



Infusing Culturally Responsive Teaching in Higher Education: Insights for Multicultural Education in Indonesia

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Abstract: The present research examines how teachers implement Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as part of multicultural education in a higher education institution. The urgency of the current research lies in the fact that teachers of the 21st century need to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to survive in this interconnected world. However, it was evidenced that one of the challenges in implementing multicultural education is the lack of teachers' skills to be culturally responsive. Accordingly, it is essential to highlight the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Indonesian setting. In doing so, a qualitative case study is employed to answer the research questions. The current research involves six multicultural classroom teachers as research participants with different characteristics. To gain a depth understanding of the teachers' attitudes, the researchers employed semi-structured interviews and observation as data collection techniques. Using thematic data analysis, the results indicated nine practices that reflect the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching in the higher education context. The nine practices are: giving more freedom to students in selecting the familiar topic, emphasizing preserving local wisdom, celebrating different perspectives in the discussion, allowing gaining and checking students' understanding, talking personally outside the class, focusing more on positive rather than negative, being a role model, being patient, and sharing the experience.

Keywords: culturally responsive teaching; multiculturalism; multicultural education; higher education

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INTRODUCTION

Although Indonesia is a multicultural country, racial conflicts are still reported across the nation. The unresolved conflict in Papua is evidence of the racial conflict due to economic disparities. In addition, conflicts in Malang, Surabaya, and other cities also show that racial clash occurs even in the city that embraces multiculturalism. Indeed, the racial issue has been a sensitive one, especially during the pandemic of COVID 19 as people are forced to maintain their physical distance from others and rely heavily on technology in their communication. This may result in a significant gap among Indonesian, who used to be warm in their social life beyond the boundaries of culture, race, ethnicity, and economic background. Because of that, multiculturalism in Indonesia has been challenged in the current situation. Indonesia is a multicultural country with various ethnicities with diverse languages, cultures, and values. The concept of multicultural education is essential in the pedagogical process.

Multicultural education is a pedagogical approach constructed on democratic values that nurture cultural pluralism in an interconnected world (Singh & Raza, 2016). It covers five purposes, that is to improve attitudes toward cultural diversity, promote respect and human rights, improve acceptance of differences, promote equality and social justice, and emphasize the equality of power and income distribution among the people (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990 in Li, 2018). Moreover, DeCapua and Wintergerst (Barker, 2018) also recognize the importance of cross-cultural awareness in equipping the skills to interact with a diverse background. Consequently, James (2018) contended that teachers and administrators continuously seek strategies to accommodate diverse students by transforming the school system and culture. To achieve these objectives, multiculturalism must be considered in every stage of education. The same notion is also identified in Nadda (2017) which mentions that school plays a significant role in fostering attitudes and values of toleration in the interconnected world. In this regard, higher education is a place that exposes diversity as the students come from different geographical, cultural, sexual, and socioeconomic (Lawyer, 2018). Classrooms in universities have become more diverse, demanding that students develop cross-cultural awareness and skills (Barker, 2018).

Previous research has been conducted to identify the challenges students face in Indonesian multicultural classes with diverse nationalities. The research that emphasizes the minority cultural group revealed that the students face difficulties with language, cultural differences, and familiarity with specific topics and their classroom learning process (Nurbatra, 2018). Interestingly, the students had difficulty in the learning process, resulting from the fact that they were not familiar with the common language (Bahasa Indonesia) and

different teaching approaches. Teachers are challenged to transform their performance to cope with today's student complexity (Greene & Montilla, 2016). They further asserted that whatever the form of diversity-physical differences, language, skin color, ethnicity- students are educated to accept, respect, and value each individual. Furthermore, teachers must be aware of the students' cultural backgrounds in multicultural education (Bin-Tahir & Rinantanti, 2016 in Amri et al., 2017). Earlier, Brophy (Jensen et al., 2018) argued that the teacher's attitudes and beliefs toward the students' cultural background significantly affect the teachers' interaction and communication with the students. Besides, scholars believe separating the school and home may cause disproportionality in terms of culture (Cholew & West-Olatunji, 2008, as cited in Larson et al., 2018). In their study, Mackay and Strickland (2018) reported that connecting school experiences and home is a complex process as the students prefer to limit their cultural information shared in the classroom. On the other hand, Emily and Sawyer (2018) reported that both in-service and preservice teachers lack an understanding of multicultural issues, which shapes their reluctance attitudes to identify or even solve equity issues.

