated moderate multicultural efficacy in the English language teaching context. Secondly, participation in student exchange programs significantly enhanced their awareness and understanding of multicultural contexts. Additionally, the findings indicated that participants with high multicultural efficacy successfully integrated Indonesian cultural elements into English Language Teaching. In contrast, those with moderate and low efficacy made cultural adjustments to bridge gaps but lacked pedagogical strategies for embedding cultural reflections into their instruction. **Novelty:** This study contributes to ELT and multicultural education research by examining pre-service English teachers' multicultural experiences, attitudes, efficacy, and instructional practices in the Indonesian context. The findings highlight the role of media, social interactions, and intercultural experiences in shaping awareness of cultural diversity. While most participants demonstrated moderate multicultural attitudes and efficacy, variations were evident in their ability to implement culturally responsive teaching. The study underscores the need for stronger pedagogical support to translate multicultural awareness into meaningful classroom practices.

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural competence (IC) and intercultural sensitivity (IS) are established as multi-component constructs comprising knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours essential for intercultural communication in multilingual contexts. (Byram, 2020), (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Guyton & Wesche, 2005) underpinned the literature, emphasizing knowledge, skills, and intellectual capabilities as core dimensions of IC. Hence, IC should be cultivated through teacher education programs and ongoing professional development, particularly for pre-service English teachers who will encounter diverse student populations in Indonesian schools and universities (Cancino & Nuñez, 2023; Dervin, 2023; Nindya et al., 2022).

Indonesia, well known for its multiculturalism, presents a rich context for studying the role of Multicultural Education (hereinafter MCE) in English Language Teaching (ELT). The country's diversity in ethnicity, language, religion, and sociocultural background provides opportunities to promote intercultural understanding and inclusive educational practices (Mariyono, 2024). However, this diversity can also pose challenges. For instance, English teachers from homogenous cultural backgrounds may experience difficulty connecting with students whose cultural perspectives differ from

their own. Teachers must also create opportunities for learners to critically reflect on their personal values, beliefs, and aspirations (Danielewicz, 2001) while fostering respect for cultural diversity and developing intercultural understanding (Umami & Irham, 2024). These challenges affect both in-service and pre-service English teachers, who must prepare to navigate such circumstances in their future classrooms.

English teachers in Indonesia face additional challenges, including large class sizes (Erlina et al., 2022), varied student abilities (Herlambang & Adri, 2024), and limited access to authentic learning materials (Dewi et al., 2023; Kusumaningputri et al., 2022; Laila et al., 2023). These conditions highlight the need for teachers to possess not only strong pedagogical skills but also multicultural awareness and confidence in addressing learner diversity. For pre-service English teachers (PSETs), these competencies are especially critical, as their professional beliefs and teaching practices are still forming during teacher education and practicum experiences. Consequently, developing multicultural competencies is a vital step in preparing PSETs to respond effectively to the complexities of diverse classrooms.

Multicultural education (MCE) has thus become increasingly important in ELT and teacher education research. It emphasizes the recognition, appreciation, and inclusion of cultural diversity in educational practices (Banks, 2021; Haniko et al., 2024; Mariyono, 2024). Closely aligned with culturally responsive pedagogy, MCE promotes equitable teaching practices and the development of intercultural understanding in the classroom (Elkader, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Gloria, 2014). In ELT contexts, integrating multicultural perspectives supports students' linguistic growth while simultaneously fostering intercultural competence (Purba, 2023).

Implementing MCE in ELT classrooms requires teachers to demonstrate both multicultural literacy and multicultural efficacy (Guyton & Wesche, 2005). Multicultural literacy is the knowledge and ability to understand, critically examine, and interact with diverse cultural perspectives. It involves recognizing issues of equity, bias, and social justice (Cherng & Davis, 2017; Maulidiah et al., 2023), acknowledging and challenging cultural assumptions (Nabung, 2024), and examining information from multiple cultural viewpoints. In the educational context, this literacy aims to cultivate cultural consciousness, promote social justice (Haniko et al., 2024), and ensure equitable learning experiences (Mouboua et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, multicultural efficacy refers to teachers' confidence in their ability to teach learners from diverse cultural backgrounds effectively (Kang et al., 2019). Teachers with high multicultural efficacy are more likely to create safe and engaging classrooms, encourage student independence, and address the needs of all learners (Tomlinson, Carol Ann & Imbeau, 2023). Guyton and Wesche (2005) categorize PSETs' belief systems regarding multicultural education into four types: tolerance, assimilation, pluralism or multiculturalism, and advocacy. Tolerance represents basic acceptance; assimilation involves conforming to the dominant culture; pluralism and multiculturalism actively value maintaining diverse cultural identities; and advocacy emphasizes taking action to promote positive change.

Taken together, these constructs can be organized into a conceptual model rather than treated as a separate literature. Intercultural communicative competence and multicultural literacy represent the knowledge-based foundation that enables PSETs to recognize and critically interpret cultural diversity. Multicultural experiences, such as

exposure to diverse peers and media, serve as antecedent inputs that shape this foundation and, in turn, PSETs' multicultural attitudes. Multicultural efficacy can be conceptualized as a domain-specific form of self-efficacy. As Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2014) describes self-efficacy beliefs as results of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological states, PSETs' confidence in teaching diverse learners is similarly shaped by their accumulated multicultural experiences and the attitudes derived from them. These efficacy beliefs then function as the proximal driver of instructional behaviour, determining whether PSETs merely tolerate diversity or actively enact culturally responsive pedagogy (Ball & Ladson-Billings, 2020) in the classroom. Framed this way, multicultural experiences, attitudes, and efficacy are not parallel, disconnected variables but sequential links in a single explanatory chain that culminates in PSETs' teaching practice, and it is this chain that the present study sets out to examine empirically.

