

LEARNING ENGLISH MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM: READING EXPERIENCE AND STRATEGIES OF EFL STUDENTS AT MTS NEGERI 2 PONTIANAK

Putri Nisrina Rahadatul 'Aisy¹, Maliquil Hafis², Sahrawi³

^{1,2,3}(English Education Study Program, University of PGRI Pontianak, Indonesia)

ririnrin283@gmail.com¹

maliquilwiya@gmail.com²

awihasanah@gmail.com³

ABSTRAK: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelaah pengalaman membaca siswa EFL di kelas multikultural serta mengidentifikasi strategi membaca yang mereka gunakan dalam kegiatan membaca bahasa Inggris di MTs Negeri 2 Pontianak. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan analisis tematik. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan seorang guru bahasa Inggris dan lima belas siswa kelas VIII dari latar belakang budaya yang beragam, serta dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa umumnya memiliki pengalaman membaca yang positif di kelas multikultural. Keberagaman budaya menciptakan suasana belajar yang lebih menarik, interaktif, dan inklusif, sehingga siswa dapat bertukar ide, menghargai perspektif budaya yang berbeda, serta memperluas wawasan mereka. Namun, siswa juga menghadapi tantangan, terutama dalam memahami kosakata asing dan referensi budaya yang terdapat dalam teks bahasa Inggris. Untuk mengatasi kesulitan tersebut, siswa menerapkan berbagai strategi membaca, termasuk strategi kognitif (misalnya mengidentifikasi ide pokok dan menafsirkan makna kata melalui konteks), strategi metakognitif (seperti membaca ulang teks dan memantau pemahaman), serta strategi penunjang (misalnya menggunakan kamus, aplikasi terjemahan, dan meminta bantuan guru maupun teman sebaya). Diskusi kelas juga berperan penting dalam meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan dengan mendorong kolaborasi dan pertukaran gagasan. Dengan demikian, kelas multikultural tidak hanya memberikan pengalaman membaca yang bermakna, tetapi juga mendukung pengembangan strategi membaca yang efektif untuk memperkuat pemahaman dan keterlibatan siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

Keywords: Kelas Multikultural, Pengalaman Membaca, Strategi Membaca, Siswa EFL, Pembelajaran . Bahasa Inggris

ABSTRACT: This study aims to examine the reading experiences of EFL students in a multicultural classroom and identify the reading strategies they employ during English reading activities at MTs Negeri 2 Pontianak. The study utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach involving thematic analysis. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with an English teacher and fifteen eighth-grade students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and



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documentation. The findings indicate that students generally have positive reading experiences in the multicultural classroom. Cultural diversity fosters a more engaging, interactive, and inclusive learning atmosphere, enabling students to exchange ideas, appreciate diverse cultural perspectives, and broaden their horizons. However, students also face challenges, particularly regarding the comprehension of unfamiliar vocabulary and cultural references within English texts. To overcome these difficulties, students employ various reading strategies, including cognitive strategies (e.g., identifying main ideas and inferring word meanings from context), metacognitive strategies (such as rereading texts and monitoring comprehension), and support strategies. Class discussions also play a crucial role in enhancing reading comprehension by encouraging collaboration and the exchange of ideas. Thus, the multicultural classroom not only provides meaningful reading experiences but also supports the development of effective reading strategies that strengthen students' comprehension and engagement in English language learning.

Keywords: Multicultural Classroom, Reading Experience, Reading Strategies, EFL Students, English Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

English has become an international language that plays an essential role in education, science, technology, and global communication. As globalization continues to increase interactions among people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, English has become one of the most important subjects taught in Indonesian schools. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, students are expected to develop four fundamental language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, reading is regarded as one of the most essential because it enables learners to obtain information, broaden knowledge, and improve language proficiency. Reading is not merely recognizing written symbols but also an active process of constructing meaning by connecting textual information with readers' prior knowledge and experiences (Grabe & Fredricka, 2019).

Reading experiences are influenced by various factors, including students' language proficiency, background knowledge, motivation, and learning environment. Students engage



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with texts differently depending on how they interpret information, relate ideas to their personal experiences, and employ reading strategies to overcome comprehension difficulties. During reading activities, learners often apply different strategies, such as identifying main ideas, rereading difficult passages, predicting meanings, using contextual clues, monitoring comprehension, and discussing texts with peers. These experiences and strategies contribute significantly to successful English language learning because they shape students' understanding of texts and support the development of independent reading skills (Li, 2024; Teng, 2023).

