

STUDENTS' AND TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING ENGLISH IN A MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM AT SMAS KARYA BUDI PUTUSSIBAU

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ABSTRAK : Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis persepsi siswa dan guru mengenai pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di kelas multikultural di SMAS Karya Budi Putussibau dan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman mereka dalam proses pembelajaran. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik analisis tematik. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas dan wawancara mendalam dengan satu guru bahasa Inggris dan delapan siswa dari kelas XI A yang berasal dari latar belakang budaya yang berbeda. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa dan guru memiliki persepsi positif terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di kelas multikultural. Kelas Multikultural dipandang sebagai faktor yang menciptakan suasana pembelajaran yang lebih bervariasi, menarik, dan tidak monoton. Guru melihat kelas multikultural sebagai kesempatan untuk memperkaya pengalaman belajar siswa. Dalam praktiknya, guru menerapkan strategi pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa melalui diskusi kelompok, permainan edukatif, aktivitas interaktif, dan penggunaan bahasa lokal untuk memperkuat pemahaman siswa. Namun, penelitian ini juga menemukan beberapa tantangan, seperti perbedaan dialek, gaya komunikasi, tingkat partisipasi, dan kepercayaan diri siswa dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris, yang kadang-kadang menciptakan hambatan interaksi dan kesalahpahaman. Oleh karena itu, peran guru sangat penting dalam menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang inklusif dan nyaman yang menghargai keragaman budaya melalui penerapan strategi pengajaran yang responsif terhadap kebutuhan semua siswa.

Kata Kunci: *Kelas Multikultural, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, Persepsi Siswa, Persepsi Guru.*

ABSTRACT : This research aims to analyze the perceptions of students and teachers regarding English language learning in multicultural classes at SMAS Karya Budi Putussibau and to explore their experiences in the learning process. This study uses a qualitative approach with thematic analysis techniques. Data were collected through classroom observations and in-depth interviews with one English teacher and eight students from class XI A who come from different cultural backgrounds. The research results show that students and teachers have a positive perception of English learning in a multicultural classroom. Multicultural Classroom is seen as a factor that creates a more varied, engaging, and non-monotonous learning atmosphere. Teachers see multicultural classrooms as an opportunity to enrich students' learning experiences. In practice, the teacher implements student-centered learning strategies through group discussions, educational games, interactive activities, and the use of the local language to reinforce students' understanding. However, this study also found several challenges, such as differences in dialects, communication styles, levels of participation, and students' confidence in using English, which sometimes create interaction barriers and misunderstandings. Therefore, the role of the teacher is crucial in creating an inclusive and comfortable learning environment that appreciates cultural diversity through the implementation of teaching strategies that are responsive to the needs of all students.

Keywords: *Multicultural Classroom, English Language Learning, Student Perception, Teacher Perception.*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English has become an international language widely used in various fields, such as education, technology, business, and international relations. As a global language, English plays an important role in connecting individuals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, many countries incorporate English into their education systems as an effort to prepare students to participate in the global community (Mandasari & Wahyudin, 2021). In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and has become one of the important subjects at the secondary education level. Thru English language learning, students are expected not only to master linguistic competence but also to be able to communicate effectively in various social and cultural contexts (Gultom & Oktaviani, 2022).

Language learning cannot be separated from culture because language is the medium used to convey cultural values, meanings, and perspectives. Brown (2007) states that language and culture have a close relationship because language not only reflects culture but also shapes the way individuals think and interact. In line with this, Mayangsari *et al.*, (2018) explain that cultural understanding helps learners interpret the meaning of language more deeply and contextually. Therefore, English language learning should not only focus on mastering grammar and vocabulary but also on developing cultural understanding and cross-cultural communication skills.

The importance of cultural aspects in language learning is increasingly evident in multicultural classrooms, which are learning environments consisting of students with diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. According to Banks (2016), multicultural classrooms provide opportunities for students to interact with individuals from different cultural groups, thereby fostering attitudes of mutual respect, inclusivity, and intercultural understanding. In English language learning, this diversity can enrich the learning process thru the exchange of perspectives,

experiences, and cultural knowledge. However, cultural diversity can also present challenges, such as differences in communication styles, learning preferences, participation patterns, and social interactions in the classroom (Gayypov *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, teachers play an important role in creating an inclusive and responsive learning environment to the diversity of students.