Despite the growing attention to multicultural education, most research has focused on conceptual discussions or general teacher perceptions (Banks, 2009; Chen, 2023). Few studies have investigated PSETs from diverse sociocultural backgrounds in Indonesian ELT contexts, particularly during teaching practicum experiences. This gap leaves limited empirical evidence on PSETs' multicultural experiences, attitudes, and efficacy in responding to learner diversity. Understanding these dimensions is crucial because PSETs' multicultural perspectives influence their readiness to implement culturally responsive teaching in the future.

Additionally, although prior studies have already examined PSETs' multicultural awareness and general perceptions of diversity, less is known about how such awareness is translated into actual classroom practice. Particularly, the literature offers a limited understanding of how PSETs' multicultural experiences, attitudes, and multicultural efficacy are enacted pedagogically during teaching practicums. Accordingly, this transition from multicultural awareness to pedagogical enactment, this present study provides a more compelling rationale for examining not only what PSETs know and believe about multiculturalism, but also how multicultural efficacy materializes in their instructional decisions and practices.

This study aims to contribute to ELT and multicultural education research in three ways. First, it examines the interrelated dimensions of multicultural experiences, attitudes, and efficacy in pre-service English teacher education. Second, it focuses specifically on PSETs in Indonesian ELT settings, which remain underexplored in the literature. Third, it presents empirical findings from survey data collected among PSETs enrolled in English Language Education programs at public and private universities in West Java, Indonesia, during the 2024–2025 academic year. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: 1.) What multicultural experiences do pre-service English Teachers have in relation to diversity and intercultural interaction?; 2.) To what extent do pre-service English teachers demonstrate their multicultural attitudes and multicultural efficacy in ELT classrooms?

RESEARCH METHOD

This current study is a part of a bigger research scale. In this article, this study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), in which quantitative survey data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative semi-

structured interviews used to elaborate and contextualize the quantitative findings. This design was selected because the survey results identified patterns in PSETs' multicultural experiences, attitudes, and efficacy, while the subsequent interviews were specifically intended to explain how and why these patterns manifested in participants' teaching practices, which is fit for this study. It employed the Multicultural Efficacy Scale survey (adapted from Guyton & Wesche, 2005) and semi-structured interviews. The MES is designed to assess teachers' multicultural efficacy, as well as their knowledge, attitudes, and teaching skills in multicultural settings.

Composite Validity and Reliability

Table 1. Validity and reliability

Domain	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability
Experience	0.757	0.791	0.813
Attitude	0.761	0.792	0.837
Efficacy	0.910	0.918	0.920

The reliability test results showed that all constructs have Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability values exceeding 0.70; hence, the constructs of these three domains are considered reliable, indicating good internal consistency among their indicators.

Discriminant Validity

Table 2. Discriminant validity

Item	Experience	Attitude	Efficacy
E01	0.575	0.175	0.178
E02	0.545	0.099	0.033
E03	0.567	0.053	0.099
E04	0.550	0.092	0.100
E05	0.726	0.171	0.179
E06	0.728	0.311	0.216
E07	0.633	0.060	0.155
AT01	0.143	0.753	0.369
AT02	0.225	0.791	0.389
AT05	0.282	0.697	0.224
AT06	0.151	0.524	0.133
AT07	0.185	0.775	0.420
ME01	0.207	0.237	0.602
ME02	0.131	0.504	0.667
ME03	0.275	0.374	0.663
ME04	0.133	0.182	0.651
ME05	0.101	0.338	0.655
ME06	0.089	0.234	0.539
ME07	0.138	0.262	0.590
ME08	0.158	0.242	0.570
ME09	0.260	0.229	0.629

Item	Experience	Attitude	Efficacy
ME10	0.252	0.218	0.661
ME11	0.057	0.290	0.579
ME12	0.232	0.239	0.577
ME14	0.181	0.305	0.726
ME15	0.207	0.215	0.671
ME16	0.088	0.156	0.637
ME17	-0.058	0.153	0.573
ME18	0.180	0.277	0.636
ME19	-0.026	0.172	0.516
ME20	0.084	0.313	0.530

Discriminant validity result in Table 2 was assessed by examining the cross-loadings of all indicators across the three latent constructs, namely, multicultural experience, attitude, and efficacy. It is established when each indicator loads more strongly on its own theoretical construct than on any other construct in the model. The results indicate that this criterion was satisfied across all 32 indicators. The Experience items (E01–E07) loaded most strongly on their intended construct (range = 0.545–0.728), with substantially lower cross-loadings on Attitude (≤ 0.311) and Efficacy (≤ 0.216). Similarly, the Attitude items (AT01, AT02, AT05–AT07) exhibited their highest loadings on Attitude (range = 0.524–0.791), clearly exceeding their cross-loadings on Experience (≤ 0.282) and Efficacy (≤ 0.420). The Efficacy items (ME01–ME20) likewise loaded most strongly on their respective construct (range = 0.516–0.726), with cross-loadings on Experience remaining low (and in two cases slightly negative) and cross-loadings on Attitude generally moderate, except ME02, which showed a comparatively narrower margin between its primary loading (0.667) and its cross-loading on Attitude (0.504). Overall, since no indicator exhibited a higher loading on a construct other than the one it was considered adequately supported at the indicator level. In other words, discriminant validity is considered good. After the survey had been collected and analyzed using SPSS 29, semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Participants