In addition to individual differences, the classroom environment also influences students' reading experiences. One learning environment that has received increasing attention is the multicultural classroom. A multicultural classroom consists of students from diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and social backgrounds who learn together within the same educational setting. Such diversity enriches classroom interaction by bringing different perspectives, experiences, and cultural values into the learning process. According to Banks (2020), multicultural education encourages students to appreciate diversity while promoting equal learning opportunities for all learners. In English language learning, multicultural classrooms allow students to interact with different cultural perspectives, which may influence how they interpret reading materials and develop reading strategies.

MTs Negeri 2 Pontianak represents a multicultural educational environment where students come from various cultural backgrounds, particularly Malay, Javanese, Bugis, and Sundanese communities. These cultural differences create diverse learning experiences during English reading activities. Some students can easily relate reading texts to their personal and



cultural experiences, whereas others encounter difficulties when reading unfamiliar topics, vocabulary, or cultural contexts presented in English texts. Consequently, students' cultural backgrounds may shape both their reading experiences and the strategies they employ to facilitate comprehension.

Previous studies have explored multicultural education, reading strategies, and English language learning from different perspectives. Zhang (2024) reported that students' reading experiences developed through classroom interaction and meaning-making activities. Li (2024) found that EFL learners commonly employ cognitive, metacognitive, and support strategies to improve reading comprehension, while cultural background and learning environment influence strategy selection. Likewise, Nigar and Kostogriz (2024) emphasized that multicultural classrooms promote intercultural interaction, collaboration, and cultural awareness, whereas Vromans et al. (2023) highlighted that multicultural learning environments enhance empathy and intercultural competence despite communication challenges. Furthermore, Khonamri (2024) demonstrated that collaborative reading activities increase students' motivation and engagement in reading.

Although these studies have provided valuable insights into reading strategies and multicultural learning, limited research has specifically explored how EFL students experience reading activities and employ reading strategies within multicultural classrooms at the junior secondary school level in Indonesia. Most previous studies focus either on reading strategies or multicultural education separately, leaving insufficient understanding of how students' multicultural learning experiences shape their reading processes in English classrooms.



Moreover, research conducted in MTs Negeri 2 Pontianak remains very limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore the reading experiences of EFL students in multicultural classrooms and identify the reading strategies they employ during English learning at MTs Negeri 2 Pontianak. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of English language teaching by providing insights into students' reading experiences in culturally diverse classrooms and offering practical implications for designing more inclusive and effective reading instruction that accommodates learners from different cultural backgrounds.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the reading experiences and reading strategies of EFL students in a multicultural classroom at MTs Negeri 2 Pontianak. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors within their natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The study focused on describing how students experienced English reading activities and the strategies they used to facilitate comprehension in a culturally diverse classroom. The participants consisted of fifteen eighth-grade students and one English teacher at MTs Negeri 2 Pontianak. The student participants were selected using purposive sampling because they represented diverse cultural backgrounds, including Malay, Javanese, Bugis, and Sundanese. The English teacher participated as a supporting informant to provide additional information regarding classroom practices, students' reading activities, and the implementation of English instruction in a multicultural learning environment.



Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations were conducted to identify students' participation, interaction, and engagement during English reading activities. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with both students and the English teacher to obtain in-depth information regarding students' reading experiences, challenges, and reading strategies. Documentation, including lesson plans, English reading materials, and classroom learning documents, was used to support and validate the findings obtained from observations and interviews.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through data triangulation by comparing findings from observations, interviews, and documentation. Dependability and confirmability were maintained by documenting the research process systematically, while transferability was achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participants.

The collected data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis. The analysis followed six stages: (1) familiarizing with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and observation notes, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for potential themes, (4) reviewing the identified themes, (5) defining and naming the themes, and (6) producing the final report. This analytical approach enabled the researcher to identify meaningful patterns related to students' reading experiences and reading strategies in multicultural English classrooms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Students' Reading Experiences in Multicultural Classrooms



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The findings revealed that students generally experienced English reading positively in a multicultural classroom. The learning environment encouraged students to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds, exchange ideas, and participate actively during reading activities. Most participants stated that classroom discussions became more interesting because they could hear different perspectives and relate the reading texts to their own experiences. Classroom observations also showed that students collaborated effectively during group discussions and demonstrated active participation when answering reading comprehension questions.