In a multicultural learning environment, students and teachers can have different perspectives on the learning process they experience. Individual perceptions are influenced by experiences, cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs. Robbins & Judge (2013) define perception as the process by which individuals organize and interpret information to give meaning to their surroundings. In the context of education, the perceptions of students and teachers can influence motivation, participation, interaction, and the effectiveness of the learning process. Beside perception, learning experience is also an important aspect in understanding how individuals interpret the ongoing learning process. Kolb (1980) explains that learning occurs through the transformation of experiences acquired by individuals. In a multicultural classroom, the learning experience not only encompasses academic aspects but also social and cultural experiences gained thru interactions with individuals from different backgrounds. These experiences can help students develop communication skills, tolerance, empathy, and intercultural competence, which are important in learning English (Deardorff, 2020).

The context of multicultural classroom can be found at SMAS Karya Budi Putussibau, Kapuas Hulu Regency, West Kalimantan. This school consists of students from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, such as Dayak Iban, Dayak Kantuk, Dayak Taman, Dayak Kayan, Malay, and Chinese. This diversity brings various regional languages, cultural values, and social experiences into the learning environment. Based on initial observations, there is variation in the patterns of student participation and interaction during English language learning. Some students appear active in discussions and express their opinions, while others tend to be more passive and comfortable

interacting with peers who share the same cultural background. This condition shows that cultural diversity can influence the learning experience and perceptions of both students and teachers regarding the English language learning process.

Several previous studies have examined English language learning in the context of multicultural classrooms. Saharani (2023) found that multicultural classrooms can enhance students' intercultural awareness and tolerance thru interactions with peers from various cultural backgrounds. Buchs & Maradan (2021) show that cooperative learning can enhance inclusivity and student participation in multicultural classrooms. Asrianti *et al.*, (2022) highlight the integration of multicultural perspectives in English language learning materials, while Li, (2023) found that a diverse learning environment can enhance student motivation and engagement. Additionally, Nurgalynova (2024) states that the integration of culture in English language learning can enhance students' communication skills and cultural understanding. However, most previous research still focuses on learning outcomes, teaching strategies, or the challenges faced by teachers. Research that specifically explores the perceptions and learning experiences of both students and teachers simultaneously in English language learning in multicultural classrooms is still relatively limited, especially in the context of secondary schools in Indonesia with a high level of ethnic diversity.

Based on this gap, this study aims to explore the perceptions and learning experiences of students and teachers in English language learning in multicultural classes at SMAS Karya Budi Putussibau. This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in understanding how cultural diversity affects English learning experiences, while also serving as a reference for teachers and schools in developing more inclusive, effective, and responsive learning practices to the cultural diversity of students.

This research uses a qualitative descriptive design. Creswell & Poth (2018) explain that research design is a conceptual framework that systematically unites various research components so that problems can be analyzed and solved effectively. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on an in-depth exploration of the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students regarding cultural diversity in English language learning at SMAS Karya Budi Putussibau. This approach is considered relevant because it can provide a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena in the context of a multicultural classroom. McMillan & Schumacher (2014) emphasize that qualitative research is used to understand participants' perspectives on social phenomena.

The research subjects consisted of one English teacher and eight students from class XI A who come from different cultural backgrounds. Class XI A was chosen because it has a higher level of cultural diversity compared to other classes, with students from the Dayak and Chinese ethnic groups. The Dayak students in that class represent several sub-ethnic groups, namely Dayak Iban, Dayak Kayan, Dayak Taman, and Dayak Suhaid. The selection of participants was carried out using purposive sampling, which is selection based on specific considerations that align with the research objectives Tajik *et al.*, (2012). This technique allows researchers to obtain diverse perspectives on the dynamics of English language learning in multicultural classrooms. Ames *et al.*, (2019) emphasize that the limited number of participants in qualitative research provides researchers with the opportunity to conduct a more in-depth data exploration.