This study employed convenience sampling to gather the survey data as it allows respondents to be selected based on their availability, convenience, and represent certain characteristics being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The respondents in this study were characterized as university students or adult learners enrolled in the English Education study program at teacher training institutions or universities in West Java, who were also undertaking the Field Teaching Practicum during the 2024–2025 academic year. A total of 107 pre-service English Teachers (PSETs) from nine public universities and five private universities in West Java, Indonesia, participated in this research. Of the participants, 33 were male, and 74 were female. The majority of participants were aged between 20 and 25 years, comprising 87% of the total. The remaining participants were aged between 26 and 33 years. Ethnically, the Sundanese group was the largest, accounting for 48.6% of the participants. The Javanese group followed, comprising 25.2%. A diverse range of other ethnic backgrounds was represented in smaller proportions, including Aceh (1.9%), Batak (2.8%), Javanese-Sundanese (1.9%), Sundanese-Japanese (1.9%), Javanese-Chinese (0.9%), Manado-Chinese (0.9%), Sundanese-Okinawan (1.9%), Sundanese-Betawi (0.9%), Ambon (0.9%), Banjarese (1.9%), Buginese/Bugis-Makasar

(1.9%), Bugis-Javanese (0.9%), Minangkabau (0.9%), Serawai (0.9%), East Nusa Tenggara (1.9%).

Then, three participants were selected based on their MES scores, following score ranges for attitude are 0 to 15 (low), 16 to 24 (average), and 25 to 28 (very positive). For efficacy, score ranges are 0 to 54 (low), 55 to 66 (average), and 67 to 80 (high) (Guyton & Wesche, 2005). Based on this classification, one participant representing each group: high (Aby), moderate (Belinda), and low (Ciko) efficacy. It was purposively selected for the interview phase to capture variation across the domain. Each participant was interviewed three to five times, with each interview lasting approximately 45–60 minutes; the interviews were conducted in *Bahasa Indonesia* to allow participants to express their experiences naturally and were subsequently audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for reporting purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section is divided into two sections, namely, survey results of PSETs' multiculturalism experiences, attitudes, and multicultural efficacy in the ELT classroom (to answer RQ 1 and 2), and the description of their perception and reflection on teaching practices (to answer RQ 3).

PSETs' multiculturalism experiences, attitudes, and multicultural efficacy in the ELT classroom

Background Experience and Knowledge in Diversity

This section discusses two important aspects in investigating their experiences and understanding of multicultural literacy, multicultural efficacy, and multicultural education concepts. This section will be divided into two parts. Pre-service English Teachers (PSETs)' background experience in differences and people of different cultures. This is an important aspect because their experience affects their actions and confidence when facing such situations.

Table 3. Background Experience in Diversity

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
As a child, I played with children whose backgrounds were not the same as mine.	2.78	.81
During my teenage years, my classmates came from various cultural or ethnic backgrounds.	2.96	.82
The neighbourhood where I grew up included families from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds.	2.65	.95
I used to be interested in reading stories that portrayed people from different cultures or life experiences.	2.45	.96
When I was younger, one of people I look up to came from a different background than mine.	2.64	.96
I enjoyed watching television programs or movies that highlighted characters from varied backgrounds.	2.99	.82
In my adolescent years, I participated in extracurricular groups or teams that included members from different social or cultural groups.	2.77	.90

Source: Adapted from Guyton & Wesche (2005)

The result in Table 3 revealed the significant role that media, educational environments, and social interactions play in shaping the diversity experiences of pre-service English Teachers (PSETs). The highest mean score for media influence ($M=2.99$, $SD=0.82$) means that television programs and movies are a primary source of exposure to diverse cultures for them. This indicates that media can serve as a powerful tool for introducing and normalizing multicultural perspectives, potentially influencing PSETs' attitudes and teaching practices. The second most prominent indicator, exposure to diverse students in the classroom ($M=2.96$, $SD=0.82$), underscores the importance of multicultural education in schools. PSETs who have studied alongside peers from various cultural backgrounds are likely to develop a more nuanced understanding of multicultural literacy and efficacy. This exposure can enhance their confidence in handling multicultural situations and foster an inclusive classroom environment. Also, social interactions ($M=2.78$, $SD=0.81$) also play a crucial role in PSETs' diversity experiences. Engaging with friends from different racial and ethnic backgrounds during adolescence helps PSETs become more comfortable with diversity, which can translate into more effective teaching strategies and a greater ability to connect with students from diverse backgrounds. These findings are aligned with prior research on PSETs' exposure to multicultural environments (Mariyono, 2024) as well as through media consumption and social (Russell & Russell, 2014). Moreover, participating in a students' exchange program has enhanced pre-service English Teachers' awareness and knowledge of multicultural contexts (Hà & Nguyễn, 2024). In sum, these findings suggested that a combination of media exposure, diverse educational settings, and social interactions is essential for developing PSETs' multicultural competencies.