One way to accommodate multicultural education is by having culturally responsive pedagogy. It is believed that the dynamics that occur in multicultural classrooms encourage the implementation of culturally responsive teaching (Hansen-thomas & Chennapragada, 2018). Cultural Responsive Teaching (CRT) is defined as the use of cultural knowledge, values, and personal experience of students with diverse ethnical backgrounds in order to create effective, relevant, and meaningful learning experiences (Chou et al., 2018). Moreover, it also helps students to avoid generalizations (Auslander, 2018). However, most research on Cultural Responsive Pedagogy is conducted in a western context (Chou et al., 2018). Recently, research in this field has been reported in Africa, Europe, and Asia (Civitillo et al., 2018). In addition, few studies are conducted in the Indonesian context, which is seen as a gap in this topic. Moreover, the present study also attempted to provide insights into multicultural education in the Islamic higher education setting, making this study crucial as it provides a framework of CRT for many Islamic universities in Indonesia.

Based on those arguments, this current research focuses on the teachers' awareness of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which is inevitable in multicultural education. Specifically, the study aims to examine the implementation of CRT in their classes. This study is significant to conduct since CRT in multicultural education should be prioritized in teacher education to have qualified educators for diverse students. As suggested by Whitaker and Valtierra (2018), adequate teacher training programs in CRT significantly transform the students' self-efficacy and motivation in teaching a multicultural classroom.

METHODS

To answer the research question, this research used a qualitative research approach. The approach was selected to obtain comprehensive data about implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching in the multicultural classroom. Using convenience sampling, the researcher selected six lecturers, two female and four male, who teach students in the English Language Education Department, University of Muhammadiyah Malang. The participants were selected based on their nationalities and the language of instruction in their class. Four were Indonesian teachers, while the other two lecturers were foreign teachers. The foreign teachers are from Ukraine and Iraq. Moreover, the lecturers were involved in the research since they have a distinguished way of teaching their lessons: Two lecturers used Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of instruction, and the other four lecturers used English. Different types of lecturers are essential as the researchers need to examine the implementation of culturally responsive teaching from various perspectives.

To collect the data, the research employed interviews and non-participant observation. The interview was meant to identify the teachers' understanding of Culturally Responsive Teaching and its implementation in their classes. More specifically, a semi-structured interview was employed as the researcher prepared the questions before the interview and asked spontaneous questions to follow up. The questions in the interview were adopted from Adams and Glass (2018) with four main domains: cultural background, cultural adjustment, attitudes, and the concept of Culturally Responsive Teaching. There were 21 questions proposed in the interview guide: three questions for cultural background, six questions for cultural adjustment, six questions for attitudes, and five questions for CRT concept. The audio was recorded to be transcribed as the data during the process.

Moreover, observation was conducted to add more data from the interview and triangulate the data. Triangulation was also done by checking the data derived from the interview, which was then cross-checked with data obtained from observation. The observation was conducted six times, in line with the number of lecturers involved in the research. The process was conducted to obtain more comprehensive findings of the present research. Thematic analysis was conducted as the data analysis procedure by identifying the emerging topics in the collected data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Culturally Responsive Teaching was implemented in some aspects. Based on the data analysis, the teachers conducted the following:

1. Giving more freedom to students in selecting the familiar topic

The research indicated that all respondents provided options for the students to choose topics based on familiarity. Specifically, in a class with English as the language of instruction, options play a significant role in the students' performance. The students already have the relevant vocabulary and knowledge by selecting the topic based on familiarity. For the class that uses Bahasa Indonesia or English as the language of instruction, the choice was given so that the students could select the topic related to their context. In this case, Thai students were given the freedom to choose in their context as they may not be familiar with the Indonesian system. For example, when the teacher gave the assignment to present the students' characteristics, Thai students preferred to present details of Thai education. Based on the interview, Mr. F elaborated that the Indonesian learners appreciated the effort because by doing so, the learners know the characteristics of Thai students. In the interview, he said:

"I asked my students to analyze problems in education. It will be difficult for them to explain what happened in Indonesia. So they brought up the issue in Thailand context."

Additionally, Mrs. Y added that in her class, the Thai students shared about the different environments they have in Thailand. She asserted that she asked her students to present about the environment in the students' neighborhood. So at that time, the students preferred to present topics they were already familiar with.

2. Emphasizing preserving local wisdom

In Culturally Responsive Teaching, teachers play a significant role as a facilitator who embraces the diversity of the learners in the classroom to cultivate the learners' understanding. In implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching, the teacher encouraged the learners to select a topic related to their local wisdom. It is done to preserve the students' culture and share different perspectives or practices in a different culture. This happened in Mrs. Y's Class, where she encouraged the Indonesian learners to talk about *Jamu* (an Indonesian herbal drink) or the use of environmentally friendly- conventional technology. Mrs. Y further added that:

"Sometimes the students need to be motivated and encouraged to think of the local wisdom around them, as perhaps they think that it is not special while others think differently. That is why I say that only a few people aware of the richness of Indonesian cultural resources."

Without the emphasis given by the teacher, the students thought that *Jamu* was not really special, as it is commonly found in Indonesia. However, when the teacher tried to raise the students' awareness about *Jamu* as one of the Indonesian specialties, it opened their perspectives to see it differently.