Data collection was conducted through interviews and classroom observations. Interviews are used to explore teachers' and students' perceptions of cultural diversity in English language learning. Creswell & Poth (2018) state that interview guidelines help researchers obtain focused data while remaining flexible in exploring participants' responses.

The interview questions focused on students' learning experiences in multicultural classrooms, teachers' strategies in addressing cultural differences, and the impact of cultural diversity on interactions and the learning atmosphere. In addition, classroom observations were conducted to obtain a direct picture of the learning dynamics. Creswell (2012) emphasizes that observation allows researchers to directly observe behavior, interactions, and social situations within the context of the study.

Research instruments include interview guides and field notes. The interview guide is used to maintain the consistency of questions, while field notes serve to record activities, interactions, and situations that occur during observations. To ensure data validity, the research instruments are consulted with competent validators so that the questions and indicators align with the research objectives. Taherdoost (2018) emphasizes that content validity aims to ensure that the research instrument can represent the concept being studied in a relevant and comprehensive manner.

The interview and observation data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected because it enables researchers to identify, organize, and interpret recurring patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, the analysis was also informed by the concept of perception proposed by Robbins & Judge (2013) and the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions discussed by Detha et al., (2021). These theoretical perspectives were used as interpretive lenses to understand how participants' thoughts, feelings, and behavioral responses shaped their perceptions of learning English in a multicultural classroom.

The analysis followed several stages according to Heriyanto, (2018). First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts and observation notes. Second, relevant statements were identified and assigned initial codes. Third, related codes were grouped into broader categories and potential themes. Fourth, the researcher reviewed the

themes by comparing them with the interview data and observation findings to ensure that each theme represented a consistent pattern in the dataset. Fifth, the themes were defined and named based on their central meanings. Finally, the researcher interpreted the themes by relating the findings to the theoretical framework and relevant previous studies.

List of Interview Questions

a. Student Interview Questions:

1. What do you think about multicultural classroom ?
2. In your opinion, does multicultural classroom have a more positive or negative impact on learning? Why?
3. Does multicultural classroom affect the way you participate in English learning?
4. How does multicultural classroom affect the way you interact with your classmates?
5. Does multicultural classroom affect your understanding of English learning materials? Explain.
6. Have you ever experienced a situation in which cultural difference made learning English difficult or gave you a new learning experience? Please describe the experience and how you dealt with it.
7. What is the teacher's role in helping you understand and appreciate multicultural classroom?
8. Do you feel more confident or less confident in learning English because of multicultural classroom? Why?
9. What benefits do you experience from learning in a multicultural classroom ?
10. What are your suggestions for making English learning in a multicultural classroom more comfortable and enjoyable?

Aspects of Perception	Indicators	Item Numbers	Total of Items
Cognitive Aspect	Students' understanding, knowledge, and views about learning English in a multicultural classroom and its influence on the learning process	1, 2, 3, 4	4
Affective Aspect	Students' feelings, emotional responses, and experiences while learning English in a multicultural classroom	5, 6, 8	3
Conative Aspect	Students' confidence, behavioral tendencies, expectations, and suggestions related to learning English in a multicultural classroom	7, 9, 10	3
Total		1–10	10

Source: Adapted from Detha et al., (2021)

b. Teacher Interview Questions:

1. What is your view of multicultural classroom ?
2. In your opinion, does multicultural classroom have a more positive or negative impact on learning? Why?
3. How do students' multicultural classroom affect their participation in English learning?
4. How does multicultural classroom affect interactions between students and teachers and among students?
5. Does multicultural classroom affect students' understanding of English learning materials? Explain.
6. What challenges do you face when teaching a class with diverse cultural backgrounds?

7. What strategies do you use to manage multicultural classroom so that learning remains effective?
8. How do you create a fair and inclusive classroom environment for all students?
9. Can you provide a specific example of when multicultural classroom affected the learning process in the classroom?
10. In your opinion, what is the most important thing a teacher should do when managing a multicultural classroom ?