Pre-service English Teachers' Perceptions toward English Teachers' Attitudes in Diverse and Multicultural Classrooms

This section discusses the perception of pre-service English Teachers (PSETs) on what attitude a teacher should have in teaching English in a diverse and multicultural classroom.

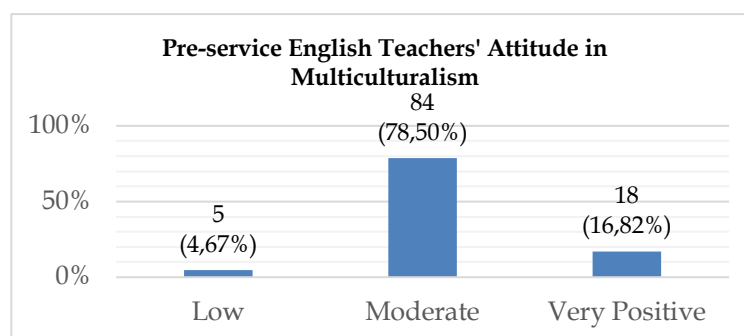


Figure 1. Pre-service English Teachers' Attitude in Multiculturalism

Based on the data in Figure 1, it was revealed that 16.80% of participants showed a very positive attitude towards multicultural education; 78.50% of participants showed moderate attitudes towards multicultural education, and 16.80% showed a low attitude towards multicultural education.

Table 4. PSETs' perceptions toward English teachers' attitudes in diverse and multicultural classrooms

Statement	Mean	Std Deviation
Teachers should adapt their lesson plans so that English teaching and learning activities represent the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students.	3.53	0.60
Teachers should provide learning moments where students exchange experiences about their traditions, such as food, clothing, family life, and beliefs.	3.65	0.57
Discussing ethnic traditions and beliefs at school sometimes causes tension or disagreements among students from varied backgrounds.	2.34	1.09
Students learn best when teachers share similar cultural or ethnic backgrounds with them.	2.37	0.97
It is important to include the viewpoints from different cultural groups that form the nation's identity while teaching English materials about Indonesian history that are commons to all Indonesians	3.45	0.62
Learning materials and textbooks should highlight how various cultural communities have contributed to society.	3.10	0.72
Books and reading materials in the classroom should represent the range of racial and cultural identities among students.	3.18	0.83

Source: Adapted from Guyton & Wesche (2005)

Based on the mean scores in Table 4, there are three main indicators related to the attitude that English teachers should have in their teaching and learning activities. The participants agreed that English teachers need to have discussions and activities about the students' background culture (such as food, dress style, family, and belief) ($M=3.65$, $SD=0.57$). Most participants agreed that lesson plans should be modified to represent better the various cultural backgrounds that students represent in the classroom ($M=3.53$, $SD = 0.60$). And the latter is common Indonesian history among all Indonesians ($M=3.45$, $SD=0.62$). In a nutshell, the English teachers should prioritize cultural sharing, responsive pedagogy, and the integration of Indonesian historical perspectives in diverse and multicultural classrooms.

Pre-service English Teachers' Perception toward Multicultural Efficacy

This section discusses the reflection of re-service English language teachers (hereinafter PSETs) on their efficacy in teaching English in diverse and multicultural classrooms.

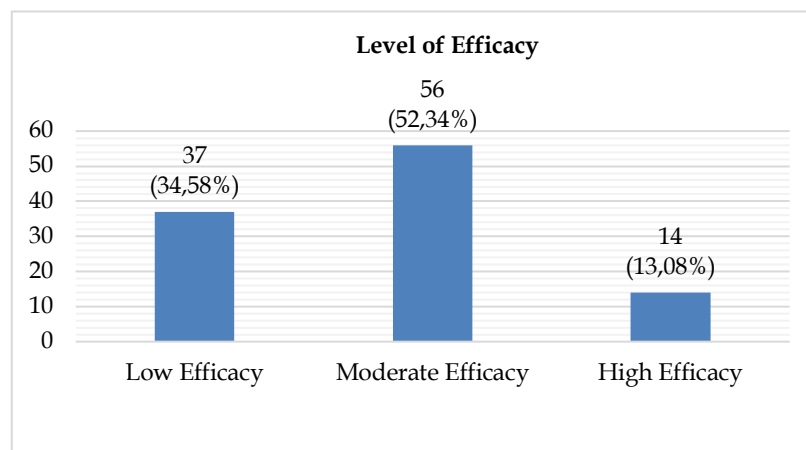


Figure 2. Level of PSETs' multicultural efficacy

As evidenced by Figure 2, the data revealed that 13.08% of participants demonstrated a high level of efficacy towards multicultural education, while 52.34% exhibited a moderate level of efficacy, and 34.58% exhibited a low level of efficacy.