These findings indicate that multicultural classrooms create meaningful learning experiences by encouraging collaboration and intercultural interaction. Students not only developed reading comprehension but also learned to appreciate different perspectives while discussing English texts. This finding supports Banks (2020), who states that multicultural education promotes inclusive learning environments where cultural diversity becomes an educational resource. Similarly, Nieto (2021) explains that multicultural classrooms encourage students to respect diversity while creating meaningful learning experiences through interaction with peers from different cultural backgrounds.

Despite these positive experiences, students also encountered several challenges. Most participants reported difficulties in understanding unfamiliar English vocabulary and cultural references presented in reading texts. Stories containing foreign traditions, customs, or social situations were sometimes difficult to understand because they differed from students' own cultural backgrounds. As a result, students occasionally required additional explanations from



This finding is consistent with Grabe and Fredricka (2019), who argue that reading comprehension depends not only on linguistic knowledge but also on readers' background knowledge and prior experiences. When students are unfamiliar with the cultural context of a text, comprehension becomes more difficult because they cannot easily connect new information with existing knowledge. Nevertheless, collaborative classroom discussions enabled students to negotiate meaning and improve comprehension. Similar findings were reported by Zhang (2024), who found that classroom interaction contributes significantly to students' reading experiences and meaning-making processes.

2. Reading Strategies Employed by EFL Students

The findings also revealed that students employed various reading strategies during English reading activities. These strategies can be categorized into cognitive, metacognitive, and support strategies. Students commonly identified the main ideas of each paragraph, reread difficult passages, predicted meanings from contextual clues, summarized important information, and connected new information with their prior knowledge. In addition, they monitored their comprehension while reading and evaluated their understanding after completing reading tasks. Students also relied on support strategies, including dictionaries, translation applications, teacher explanations, and peer discussions. These resources helped them overcome unfamiliar vocabulary and difficult concepts while increasing their confidence during reading activities. Classroom observations confirmed that students frequently discussed difficult passages with



classmates before answering comprehension questions, indicating that collaborative learning became an important component of their reading process.

The use of multiple reading strategies demonstrates that students actively regulated their learning rather than depending solely on teacher explanations. Cognitive strategies enabled students to process textual information, whereas metacognitive strategies helped them monitor and evaluate their comprehension. Support strategies further facilitated understanding by providing additional learning resources. These findings are consistent with Li (2024), who reported that EFL learners employ cognitive, metacognitive, and support strategies to improve reading comprehension. Likewise, Teng (2023) emphasizes that metacognitive awareness enables students to become more independent readers because they can plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning processes.

Overall, the findings suggest that multicultural classrooms provide opportunities for students to develop both intercultural awareness and effective reading strategies. Through interaction with classmates from different cultural backgrounds, students not only improved their understanding of English texts but also strengthened collaboration, communication, and respect for diversity. Therefore, English teachers should integrate culturally responsive teaching practices and explicit reading strategy instruction to support students' reading development in multicultural learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the reading experiences and reading strategies of EFL students in



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multicultural classrooms at MTs Negeri 2 Pontianak. The findings indicate that students generally had positive reading experiences in a culturally diverse learning environment. Multicultural classrooms encouraged active participation, collaboration, and interaction among students from different cultural backgrounds, allowing them to exchange perspectives and develop greater intercultural awareness. However, students also encountered challenges, particularly in understanding unfamiliar English vocabulary and cultural references contained in reading texts. The study further revealed that students employed a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, and support strategies to facilitate reading comprehension. Cognitive strategies, such as identifying main ideas, rereading difficult passages, and using contextual clues, helped students process textual information. Metacognitive strategies enabled students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own comprehension, while support strategies, including the use of dictionaries, translation applications, teacher guidance, and peer discussions, assisted students in overcoming reading difficulties.

Overall, the findings suggest that multicultural classrooms provide meaningful opportunities for developing both reading competence and intercultural understanding. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to implement culturally responsive teaching practices, integrate collaborative reading activities, and explicitly teach reading strategies to enhance students' comprehension and engagement in English learning. Although this study was limited to one junior secondary school and a relatively small number of participants, it provides valuable insights into English reading instruction in multicultural EFL contexts and may serve as a reference for future studies conducted in different educational settings.



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lanternsasing@gmail.uniflor.ac.id

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