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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS BETWEEN INDONESIA AND GHANA IN ELT

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ABSTRACT

The globalization of education and increasingly multicultural nature of the classroom, English teachers must develop intercultural awareness and competence. However, comparative studies that specifically focus on the experiences of foreign English teachers are limited. Thus, the research aims to investigate and compare the similarities and differences of the intercultural awareness and practices of Indonesian and Ghanaian English teachers in the context of English language teaching. As well as the strategies of teaching materials and techniques they employ to promote intercultural understanding among their students. This research used qualitative methods within the framework of a comparative study design and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The participants were 2 EFL teachers from Ghana and Indonesia. The researcher analyzed it to identify patterns by organizing, coding and summarizing the data into themes. The study's findings indicated the critical importance of integrating intercultural awareness in English teaching, emphasizing the recognition and value of cultural diversity. This motivates teachers to foster an inclusive, tolerant environment using culturally appropriate teaching materials and techniques, ensuring all students feel valued. The Ghanaian teacher in international schools promotes global cultural acceptance or called as intercultural awareness, blending diverse cultures into lessons, while the Indonesian teacher prioritizes local culture or basic cultural awareness in English teaching. However, this research has limitations on the application of integration, teaching materials and techniques in intercultural awareness in English language teaching. So that future research can explore these aspects more broadly and varied.

Keywords: *Intercultural Awareness; EFL teachers; Cultural diversity; Teaching materials; Teaching techniques*

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century where multicultural societies are increasingly developing, people from different cultures struggle to fulfil the expectations of others and change the way they perceive the world. Respecting cultural identities "from a distance" and cohabitation alone are not enough to define interculturalism. The goal of the intercultural approach is to foster communication and mutual learning among various socio-cultural groups so that they can collaborate for the betterment of society as a whole (Elias & Mansouri, 2020, p. 495). Interculturalism has emerged to understand intercultural dialogue among people from different cultures and help them live peacefully in cultural fusion. The aim is to encourage

intercultural communication and support people from different cultural backgrounds to have better coexistence (Damaschin, 2017). One of the main goals of teacher education, which it should strive to achieve lies in training culturally competent practitioners who will become intercultural speakers/intermediaries in the classroom. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers, who have the responsibility of teaching English and how to communicate effectively using the language, to develop their intercultural competence. In this regard, calls to expand teachers' knowledge from subject knowledge and teaching techniques to include intercultural education have begun in the field of education worldwide (Echcharfy, 2022, p. 100).

By encouraging intercultural language instruction, teachers are now seen as having a more significant impact on language learners' intercultural learning journeys. Language teachers are now held accountable for teaching their students to comprehend the world around them, to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and to participate actively at many levels in the global community (Z Tajeddin, A Rezanejad, 2018 p. 80). This is because the intercultural dimension of language pedagogy demands teachers who are prepared to educate learners who can handle general intercultural communications and improve the overall quality of “human life” in the world (J Jackson, 2019).

Based on the previously stated background, this study attempts to answer the following questions; 1) What are the similarities of experiences and practices among Indonesian and Ghanaian English teachers in English Language Teaching? 2) What are the differences of experiences and practices among Indonesian and Ghanaian English teachers in English language teaching? Therefore, the objectives of this study are as follows: 1) To find out the similarities of experiences and practices among Indonesian and Ghanaian English teachers in English Language Teaching. 2) To find out the differences of experiences and practices among Indonesian and Ghanaian English teachers in English Language Teaching.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Intercultural Awareness

These twelve components attempt to build on the common features of cultural awareness, especially those identified by Byram (1997), and extend this to the more fluid conceptions of intercultural communication through English (Baker, 2022, p. 44). It is crucial to be interested in other cultures, to respect them, to strive to understand them, and to learn how to approach them patiently in the modern era when diverse peoples, languages, and civilizations are becoming more interconnected (Steers, Osland, Szkudlarek, 2023; Cai & Sankaran, 2015). Being able to comprehend and interact in an intercultural context is essential for learning a language success. Intercultural competence refers to an individual's capacity to communicate and engage with members of different cultures in an appropriate and successful manner, as well as their ability to adjust to new situations and settings (Shohidova, 2023). Therefore, teachers are expected to help and prepare their students to be interculturally competent so that they can communicate in various backgrounds in multilingual and multinational societies (Bousslama & Bouhass Benaissi, 2018; Mostafaei Alaei & Nosrati, 2018).