Aspects of Perception	Indicators	Item Numbers	Total of Items
Cognitive Aspect	Teachers' understanding, knowledge, and views about teaching English in a multicultural classroom and its influence on the learning process	1-5	5
Affective Aspect	Teachers' feelings, experiences, and challenges in teaching English in a multicultural classroom	6, 9	2
Conative Aspect	Teachers' strategies, roles, actions, and expectations in managing a multicultural classroom	7, 8, 10	3
Total		1–10	10

Source: Adapted from Detha et al., (2021)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Students' Perceptions and Learning Experiences of learning english in a Multicultural Classroom

The findings revealed five main themes concerning students' perceptions and experiences: positive perceptions, challenges, influence on the learning process, influence on understanding English materials, and benefits of multicultural English learning.

a. Positive Perceptions

Students generally viewed the multicultural classroom positively. They reported that cultural differences made the classroom more lively and provided opportunities to learn different perspectives, customs, and ways of thinking.

“Multicultural classroom in the English class makes the classroom atmosphere more lively and enjoyable. With the diverse cultural backgrounds among the students, the learning process not only focuses on English language material but also opens opportunities to understand other people's perspectives.” (Student 1)

This finding can be understood through Robbins & Judge (2013) view of perception as a process of interpreting experiences and giving meaning to the surrounding environment. Students interpreted cultural differences as learning resources rather than merely as differences among classmates. The finding is consistent with Deli & Allo (2018), who found that multicultural classroom can create a more interactive and meaningful EFL learning environment. It also supports Kolb (1980) experiential learning perspective, as students gained knowledge through direct interaction and classroom experiences.

b. Challenges in the Multicultural Classrom Despite these positive perceptions, students experienced communication barriers, fear of misunderstanding, and reduced confidence when interacting with classmates from different backgrounds.

“I often feel more anxious when speaking because I am afraid of offending or causing misunderstandings with my friends. This is because there are some words or phrases that sound the same but have different meanings in each region.” (Student 3)

Some students became more careful when speaking because particular words or expressions could have different meanings across cultural or linguistic backgrounds. This finding reflects the cognitive-affective relationship in perception: students recognized linguistic differences

cognitively, experienced uncertainty affectively, and responded by adjusting their communication behavior. The finding is consistent with Alisoy (2024) and Hossain (2024), who explain that mother-tongue and cultural backgrounds can influence pronunciation, communication styles, and learners' adaptation to English.

c. Influence on the learning process

Multicultural Classroom also influenced students' participation and interaction. Some students were active in discussions, while others were more reserved.

“Multicultural classroom influences the way I participate in learning. This can be seen from the different characteristics of students, where some are more active in speaking while others are quieter. These differences are influenced by their cultural backgrounds, so the way students participate in class becomes diverse.” (Student 3)

Students reported that different cultural habits influenced their willingness to speak and required them to adapt to classroom interaction. However, observations showed that students were able to collaborate, respect different opinions, and help classmates during learning activities. This supports Weda et al., (2022), who found that interaction in culturally diverse EFL classrooms can contribute to communication and cooperation. Thus, cultural differences influenced participation patterns but also created opportunities for students to develop adaptive communication.

d. Understanding English materials

Students reported that multicultural classroom were particularly relevant when English materials contained unfamiliar cultural contexts, such as Western customs, celebrations, idioms, or implied meanings.

“Multicultural classroom can influence my understanding of English language material. This is because English often carries Western cultural contexts, such as certain terms, celebrations like Halloween, or specific idioms.” (Student 8)

In contrast, cultural differences were less problematic when students dealt with basic grammar or vocabulary. This indicates that the influence of culture was more apparent in understanding contextual meaning than in understanding language structures. Hossain (2024) emphasizes that cultural knowledge is important in interpreting and using a target language. Group discussions also helped students clarify unfamiliar cultural meanings, showing that cultural diversity could simultaneously create comprehension difficulties and provide resources for solving them.

e. Benefits of Learning English in a Multicultural Classroom

Students identified increased tolerance, broader knowledge, greater confidence, empathy, and readiness to interact with people from different backgrounds as important benefits.

“The benefits I experience are becoming more tolerant and more prepared to appreciate differences in the outside world. Since Kalimantan itself has many cultural and traditional differences, learning in a diverse class makes me feel more prepared to face a wider environment.” (Student 1)

These findings reflect the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of perception: students gained cultural knowledge, developed positive attitudes toward differences, and became more willing to interact with others.