Table 5. Multicultural Efficacy in ELT Classrooms

Statement	Mean	Std Deviation
I can design instructional activities that guide students in handling conflicts related to racial and cultural differences.	2.83	0.55
I can adapt my instructional method to fulfil learners' needs from various cultural backgrounds	2.91	0.72
I can create learning resources that are suitable for use in classrooms with culturally diverse learners.	2.91	0.69
I can develop instructional methods that dispel misconceptions about diverse groups.	2.58	0.77
I can review, reflect and evaluate my instructional materials to detect potential stereotypical and/or biased representation.	2.68	0.73
I can guide students to reflect on and recognize their personal prejudices.	2.97	0.81
I can introduce various cultural groups in ways to promote mutual understanding and respect among students.	3.01	0.70
I can organize classroom activities that enhance the confidence and participation of students from diverse backgrounds.	3.03	0.69
I can teach lessons that demonstrate how prejudice affects individuals.	2.89	0.69
I can plan teaching activities that help reduce bias and foster inclusivity among students.	2.75	0.69
I can recognize when published or commercial teaching materials contain cultural bias.	2.78	0.81
I can assist students in resolving conflicts that arise from stereotypical and/or prejudicial attitudes.	2.82	0.72
I can facilitate collaboration and teamwork among students with different cultural backgrounds.	3.03	0.73
I can recognize institutional or classroom practices that might disadvantage students from different backgrounds.	2.89	0.81

Statement	Mean	Std Deviation
I can suggest practical solutions when challenges related to diversity occur in the classroom.	2.74	0.70
I can explain how social structures and systems shape opportunities for people from different backgrounds.	2.62	0.72
I can describe how different cultural groups enrich and contribute to our pluralistic society.	2.64	0.65
I can encourage students to view situations from the perspectives of cultures other than their own.	2.94	0.68
I can teach historical and current events by including multiple cultural viewpoints.	2.90	0.77
I can get students involved in making decisions and clarifying their values regarding multicultural issues.	2.92	0.64

Source: Adapted from Guyton & Wesche (2005)

Based on the mean scores in Table 5, PSETs perceived their highest confidence associated with competencies about interpersonal and affective dimensions in teaching the ELT classroom. Items “I can organize classroom activities that enhance the confidence and participation of students from diverse backgrounds.” (SD=0.69) and “I can facilitate collaboration and teamwork among students with different cultural backgrounds.” (SD=0.73) yielded the same mean scores of 3.03. Also, item “promoting mutual respect among students” (M =3.01; SD=0.70). These findings indicate that PSETs demonstrated stronger confidence in the interpersonal dimensions of multicultural teaching than in the critical and structural dimensions of multicultural pedagogy. Their efficacy was primarily reflected in maintaining harmonious classroom interaction, facilitating collaboration, and promoting mutual respect among students from different cultural backgrounds. This suggests that PSETs tend to conceptualize multicultural teaching as relational and affective support rather than as a transformative pedagogical practice that critically addresses inequality, stereotypes, and systemic bias.

This finding resonated with Guyton and Wesche’s (2005) argument that pre-service teachers commonly demonstrated tolerance-oriented multicultural beliefs before developing advocacy-oriented perspectives. In the Indonesian ELT context, multicultural competence may still be interpreted as maintaining classroom harmony instead of engaging students in critical discussions about social inequities and cultural representation. As a result, PSETs may feel comfortable acknowledging diversity yet remain uncertain about implementing critical multicultural pedagogy within English language instruction.

On the other hand, the lowest mean scores were observed for items assessing critical multicultural competencies. The item “I can develop instructional methods that dispel misconceptions about diverse groups” recorded the lowest mean score of 2.58 (SD = 0.77), closely followed by “I can explain how social structures and systems shape opportunities for people from different backgrounds” (M=2.62; SD=0.73). This finding indicated a gap in participants’ efficacy to engage with complex structural and sociopolitical aspects of diversity. Additionally, items with the highest standard deviations, “I can guide students to reflect on and recognize their personal prejudices” (M=2.97; SD=0.81), reflected considerable variability in responses. This variation may stem from differences in participants’ prior exposure to multicultural training or their personal experiences with diverse environments.

Pre-service English Teachers' teaching experiences and reflection

After conducting an assessment on Multicultural efficacy, it was found that 13,08% of participants demonstrated high efficacy, 52.34% of participants demonstrated moderate efficacy, and 34,58% of participants demonstrated high efficacy. In this article report, three participants were taken for further investigation related to their experience, teaching activities, and their reflections related to the topic using semi-structured interviews, namely, Aby (pseudonym), who demonstrated high efficacy, Belinda (pseudonym), who demonstrated moderate efficacy, and Ciko (pseudonym), who demonstrated low efficacy. This follow-up interview is important to be investigated to provide insights into the preparedness of ELT Pre-service English Teachers to teach English in the multicultural context of Indonesia.

Aby

Aby is a pre-service teacher who participated in Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (student exchange programs, including cultural exchange-Modul Nusantara) in Ternate, North Maluku Province, Indonesia. The interview highlights Aby's personal experiences with concepts such as multicultural efficacy, multicultural education, and translanguaging, and their impact on Aby's teaching practices.

Aby's Experiences – Aby described experiencing culture shock during their exchange program in Ternate, particularly regarding differences in communication styles (particularly differences in intonation and gestures), as he stated that:

“...And I've also felt like I was being scolded. Even though they weren't angry. It's just my feelings (because of Sundanese culture, Aby's way of speaking has a soft intonation).”

“I was carried away by my feelings because (my perspective was like) being scolded. Well, it turns out it wasn't. It turns out it's normal in North Maluku (to have loud intonation).”