Teaching Materials and Techniques

In integrating intercultural awareness in the classroom, the teachers should use a diversity of contextualized language input the language that is carried out through content and meaningful situations in the classroom to provide their students a higher opportunity of internalizing and using a variety of language structures. That is, teachers should teach the language through meaningful (authentic) materials and hands-on classroom activities (tasks) (Ali Alghamdi et al., 2019). Literary texts that more directly reflect experiences of cultural participation can help raise this kind of understanding in learners (Pulverness & Tomlinson, 2003). According to Durant (1997) literature is a very effective source of cultural material. Based on previous research has proven that learning English through cultural literacy involves reading social surroundings, including unjust and unequal practices, which is facilitated through literary and critical thinking (Pattiwael & Id, 2019). Intercultural classroom was achieved through collaborative work. The students learned to

identify their own strengths and weaknesses and they said that the collaborative tasks helped them become more reflective and critical (Yaacob et al., 2020). According to Arif and Jusuf (2022) showed the lecturers recognized the importance of integrating culture into FL classes through various strategies and methods. Their statements included the following: However, they are often forced to follow the pre-prepared textbook activities and activities for the textbook as they have little time in class to address cultural issues due to the high expectations of the syllabus.

The Role of Teacher in Intercultural Awareness

An important educational implication relates to intercultural awareness. If English language teaching aims to equip learners in intercultural communication, this needs to be translated into pedagogy. For intercultural communication, the competence of successful multilingual and multicultural communicators is necessary, as in the foreign language context in relation to English as lingua franca (ELF). Intercultural awareness can be seen as an important part of this multilingual and multicultural competence (Baker, 2011). The intercultural of learners depends on teachers intercultural (Elena, 2014). This means that teachers have to change their traditional profile in terms of attitudes towards teaching/learning, classroom practices, beliefs and behaviors. Language educators' role is to prepare language learners for meaningful communication outside their own cultural setting and to develop in language learners a sense of themselves as mediators between languages and cultures. Teachers who teach in classrooms are both experience intercultural and multicultural situations. Then the teacher not only helps students in facilitating communication but also incorporates a pleasant culture. Tips for teaching culture to teachers, direct training in designing lessons and activities related to identifying culture, investigating nonverbal communication (Ponce Durán, 2013), establishing social identity, dealing with culture shock, and a challenge to connect intercultural learning with social responsibility (Brown, 2004, p. 198-200).

METHODOLOGY

This research used a qualitative method within a comparative study design study framework. Qualitative research is a research approach that begins with assumptions and

the use of interpretive / theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems that address the meanings ascribed by individuals or groups in social or human problems (Creswell, 2013, p. 44 in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.35). The comparative study design allows researcher to involve carefully selecting and comparing a small number of meaningful case studies which is often applied when looking for patterns of similarities and differences, explaining continuity and change (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). The sampling technique for this research was purposive sampling or judgmental, so that individuals are selected because they have experienced the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). Semi-structured interviews have shown to be adaptable and flexible, which is why they are an often-utilized data collection technique in qualitative research. It has a rigid structure that can be varied depending on the research objectives and research questions (Kimura & Middlecamp, 2017). Therefore, the researcher chose the semi-structured interview so that research participants are encouraged to explain their views in detail. Open-ended questions are used to explore personal experiences and perspectives on the exploring intercultural awareness in English language teaching.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research obtained several data from the research questions. The first finding related to EFL teachers' similarities of experiences and practices among Indonesian and Ghanaian English teachers in English language teaching, and the second related to EFL teachers' differences of experiences and practices among Indonesian and Ghanaian English teachers in English language teaching. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two English teachers, an English teacher in Indonesia and an English teacher in Ghana. The researcher used two methods to conduct the interviews: online interview via Zoom meeting and offline interviews through face-to-face.