3. Celebrating different perspectives in the discussion

All the teachers involved in the study affirmed that classroom discussion is an important activity for all the members of the class can participate, either as the speaker or listeners. A discussion took place in every meeting in the speaking class run by Mrs. E, N, Mr. H, and Mr. R. It allowed students to share their thoughts and opinions, ask questions, and respond to other students. Additionally, Mrs. Y thought that social and cultural discussions with people with different cultural backgrounds could develop their cultural sensitivity to face the multi, complex and dynamic environment. She elaborated:

"In this situation, students meet people with various backgrounds and characters that enable them to transfer knowledge so that they can develop their cultural understanding."

From the result of the observation, the discussion could be on various topics ranging from education, food, habit, and religion. When the teacher and students discussed the different habits of people in Indonesia, Europe, and Thailand, they learned about the different cultural practices in different countries and the value in different settings.

4. Allowing gaining and checking students' understanding

The implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching was recognized from the way the teacher provided an opportunity for the students from a different culture to gain and check their understanding. It happened in classes that use Bahasa Indonesia and English as the medium of instruction. The students who are not proficient in Bahasa Indonesia faced difficulties in understanding the materials and assignments in the lesson. To solve this issue, the students looked up the dictionary and asked their friends to explain the statement. Mr. F, who taught Learning and Pedagogy class, stated that he permitted his students to look up a dictionary to find the meaning of unfamiliar words. He argued that:

"I facilitated the learning by permitting them to check the dictionary to translate the questions."

Secondly, students gained and checked understanding by asking their friends or the teacher. When facing foreign lecturers, some students struggled to understand what the teacher said. Mr. R admitted that:

"(For) discouraged students, I encourage them and say...if you cannot express your opinion, you can ask your friend next to you to explain in the native language and return to English."

The above quote shows that students who struggle with understanding can ask for assistance from a friend. The same happened to Chinese students in the class who may not be familiar with some topics in the Indonesian context. As the uniqueness of heterogeneous classrooms, students are exposed to a different paradigm. In Culturally Responsive Teaching, teachers were aware that students often have a different perspective on seeing something. One example is when some students were asked to review a movie in the Afro-American context, some said "negro" which sounds negatively strong from a sociocultural perspective. Accordingly, the teacher (Mr. R) responded that:

"Guys students, you should understand the meaning of the strong word here. If you see that any person, I mean different background, ethnical related to any ethnical groups even like different color skin, you should understand how you can call these people. For example, if we are now talking about afro American, please any one of you should not say and use the word nigga for even black people."

The teacher also provided understanding to the students from the host culture about different treatments that the teacher may give to minority students. In particular, Mrs. F informed the other students about the purpose of the special treatment given to Thai students so that they could understand the situation and not feel jealous. After permitting Thai students to lookup in dictionaries to gain understanding, Mr. F elaborated:

"With the consent of other students, so they do not feel jealous, I told my students that it is needed so the Thai students can understand the context."

5. Talking personally outside the class

In Culturally Responsive Teaching, teachers are expected to strongly connect with the students. In doing so, teachers also communicate extensively with students after class. Although not many teachers did the same because of time limitations, Mr. R argued that knowing more personally about the students is crucial because it helps them perform better. It shows the students that the teacher cares and is willing to assist them in improving their performance. In the interview, Mr. R said the following statement:

"My advice they can help to ruin or to destroy the wall, the barrier, which is a student because they will be like "oh teachers are listening to us teachers would like to know about us more... Because knowing their background, especially their family background, helps (them) growing"

The personal chat in this situation also is intended to gain more intercultural skills for both teacher and students. For the teacher, this type of activity opens opportunities to track the students' progress and identify issues they experienced in the class. In addition, for the students, personal communication also leads to better intercultural skills because they share their feelings, opinion, and thoughts with their teachers who (in this case, have different nationalities) might have different perspectives.

6. Focusing more on positive rather than negative

Teachers must explore differences in various cultures when teaching in a multicultural classroom. Concerning this matter, the teacher must also be aware of the students' attitudes toward other cultures. Mrs. Y was aware of this issue and carefully selected topics that may result in uncomfortable feelings. It happened when Thai students were asked about the flood that happened in their country. They answered the question reluctantly. Responding to this, Mrs. Y stated that:

"Perhaps, it will be easier to share about positive things that happened in our country, but for the negative thing, students will think twice whether they would share it or not to another cultural group of students."

From the observation and the interview, it can be implied that it is important to maintain positive vibes in the classroom where every student feels comfortable sharing their perspectives and ideas, particularly in talking about their own cultures.

7. Being a role model

Culturally Responsive Teaching is identified by how the teacher becomes a role model for the students. This relates to the concept of time, which in the Indonesian context is too flexible. The two foreign teachers, Ms. R and Mr. H, complained about it and tried to change the action by giving examples. