

# Promoting Multicultural Literacy through Learning Materials in EFL Classroom: Benefits and Challenges

Laxmi Mustika Cakrawati

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Setiabudhi 229, Bandung, Indonesia  
laxmicakrawati@student.upi.edu

**Keywords:** Multicultural literacy, learning materials, teachers' perception, EFL classroom.

**Abstract:** Multicultural education should be integrated into the classroom to cope with the changes in the global world and to foster students' multicultural awareness. Teachers can utilize learning materials to develop students' multicultural literacy. Therefore, the study tried to investigate teachers' perception on promoting multicultural literacy through learning materials and to figure out difficulties encountered in developing the materials. The data for the study were obtained from questionnaire and interview and were analyzed using mixed methods approach. The questionnaire, consisting of open-ended questions and closed-ended questions using the Likert scale, was administered to 50 teachers to find out their perceptions. Meanwhile, the interview was conducted to gain in-depth explanations of promoting multicultural literacy through English learning materials. The participants of the study have already shown high awareness on multicultural education and the importance of promoting multicultural literacy in EFL classroom. The findings of the study indicate that carefully selected teaching materials such as videos, podcast, and literary works can help teachers in promoting multicultural literacy. Thus, it is suggested that teachers should creatively choose teaching materials that not only can enhance students' language skills but also can foster their multicultural awareness.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In today's world, it is very common to see people from different races and ethnic groups live together in a society. However, living in a multicultural society is not easy. In some cases, racial prejudice and conflict between the groups may happen. Indonesia as one of the multicultural countries encounters the similar challenge. The country, which is enriched by more than 240 ethnic groups and more than 300 languages, is widely known for the national motto of "*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*" to describe the diversity in Indonesia. Nonetheless, multicultural awareness is definitely needed to prevent interethnic conflict. Interethnic conflict in the country possibly happens due to the lack of mutual understanding that can actually be developed through empowering multicultural education (Alwasilah, 2014).

Multicultural education should be integrated both in the schools and in teacher education programs to enhance students' multicultural literacy. As mentioned in one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century education framework, one of the skills that is highlighted as a core competency for learners is multicultural literacy. Multicultural literacy can be defined as the ability to

understand and appreciate the customs, values, and beliefs of one's culture and others (enGauge, 2003). Therefore, to cope with the one of the requirements of 21st skills, school as an educational institution play significant roles in promoting multicultural literacy to the students.

Integrating multicultural education can be done in various ways. One of them is through learning materials. The role of materials is essential in ensuring the teaching and learning process in the classroom can run well. Comprehension of the subject taught and meaningful learning experience can be enhanced by providing appropriate teaching materials.

Little research has been conducted on integrating multicultural education in schools through materials development, especially in the Indonesian context. Reflecting on the previous elaboration, this study intends to explore teachers' perception on promoting students' multicultural literacy through materials development and to figure out kinds of materials that can be developed to promote students' multicultural literacy.

Therefore, the issue to be discussed in this paper will be summarized in the following research questions:

1. How are teachers' perceptions on promoting multicultural literacy through learning materials?
2. What kind of materials can be developed to promote students' multicultural literacy?
3. What are the benefits and challenges of promoting multicultural literacy through learning materials?

## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

The study employed mixed method approach which enables the researcher to combine both quantitative and qualitative data. The collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data are expected to give better insight in answering research questions will be investigated in the study (Malik & Hamied, 2016). In addition, Creswell (2009) mentioned that mixed methods take advantage on the strength of both qualitative and quantitative research. The concurrent triangulation design was adopted in the study. Through the design, the researcher may concurrently gather the gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, the design allowed the researcher to examine the data to find out if there is convergence, differences, or some combination (Creswell, 2009).

### 2.2 Data Collection

The study involved 50 teachers as the participants. Questionnaire and interview were used to obtain the data for the study. The questionnaire was adapted from Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey (TMAS). The questionnaire was divided into two sections and is intended to figure out teachers' perceptions on multicultural literacy and their opinion on using learning materials as one of the ways to promote students' multicultural literacy. Meanwhile, an interview involving five teachers was conducted to gain in-depth explanation and description on promoting students' multicultural literacy.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

The data from closed-ended questionnaire were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The percentages obtained from the questionnaire were

interpreted to figure out how teachers perceive materials development as a way to promote students' multicultural literacy.