To overcome the challenges, Aby made significant efforts to adapt to the local language. He identified similarities between Sundanese (his native language) and the Ternate language (Ternate-Malay language), which facilitated his adaptation to the new environment. Furthermore, his participation in the cultural exchange program contributed to his advancement in both the learning and teaching processes. Consequently, Aby successfully demonstrated self-confidence in cross-cultural communication, despite initial discomfort. In essence, the exchange program provided valuable learning experiences, fostering cultural awareness and a deeper comprehension of diverse perspectives.

Aby's English Language Teaching Practices – During the investigation, Aby has demonstrated self-efficacy in communicating across cultural boundaries due to his prior experiences in encountering multiculturalism. Based on Aby's understanding, he mentioned that the concepts of multicultural education are the integration of local cultural elements into English language teaching materials and activities. During Aby's teaching internship in one of the junior high school, he was required to implement the emancipated curriculum in his English teaching learning process by using the “English for Nusantara” textbook. During the teaching and learning process, he faced several obstacles, for instance, the materials, students' engagement, and students' input during the learning process, as he stated that:

“The material that must be delivered with the students' understanding which may be quite difficult. So, it's also a challenge for me.... How should I teach them so that the material is delivered but the students also understand it even though the students' abilities may not be there yet regarding English language skills.”

To address the challenges, Aby initiated the provision of instructional videos on the materials, specifically in the context of food description. These videos provided detailed descriptions of the food's characteristics, including its type, texture, and colour, in English. Subsequently, Aby guided students through the proper techniques for describing food. The examples of food elaborated during this process were local dishes such as Gado-gado (Indonesian's salad with boiled vegetables, eggs, tofu, tempeh, and sometimes potatoes with savoury peanut sauce poured over it) and Sate (a well-known Indonesian street food, made with skewered and grilled meat served with a peanut sauce), which students were required to present to the class, highlighting their colour, taste, texture, and other sensory attributes using English language.

During the teaching and learning process, Aby utilised project-based learning, and, in some cases, he also applied a problem-based learning approach. Furthermore, he incorporated interactive games within the learning process to stimulate students' engagement and critical thinking during the learning process. In addition, during reflection, Aby acknowledged the potential of integrating the emancipated curriculum into teaching practices to foster culturally responsive teaching. This approach would enable the integration of students' cultural elements into the curriculum, as they have already experienced the relevant situations.

Belinda

Belinda is a pre-service teacher who participated in both Kampus Mengajar program in Purwakarta, Indonesia and *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (student exchange programs, including teaching internship) in Makasar, Indonesia. The interview highlights the difficulties and adaptations experienced by Belinda in teaching English in a diverse cultural environment, especially regarding language and cultural differences between Sundanese culture of West Java (Belinda's origin) and South Sulawesi (the placement location).

Belinda's Experiences—Belinda described the selection processes for both programs, which involved written tests and assessments of various skills. During the programs, Belinda was placed in diverse settings, including elementary and high schools, and engaged in activities focused on improving literacy and numeracy, as well as teaching English. A key finding was the shift in focus during the program, where Belinda was initially tasked with supporting literacy and numeracy but later assigned to teach English due to the program's placement in elementary schools and Belinda's English language background.

Additionally, Belinda did not face culture shock because the students' cultural background is similar to Belinda's culture. However, Belinda experienced a degree of culture shock during *Pertukaran Pelajar Merdeka* program (students' exchange program), primarily due to the linguistic differences. The rapid speech and distinct accents in South Sulawesi posed a significant communication barrier. A key solution emerged through interaction with a fellow dormitory resident who had prior experience living in Makassar. This peer support provided insights into the local language, particularly the

use of affixes, which aided Belinda in understanding speech patterns and adjusting their own communication style.

Belinda's Challenges of Teaching English in a Multicultural Environment—A significant challenge identified was the linguistic and cultural differences between Belinda's background (Sundanese, West Java) and the students' contexts (South Sulawesi). As stated, that:

"They were a bit confused by my Sundanese accent, Miss. Very Sundanese (a little bit slow pace). Meanwhile, in Sulawesi, they speak very fast, even though I had been in Makassar for a while, moving to Bulukumba, it was still difficult to understand their very fast speech..."

Belinda noted difficulties understanding the local dialects and rapid speech patterns. Furthermore, the presence of diverse cultural groups within the student population, including those from Toraja and Makassar, presented challenges in creating inclusive and culturally sensitive lessons, especially when addressing topics related to religious moderation.

Belinda's Adaptation and Learning Strategies—To navigate these challenges, Belinda employed several adaptive strategies. The use of games, particularly flashcards and songs, proved effective in engaging students, especially in elementary school. As stated, that:

"I use a games approach as much as possible, coincidentally, my research proposal also uses games, Miss. So, I tried it in elementary school, to see if it worked, and it was also tried in Bulukumba high school, to see if it worked."

Based on the investigation, it revealed that during teaching and learning, to solve the obstacles, Belinda employed a form of translanguaging, attempting to explain English concepts using Indonesian with a Sundanese accent (at first). While initially confusing for students, this strategy evolved as Belinda adapted to the local context (Makassar accent). Adjusting speaking speed was another key adaptation employed by Belinda. Furthermore, Belinda's experiences underscore the importance of pre-service teacher training that prepares educators not only with pedagogical knowledge but also with the cultural sensitivity and adaptability needed to navigate diverse classrooms.