EFL teachers' similarities of experiences and practices among Indonesian and Ghanaian English teachers in English language teaching

Based on the interview results regarding the integration of intercultural awareness in English language teaching. It revealed that EFL teachers in Ghana and in Indonesia integrated intercultural awareness in English language teaching as an important element

that must be recognized and valued in the teaching and learning process. In line with previous research, the teachers showed a willingness to demonstrate favorable attitudes towards cultural diversity, develop cross-cultural knowledge and improve skills needed in intercultural encounters (Echcharfy, 2022). Understanding and appreciating cultural diversity not only enriches the learning experience, but also encourages tolerance and empathy among students. As expressed by an international school teacher in Ghana, as follows:

“We have many students that come from the African South region, some from outside of Africa, continents like America, Britain, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey. So, basically, what we do as teachers is that we bring our culture. We do something called marrying of the various cultures... By doing that, we get to respect their culture, learn something we didn't know about them, and appreciate that the world is much bigger than what they know within their cultural settings.” (U)

The results showed the value of recognizing and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds of students in the classroom. By incorporating elements of intercultural awareness, teachers foster an environment where students can learn from each other's unique experiences and perspectives. Similarly, the previous studies the English teachers need to help the students not only master the English language, but also develop empathy and understanding for the cultural diversity around them (Bouslama & Bouhass Benaissi, 2018; Mostafaei Alaei & Nosrati, 2018). This is equally expressed by an English teacher in Indonesia with the initials REP, who expresses the importance of cultural integration in language learning, as follows:

“Cultural integration is very important to be taught in class. Especially for students who are in the senior high school. They should already understand and know about our cultural diversity. There are many different characters in the class, and different customs. So, students really have to know the integration of knowledge about culture or our own culture.” (REP)

This highlights the necessity of teaching cultural integration, particularly for students who need to understand and appreciate the rich cultural diversity that surrounds them. By

acknowledging the various characteristics and customs present in the classroom, the teacher can create a more inclusive and respectful learning environment. The results were relevant to the previous studies it is crucial to be interested in other cultures, to respect them, to strive to understand them, and to learn how to approach them patiently in the modern era when diverse peoples, languages, and civilizations are becoming more interconnected (Steers, Osland, Szkudlarek, 2023; Cai & Sankaran, 2015).

The similarity between the Indonesian and Ghanaian teachers showed in teaching materials in presenting intercultural awareness in English language teaching using literary text through descriptive text. According to Durant's (1997) theory that literature is a very effective source of cultural material. In line with the previous study both teachers used cultural literacy because it enables students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own to fosters acceptance of differences and helps students realize how they function within various cultural contexts (Pattiwael & Id, 2019), as the Indonesian and Ghanaian teachers' state:

“For example, in English materials, there are many examples of descriptive text, recount, report, I always give examples of Indonesia's diversity. For example, cultural customs, wonderful Indonesia, customs in Minangkabau. The students have to know various kinds of diversity. For example, in descriptive text, they have to describe a place in Indonesia.” (REP)

“Yes, we use a different setting. For example, in descriptive writing, students are able to describe what they are familiar with. We are comfortable allowing students to describe their hometown, community, or how their favorite food is prepared. This way, they are comfortable and we also learn more about them as they describe what they know well.” (U)

This text focuses on creating a clear and vivid picture so that the reader can imagine the object being described. With this opportunity, the teacher can make the cultural diversity that exists in various regions in Indonesia as the object of descriptive text. As it is known that the students come from different countries, so the descriptive text is used by the teacher to stimulate students to introduce their origins such as their hometowns, or their customs and even their traditional food. This indirectly formed intercultural awareness

between one student and another and formed curiosity.

Regarding the teaching techniques in intercultural awareness in English language teaching the teachers showed a similarity technique through collaborative work. Similarly, the Yaacob et al. (2020) diversity learning was achieved through communication with diverse others or collaborative work. The Indonesian teacher and Ghanaian teacher in this research use technique, as stated as follow:

“Then collaboration is also very important to do in the classroom. The first thing is the approach first. So, we know their characteristics. What they want to be like, what they want to learn, and what methods should be used that match their characteristics. For me, I always provide collaboration as well. Collaboration is very important. Learning groups are also very important.” (REP)

“Okay sometimes we use the focus groups. Focus groups. Like we have small groups sometimes in class you are going to write about a particular topic let’s say you are doing narrative writing you want students to narrate something they know... So, we give them okay three of you one from Egypt, one from Lebanon, one from let’s say Nigeria. So, they have different, this one will bring his view from Nigeria, this one will bring his view from Egypt, this one from Lebanon, put it together.” (U)

By applying a collaborative approach in teaching intercultural awareness, students can more deeply understand the various cultures that exist in Indonesia. Students from different cultural backgrounds can work together on projects that explore different aspects of culture in Indonesia and Ghana.