Meanwhile, to support the data from closed-ended questionnaire, the data from open-ended questionnaire were analyzed thoroughly. The data from the interview were transcribed and analyzed for repeating patterns which are related to ways in promoting students' multicultural literacy through learning materials. The data gained from the questionnaire and interview will be used to provide descriptions of teachers' perceptions on promoting students' multicultural literacy through learning materials.

## 3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Teachers' Perceptions on Promoting Multicultural Literacy

The questionnaire administered to the participants consisted of some parts. The first part is related to teachers' awareness and perceptions on students' background.

Table 1: Teachers' Awareness and Perceptions.

PART 1	N	A	SA
Teachers should have sufficient knowledge related to various social and cultural backgrounds of the students.		36%	64%
I enjoy interacting with people and students from different social and cultural background.		30%	70%
As a teacher, I can respect the differences on students' various social and cultural background.		32%	68%
I believe that various socio-cultural backgrounds should be considered in teaching and learning process.	8%	36%	56%
The more students know and understand cultural diversity, the more tolerant they will be.		26%	74%

Table 1 showed what teachers believe, think, and feel towards integrating culture in foreign language classroom. From the result of the questionnaire, it can be seen that the participants have already shown

high awareness on students' diverse social and cultural background. As mentioned in The Ministerial regulation No. 16 of the year 2007, there are four competencies should be possessed by teachers: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competences. In personal and social competences, it is clearly stated that teachers should appreciate students without distinguishing them based on their beliefs, ethnic groups, culture, region, and gender.

While 70% of the participants stated that they enjoy interacting with people and students from different social and cultural background, 64% of them strongly agreed that teachers should have sufficient knowledge related to students' background. Furthermore, 92% of the participants mentioned that they believe that various socio-cultural backgrounds should be considered in teaching and learning process because they think that the more students know and understand cultural diversity, the more tolerant they will be. The high percentages shown in agree and strongly agree categories indicate that the participants are aware of the diversity and consider multicultural literacy as a crucial issue. Similar to this finding, the previous study conducted by Kuykendall (2012) revealed that it is crucial for teachers to understand ways in promoting students' engagement to counteract cultural disharmony. Besides, by understanding students' culture, teachers can bring fair perspective to their teaching.

Table 2: Teachers' Awareness and Perceptions.

PART 1	N	A	SA
I give my students chances to share their opinion and experiences about their culture and tradition.	10%	30%	60%
I have sufficient knowledge about how teachers should teach in multicultural setting.	22%	56%	22%
Teachers' education program should prepare teacher students to teach in multicultural setting.		22%	78%
I believe that integrating culture is important in learning foreign language.	4%	26%	70%

Table 2 showed that teachers participated in the study generally have knowledge related teaching English as a foreign language in multicultural settings. The data showed that 90% of the participants tend to give their students chances to share their opinion and experiences about their

culture and tradition. They also believe that integrating culture is important in learning foreign language teaching. Therefore, they mentioned that teachers' education program should prepare teacher students to teach in multicultural settings. It is in line to the statements of Banks (1991) who states that good teacher education programs should also encourage pre-service teachers to explore their cultural identities and foster positive attitudes towards other groups in terms of their race, ethnic, or culture. In a multicultural classroom, teachers need to possess at least three major kinds of knowledge: social science knowledge or teachers' awareness on diverse cultural societies, pedagogical knowledge, and subject-matter content knowledge.

A study conducted by Sharma (2005) also indicated that training and experience in multicultural education are needed by teachers who teach in culturally diverse classrooms. The teachers also mentioned about the needs in introducing multicultural education through workshop, seminars, and presentation for practicing teachers.

Table 3: Teachers' Awareness and Perceptions.