Ciko

Ciko conceptualizes multicultural literacy as the comprehension of various cultures and backgrounds, extending beyond a singular cultural perspective. This understanding is shaped by his multicultural family heritage and the potential impact of his background on his teaching practices.

Ciko's Multicultural Background—Ciko is a pre-service teacher who has a multicultural family background. Ciko is characterized by a mix of Sundanese (his mother), Banjarese (his father), and Okinawan (his grandfather from his father's side) cultures. This diverse background significantly shaped his understanding of multicultural literacy as encompassing various cultural backgrounds. This was evident in discussions about family traditions, particularly regarding food and parenting styles, which differed from more homogenous Sundanese families as follow:

"...my parents are already from different backgrounds. My mother is Sundanese, but my father is originally from Banjar."

"...My grandfather was a soldier, so he was very strict with his children. With my mother, and also my other relatives."

Based on his reflection, the diverse family background influences the strict upbringing and family traditions, especially in terms of food and child-rearing in Ciko's life. Additionally, the contrast between two family cultures (Sundanese and Banjar) reflects stricter parenting from the maternal side.

Ciko's Education and his School Experience—Ciko described significant challenges in adapting to a public-school environment, particularly feeling isolated in an environment that did not support diversity during his senior high school. This experience was described as "really tiring" for him and led to a period of school absenteeism. To cope with the situation, Ciko adjusted by seeking friends in religious groups, believing they would share similar values and help him feel accepted in a homogeneous environment. Yet, it did not solve his problem as Ciko stated that:

"I tried to find friends, and I was thinking about finding those who were in a religious group, because I thought that they would be good people. It turns out that they were just the same, meaning even though they were in something like a holy organization, it's still not good (for him to feel acceptance)."

During Ciko's senior high school, he faced bullying and discrimination experiences due to his 'different appearance and his accent' with his classmates. To cope with the problem, Ciko sought companionship within a religious group (rohis), but this proved unhelpful. Subsequently, reconnecting with friends from middle school provided much-needed support. One year later, Ciko decided to transfer to a different school (to join his old friends), and it offered a more positive and supportive environment. Additionally, Ciko's hobby in watching English-language movies and singing also served as a coping mechanism, indirectly contributing to Ciko's interest in the English language and his dream to be an English teacher.

Ciko's English Language Teaching Practices—Despite not initially enjoying Ciko's senior high school experiences, Ciko expressed a strong desire to become an English teacher. This motivation stemmed from several factors: a desire to interact with young people, a wish to provide students (who have similar conditions) with a platform to express themselves (with their identity), and the recognition that their coping mechanisms had inadvertently developed their English skills. The first approach that Ciko used to apply during teaching practices was using interactive teaching, like games and involving physical movement. As Ciko stated that:

"I first try to make them comfortable, I start with games, then I want to try using TPR, total physical response."

During Ciko's teaching internship at a junior high school, his students had diverse language abilities and learning styles. Ciko adapted his teaching method to kinethetics learners, using physical activities to help students understand and engage better. For instance, during teaching narrative text, Ciko asked the students to express the story using gestures and movement. Ciko argued that this approach has helped his students to engage with the learning process.

Additionally, Ciko has adapted the recognition of students' cultural differences within the class because there were students from a different cultural background (Javanese), similar to Ciko's own experience. Showing empathy and respect for students who have diverse cultures and feel isolated could help the students feel accepted, and mutual understanding can decrease social exclusions based on his reflection during teaching practices. In a nutshell, Ciko's experiences in public school, particularly in adjusting to a homogenous environment, have motivated him to become a better teacher and influence his engagement with students from diverse backgrounds. The interview highlights his adaptive teaching strategies and his emphasis on creating inclusive, supportive learning environments, reflecting his personal growth and understanding of cultural differences.

Discussion

This study found that the majority of pre-service English Teachers (hereinafter PSETs) have background knowledge and experience related to diversity and multiculturalism from their early experiences with diversity, primarily from media consumption (e.g., movies, games, etc.), classmates from different backgrounds, and social interactions outside of school. These findings are aligned with prior research on PSETs' exposure to multicultural environments (Mariyono, 2024) as well as through media consumption and social (Russell & Russell, 2014). Moreover, participating in a students' exchange program has enhanced pre-service English Teachers' awareness and knowledge of multicultural contexts (Hà & Nguyễn, 2024). These experiences are effectively shaping attitudes and Multicultural efficacy.

Additionally, media exposure appears to function primarily as a low-stakes, vicarious form of contact through repeated exposure to characters and narratives from different cultural backgrounds (Bandura, 2014). PSETs accumulated various experiences that build a baseline comfort with diversity. Meeting with diverse classmates, by contrast, constitutes direct interpersonal experiences consistent with Allport's intergroup contact theory (Bigler et al., 2016), wherein repeated, sustained interaction under relatively equal-status conditions reduces prejudice and builds cultural understanding that PSETs reported. Students' exchange programs combine both mechanisms but add a further layer because they require PSETs to function and, in some cases, teach within an unfamiliar cultural setting, which constitutes experiences in Bandura's (Bandura, 1982, 2014) social learning theory, successful engagement with a culturally challenging task, which explains why their effect on awareness and confidence was reported as stronger than media or diverse classmates alone. This layered view helps explain not only that multicultural exposure shapes attitudes and efficacy, but how vicarious exposure builds baseline comfort, sustained classmate relationships build nuanced understanding, and immersive multicultural experiences build the confidence necessary to act on that understanding pedagogically.