This is consistent with Deardorff (2020) concept of intercultural competence and Saharani (2023), who found that interaction in multicultural EFL classrooms can support intercultural awareness. Therefore, the benefits of multicultural English learning extended beyond language knowledge to students’ social and intercultural development.

b. Teacher's Perceptions and Experiences of teaching english in a Multicultural Classroom

Three main themes emerged from the teacher's data: positive perceptions, teaching strategies, and challenges in managing the multicultural classroom.

a. Positive Perception

The teacher viewed multicultural classroom as an interesting and valuable aspect of the English classroom. According to the teacher, differences in linguistic and cultural backgrounds made classroom interaction more varied and sometimes created a relaxed atmosphere.

“My view on multicultural classroom is quite interesting because the students come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. With this diversity, the classroom atmosphere feels unique and the learning activities become more vibrant.” (SH)

The teacher also emphasized fairness and equal opportunities for students regardless of their backgrounds. This finding reflects Robbins & Judge (2013) view that perception is influenced by how individuals interpret their experiences. It is consistent with Liu (2022) and Weda et al., (2022), who emphasize the importance of positive and inclusive teacher attitudes in supporting student participation in multicultural classrooms.

b. Teaching strategies in a Multicultural Classroom

To accommodate differences among students, the teacher used games, group discussions, collaborative activities, culturally neutral examples, cultural-sharing activities, and local-language translation when necessary.

“The strategy I use is to create an engaging learning atmosphere, such as using various types of games. In this way, students become more active and learning can take place more effectively and enjoyably.” (SH)

The teacher also acted as a facilitator rather than dominating classroom interaction. These practices represent the conative dimension of perception because the teacher responded to classroom diversity through concrete instructional actions. The use of collaborative learning is consistent with Buchs & Maradan (2021), while the use of engaging activities is supported by Hafis et al., (2018) and by Sahrawi et al., (2024). These strategies helped create opportunities for participation, interaction, and mutual support among students.

c. Teacher Challenges in Managing a Multicultural Classroom

The teacher identified differences in dialect, pronunciation, communication styles, English proficiency, and participation as major challenges.

“The main challenge I face is related to the students’ dialects. Some students have a strong influence from their mother tongue, while there are also students who are already able to pronounce English better.” (SH)

Mother-tongue influence was particularly visible during English reading activities, as some students could adapt their pronunciation more easily than others. This finding is consistent with Alisoy (2024), who explains that linguistic backgrounds can influence pronunciation and communication, and Hossain (2024), who highlights the influence of cultural and linguistic backgrounds on learners’ adaptation to English. Differences in proficiency also required the teacher to provide additional explanations and adjust teaching strategies. Thus, the teacher’s experience shows that multicultural English learning involves both opportunities and challenges and requires flexible and inclusive classroom management.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to understand the perceptions of students and teachers regarding English language learning in multicultural classrooms and to explore students' learning experiences in such

environments at SMAS Karya Budi Putussibau. The research results indicate that students and teachers generally have a positive perception of English language learning in multicultural classrooms. Students view the learning environment as more engaging and meaningful because it provides opportunities to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds, exchange ideas, broaden their horizons, and improve their English communication skills. Teachers also see multicultural classrooms as a resource that can enrich classroom interactions and support the creation of more inclusive and interactive learning.

Additionally, this study found that students gain various benefits while also facing several challenges in learning English in a multicultural classroom. Differences in language backgrounds, communication styles, pronunciation, and levels of English proficiency sometimes cause difficulties in communication and participation during the learning process. However, these challenges also encourage students to develop adaptation skills, enhance intercultural understanding, and build confidence in communication. To overcome these challenges, teachers implement various flexible and interactive learning strategies, such as group discussions, games, and the use of local languages to aid students' understanding.

Based on these findings, English language learning in multicultural classrooms not only contributes to the development of language skills but also enhances students' English communication skills, tolerance, adaptability, and intercultural competence. Therefore, teachers are expected to continue developing inclusive and adaptive teaching strategies to support active participation and create more meaningful learning experiences for all students.

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