	D	N	A	SA
Learning foreign language should be able to develop students' critical thinking towards the culture of target language, global culture, and their own culture.			22%	78%
English learning materials should be adapted and developed while considering cultural diversity in Indonesia.		4%	22%	74%
I always try to introduce the culture of target language, cultural diversity in Indonesia and other countries in English classroom.			66%	34%
I use learning materials (textbook, articles) which show socio-cultural diversity.	4%	10%	62%	24%

The following part of the questionnaire explored teachers' experience related to integrating culture in English language learning. Since 78% of the

participants strongly agreed that learning a foreign language should be able to develop students' critical thinking towards the culture of the target language, global culture, and their own culture, 96% of them agreed that English learning materials should be adapted and developed while considering cultural diversity in Indonesia. In addition, more than half of the participants often try to introduce the culture of the target language and cultural diversity in Indonesia and other countries. The data also showed that the teachers often use learning materials which portray socio-cultural diversity.

### 3.2 Materials in Promoting Multicultural Literacy

There are many cultural aspects that likely can be explored in foreign language classrooms. Table 4 showed cultural aspects that likely can be explored in foreign language classroom.

Table 4: Cultural Aspects.

Cultural aspects that can be explored in foreign language classroom:
History, geography, and governmental system 32%
Ethnic group diversity, tradition, and culture 78%
Daily life 88%
Youth and pop culture 66%
Education 56%
Tourism sites 54%
Literature 58%
Values and beliefs of the society 56%

Most of the participants think that ethnic groups' diversity, tradition, culture, and daily life customs can be interesting to be explored in language classroom. The table shows that more than 80% of the participants choose daily life as a cultural aspect that can be elaborated in the learning materials. Besides, teachers also consider other topics such as youth and pop culture, education, tourism sites and literature can be used to introduce culture.

Table 5: Activities in Introducing Culture.

Activities that can be explored in introducing culture in foreign language learning:
Lecturing 48%
Having discussion on differences and similarities in culture 74%
Having discussion on the latest issues in a country/ region 74%
Watching videos 82%
Listening to songs/ radio program 18%
Reading and discussing articles from newspaper and

magazine 52%
Reading literary works and discussing intrinsic and extrinsic value in the literary works 54%
Doing projects 34%

Related to learning activities, table 5 showed activities teachers prefer to do in the classroom related to promoting multicultural literacy. In promoting multicultural literacy during the learning process, the teachers tend to choose watching videos, having discussion on differences/ similarities in culture, and having discussion on the latest issues in a country/ region as activities that can develop students' multicultural awareness.

Table 6: Sources for Introducing Culture.

Sources that are possible to use/ explore in introducing culture in foreign language learning:
Textbook 66%
Articles from newspaper and magazine 70%
Literary works – novels, poem, folklores, drama 56%
Video and podcast 82%
Websites 68%
Realia 42%

Table 6 showed learning materials that can be explored in introducing culture and promoting multicultural literacy in the language classroom. The participants mostly chose video, podcast, articles, and literary works.

However, in preparing teaching materials, teachers should consider some criteria of good materials. Good materials should be well planned considering whether or not the materials can introduce students to the real context of the language as well as provide opportunities for students to communicate in the target language. Good learning materials also have to be able to raise students' curiosity and attention and stimulate them in terms of intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional involvement (Tomlinson, 2011).

Furthermore, related to multicultural education, in order to achieve purposes in improving students' cultural awareness, teachers are suggested to do activities such as asking students' experience related to culture, providing cultural encounters through video, songs, literature, and simulation, facilitating connections between the old and the new, stimulating multi-dimensional representation of cultural experiences, providing focused discovery activities, and contributing teachers' interpretation and personal experience related to other culture (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004).

Some participants also mentioned that they usually use legend and local folklore and discuss the value contained in the story and figure out the differences between each culture. By reading literature, students will begin to learn that there are a lot of perspectives and they should try to see other perspectives when they encounter certain problems in life (Lawson, 2013). In addition, incorporating multicultural literature can expose children to cultures, values, and tradition around the world. The knowledge about particular culture will allow them to figure out similarities between themselves and other people (Hartmann, 2011).