Additionally, despite PSETs exhibiting moderate attitude (78.50%) and moderate efficacy (52.34%), based on the interview, one participant (Aby) fully integrated local cultures into lesson planning, while others focused on superficial adjustments (e.g., speech speed). This indicates that while PSETs have recognized the importance of multiculturalism, they lacked pedagogical strategies for meaningful integration, such as providing cultural reflections, a similar challenge noted by Guyton and Wesche (2005).

This finding also demonstrated an important distinction between multicultural awareness and multicultural pedagogical capability. Possessing positive perceptions

toward diversity does not automatically equip PSETs with the instructional strategies necessary to facilitate critical cultural reflection in ELT classrooms (Choephatrueedi, 2025). Although PSETs (Belinda and Ciko) recognized and respected cultural diversity but had not yet developed the pedagogical repertoire needed to transform this recognition into critical instructional practice. This is consistent with Cherng and Davis's (2017) argument that teacher education programs often cultivate multicultural awareness without equipping teachers with concrete strategies for critical pedagogical implementation. This finding, therefore, underscores the need for teacher preparation programs to move beyond cultivating cultural sensitivity alone and to explicitly model how cultural awareness can be operationalized into transformative teaching practices, for example, through guided lesson planning, case-based pedagogical training, or mentored practicum experiences focused on culturally responsive instructional design.

Correspondingly, this study demonstrated how PSETs' knowledge, attitude, and multicultural efficacy manifest in the ELT classroom. The findings further revealed that PSETs' cultural backgrounds and prior experiences have shaped their problem-solving approaches in a multicultural learning context. Hence, teacher education programs should prioritize structured multicultural experiences and intercultural competence development to better prepare PSETs for diverse classrooms (Pokhrel & Kshetree, 2024).

Although most PSETs have displayed moderate attitudes and multicultural efficacy, these foundational competencies indicated their potential for growth in culturally responsive teaching. To maximize this potential, teacher training curricula should integrate explicit pedagogical strategies for embedding local culture elements—such as those in the English for Nusantara textbook—into language instruction. Not only is this beneficial, but it also serves as a resource for them in developing authentic teaching materials that incorporate Indonesian cultural elements into English language instruction in accordance with the curriculum requirements of the Indonesian National Education System.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This study highlights pre-service English Teachers' (hereinafter, PSETs) knowledge, attitude, and multicultural efficacy in ELT classrooms. The findings revealed that most PSETs have early exposure to diversity and multiculturalism, primarily through media and social interactions, which align with previous studies. Notably, participation in student exchange programs has appeared to further their intercultural awareness and understanding of multicultural pedagogical contexts. These insights underscore the necessity of integrating multicultural experiences and intercultural competence development into teacher education programs, equipping PSETs with skills needed for culturally responsive teaching. **Implication:** The findings provide important implications for teacher education in increasingly diverse educational settings. The associations among multiculturalism experiences, attitudes, and multicultural efficacy suggest that the development of culturally responsive teachers requires more than the acquisition of knowledge about diversity; it also depends on meaningful multicultural engagement that fosters positive attitudes and confidence in working with diverse learners. Therefore, teacher education programs should intentionally integrate multicultural perspectives throughout ELT curricula, encourage critical reflection on issues of diversity and inclusion, and provide authentic opportunities for intercultural engagement through teaching practicums, service-learning activities, community partnerships, and exchange programs. It can expand

structured placements such as *Pertukaran Pelajar Merdeka* to ensure that every PSET, not only those who opt in, experiences direct teaching in a culturally diverse setting, and can build their multicultural efficacy. Additionally, in ELT curriculum design, it should embed multicultural content, for instance, requiring PSETs to develop and teach lesson units that draw on Indonesia's regional cultures. By creating learning environments that simultaneously nurture multicultural experiences, attitudes, and efficacy, teacher education institutions can better prepare PSETs to promote inclusive and equitable learning environments. **Limitation:** The researchers realized that this study has two limitations. First, the respondents consisted of only 107 pre-service English teachers from universities in West Java and three participants to be interviewed and reported, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other regions and educational contexts in Indonesia. Second, although the research design enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, this study relied substantially on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias and may not fully capture actual multicultural teaching practices or competencies. **Future Research:** Due to the limitations, future research should involve larger and more geographically diverse samples to improve the representativeness and generalizability of the findings. In addition, the follow-up research is encouraged to incorporate multiple sources of evidence, such as classroom observations, teaching portfolios, reflective journals, and mentor evaluations, to provide a more comprehensive assessment of multicultural competence in practice. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine how multiculturalism experiences, multicultural attitudes, and multicultural efficacy evolve and influence culturally responsive teaching practices and student learning outcomes. It would be particularly valuable if extended beyond the pre-service stage to track PSETs into their early years of professional teaching, capturing how multicultural efficacy continues to develop once they assume full classroom responsibility. It could also move beyond correlational analyses by employing structural equation modelling to test causal relationships among multicultural experiences, attitudes, efficacy, and culturally responsive teaching practices, thereby offering stronger explanatory evidence than the present design. Therefore, such investigations would contribute to a deeper understanding of multicultural teacher development and support the design of more effective multicultural education initiatives within ELT teacher preparation programs.

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