EFL teachers’ differences of experiences and practices among Indonesian and Ghanaian English teachers in English language teaching

Although there were some experiential and practical similarities in the integration of intercultural awareness in English language teaching. However, there are also some different experiences and practices in the integration of intercultural awareness in English language teaching between Ghanaian and Indonesian EFL teachers. The first result showed the differences between Ghanaian and Indonesian teachers is that the scale of intercultural

awareness in English language teaching. The Ghanaian teacher tends to focus on global cultural acceptance and the integration of various international cultures in classroom activities, according to the context of an international school with students from various countries. The result also showed relevant to Baker's (2022) theory that they use learning materials that reflect various global cultures to help students understand and appreciate cultural differences beyond their home country or called as intercultural awareness. The Ghanaian reflect on various cultures in various parts of the world that stated as follow:

“Yes, yes. See the world has become a global village. In the olden days when something happened somewhere in Malaysia you could not even hear it at all because of lack of internet, lack of rules. But today something happens maybe in America within minutes we hear it. That's one. So, for better communication you can never better understand things you are not aware of.” (U)

This global interconnectedness, facilitated by the internet and improved communication technologies, underscores the importance of understanding cultures beyond one's own. In the context of English language teaching, this awareness becomes crucial. In the context of English language teaching, this global awareness is crucial because it fosters a deeper understanding of cultures beyond one's own, enabling better communication and reducing misunderstandings. This perspective suggests that teaching English should not only focus on local culture but should also embrace diverse cultural perspectives to prepare learners for effective global communication. The teacher integrates elements of Indonesian culture to help students recognize and appreciate their own cultural heritage, while showing how local culture can be related to the global context. This is aligned with Baker's theory (2022, p.44) that this approach emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness on a local scale or basic cultural awareness and how it can be applied in language learning. To support the data, as Indonesian EFL teacher stated:

“To develop local culture is very important, especially our own culture. We should not forget our own culture. For example, now many children follow the western culture such as girl bands, boy bands. I always remind us not to forget our culture. For example, traditional children's games of the old days. Even though today is digitalized, we still have to develop or provide understanding to students to love their own culture.” (REP)

Therefore, linking English language teaching with local culture becomes very important in the educational context. This approach not only enriches students' understanding of English as a global language, but also relates it to the cultural values around them. Associating English with local culture helps students to appreciate and understand their own cultural heritage. For example, by learning English through traditional stories or poems in the local language, students can experience the beauty and meaning contained in their own culture. Unlike the English teacher in Indonesia with a focus on developing local culture only.

The main difference between Indonesian and Ghanaian teachers lies in the use of learning resources. The teacher in Indonesian do not only rely on textbooks but also other learning resources such as the internet, e-books and apps like Canva to make learning materials more interesting and interactive. This finding in line with the theory of Pulverness & Tomlinson (2003) that the mass market, textbooks continue to dominate ELT in general. Therefore, the teacher plays an important role in this context by acting as an intercultural mediator and giving some of the cultural coordinates that are missing from the textbook. To support the data, as Indonesian EFL teacher stated:

“Then we use technology as well. So, we are not left behind. For example, the students. Sometimes they don't know how to use technology in learning. So, we provide material or teaching using technology. For example, how to make a biography in the Canva application or Canva web like that. So, they can edit, explore. Making a biography. Creating a biography in the Canva application. Then the inclusive approach is also important. Because we have to be able to appreciate and value the uniqueness of our various students. Maybe like that. So, there is no discrimination between students. Between one student and the other students.” (REP)