Two teachers also mentioned that sharing experience is a beneficial activity to promote multicultural literacy. For example, one of the teachers shared his experience when he lived in different areas in Indonesia and he also asked his students who had lived in different areas in Indonesia or abroad to share their experiences. Moreover, other activities that can be done to promote multicultural literacy is a sharing session related to customs, holidays, etiquette and doing a project such as post crossing project. According to a participant in the study, by doing post crossing, students can send their postcards and introduce Indonesian culture around the world. They also can get abundant knowledge of diverse culture through the postcards they receive from others.

### 3.3 Benefits and Challenge in Promoting Multicultural Literacy

Promoting multicultural literacy is essential in language learning classroom. The participants agree that the more students aware of differences and diversity, the more tolerant they will be. However, there are some challenges that usually encountered by teachers. Some of the participants mentioned that time is one of the challenges. Teachers usually have certain targets to accomplish during the learning classroom and sometimes, they do not have enough time to accomplish the target. Thus, if it is not well managed, some of the participants argue that integrating culture can be time-consuming. Few teachers also mentioned that selecting appropriate cultural materials are quite challenging since there are some cultural aspects that should be considered before using the materials in the classroom.

Some teachers are busy and spend much time in finding appropriate and relevant materials which are in line with learning objectives mentioned in the curriculum. Few of them even do not consider the social and cultural biases in the materials. However,

every teacher needs to be aware of their students' different background in terms of cultural, levels of proficiency, social, and economic background. Thus, teachers need to have a critical analysis on the materials they are going to give to their students by raising their own awareness and sensitivity regarding issues of cultural content in English language teaching practice (Sudartini, 2011).

## 4 CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that teachers showed positive responses on promoting multicultural literacy through learning materials. The participants have already been aware of the importance of considering students' diverse culture and background, integrating the culture into learning materials, as well as introducing the target culture. Teachers can provide learning materials through videos, podcast, articles, or even literary works. Various cultural aspects from traditional to pop and youth culture can be explored in the classroom. However, several things should be considered in choosing learning materials. Therefore, it is suggested for teachers to carefully select, adapt, and develop the learning materials.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my great appreciation for contributors in this study. Special thanks should be given to LPDP for being a sponsor for my master study. This research was also supported by LPDP (Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education).

## REFERENCES

- Alwasilah, A. C., 2014. *Islam, Culture, and Education: Essays on Contemporary Indonesia*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Banks, J. A., 1991. Teaching Multicultural Literacy to Teachers. *Teaching Education*, 4(1), pp. 133–142.
- Creswell, J. W., 2009. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- enGauge, 2003. *21st Century Skills: Literacy in the Digital Age*. Available through: [www.ncrel.org/engage](http://www.ncrel.org/engage) [Accessed 15 May 2017].
- Hartmann, L. K., 2011. *Using Multicultural Literature in the Classroom to Encourage Tolerance and Respect*. Rowan University.

- Kemdiknas, 2007. *Permendiknas No. 16 Tentang Standar Kualifikasi Akademik dan Kompetensi Guru*. Jakarta: Kemdiknas.
- Kuykendall, M., 2012. Strategies for Cultural Awareness of Teachers in Training : An Action Research Project. *Delta Journal of Education*, 2(1), pp. 27–41.
- Lawson, M., 2013. *Multicultural Literature : The Impact It Has on Today's Students*. *Education Masters*. St. John Fisher College. Available through: [http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education\\_ETD\\_masters](http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters) [Accessed 20 May 2017].
- Malik, R. S. & Hamied, F. A., 2016. *Research Methods: A Guide for First Time Researchers*. Bandung: UPI Press.
- Sharma, S., 2005. Multicultural Education: Teachers' Perceptions and Preparation. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, 2(5), pp. 53–64.
- Sudartini, S., 2011. Multicultural-Based English Language Teaching: One Way of Maintaining Nation Identity. In *2nd International Graduate Students Conference on Indonesia; Indonesia and the New Challenges: Multiculturalism, Identity, and Self Narration* (pp. 45–56). Yogyakarta: The Graduate School Universitas Gadjah Mada.
- Tomlinson, B., & Masuhara, H., 2004. Developing Cultural Awareness. *Modern English Teacher*, 13(1), pp. 5–11.
- Tomlinson, B., 2011. Introduction: principles and procedures of materials development. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. 2nd ed., pp. 1–10. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.