In contrast, the teacher in Ghana makes more use of technology such as YouTube and smartboards to conduct virtual tours of historical and cultural places around the world. This allows students to have a direct and in-depth cultural exploration through interactive presentations, enriching their learning experience by virtually visiting places like the Taj Mahal or the Blue Mosque in Turkey. In line with Ali Alghamdi et al. (2019) using authentic language examples produced by native speakers of the target language, which

may be accessible through various sources, for example, YouTube videos, TV programs, radio broadcasts, and so on. Technological innovations have brought about various facilitative features in controlling many of these visual displays. To support the data, the Ghanaian EFL teacher expressed:

“Sometimes, in the middle of a lesson, we can just go to YouTube, maybe to the Taj Mahal, for example. I take them on a virtual tour using the smart board, like to the Taj Mahal or the Blue Mosque of Turkey. We integrate different cultural backgrounds. We can go to the Moko Moko of Nigeria or any area we want to virtually explore. We can also ask the students to read about topics like how the Mau Mau rebels were defeated in Kenya or how the Malaysians used palm nuts to transform their country. When we are there, we see many unique things from the students, and they present what they have discussed with their group using the smart board.” (U)

The methods of assessing intercultural communication skills in English classes differ between Indonesian and Ghanaian teachers. The Indonesian teacher assesses students' ability to explain Indonesian culture, understand the meaning communicated about culture, avoid misunderstandings, give ideas about culture, listen effectively, present information well, and use effective language. To assess students' ability the teachers have to consider several requirements such as, reflect on their cultural influences and how they may impact their teaching style and interactions with students, understand each student's unique background and experiences, not judge other cultures based on their own standards, develop a lifelong learning mindset by actively pursuing new cultural experiences and information, experiment with various teaching strategies and materials to represent their students' cultural variety (Ponce Durán, 2013). To support the data, the Indonesian EFL teacher stated:

“To assess the first, the students must be able to explain or describe the culture that exists in Indonesia. Then students are also able to capture the meanings that we communicate about culture. Then the second, there is no misunderstanding with one another. The third is also, students are able to provide their ideas or ideas about culture or cultural materials. Fourth, students are also able to listen effectively to the explanations that teachers convey in class. Then the fifth, they are able to communicate or present

information well to as many friends as possible. And lastly, they or the students are able to use good and effective language.” (REP)

On the other hand, Ghanaian teacher uses an approach that focuses more on the oral aspect and reading comprehension. They assess students through oral English lessons, where students are taught how to pronounce words correctly and read topics from different cultural perspectives. Ghanaian teachers also use comprehension lessons to see to what extent students can understand content from different cultural perspectives. As the Ghanaian EFL teacher stated:

“Well, the first one of them is through speaking. In one of our lessons, there’s something called oral English. And oral English, we teach children how to pronounce words correctly, how to pronounce words. And it means that sometimes we let them read different topics. So, when they read on given topics, we’re able to see whether they are adapted to the proper way of what we are telling them. We also use comprehension. After doing comprehension lessons, as I said, we do reading across topics, across cultural boundaries.” (U)

In the context of teaching spoken English, the teacher uses methods such as reading on various topics and reading comprehension to assess the extent to which students can pronounce words correctly and understand content from various cultural perspectives. These assist the teacher in evaluating the students’ progress and ensuring they can adapt in an appropriate way to what is being taught. In line with the Kung's (2019) study showed the use of reading comprehension exercises are beneficial to EFL students because they are more relevant to their daily lives. The students' improved reading competency as a result of the instruction enhances their reading strategy awareness by allowing them to use more metacognitive information to manage learning and overcome their difficulty reading English texts.

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that the integration of intercultural awareness in English language teaching is important to create a classroom atmosphere of mutual respect and empathy

within different cultural backgrounds. However, Ghanaian teacher in international schools emphasize global cultural acceptance, integrating various international cultures into classroom activities. In contrast, Indonesian teacher focus on preserving local culture in English teaching. Ghanaian teacher integrates various international cultures into classroom activities, using technology like YouTube and smart boards for virtual tours, whereas Indonesia teacher utilizing textbooks, the internet, e-books, and apps like Canva. This understanding fosters acceptance of differences and helps students realize how they function within various cultural contexts. Additionally, collaborative work or approach allows students to bring their unique experiences and perspectives to the project and discussions together, thus enhancing their understanding of different cultures.

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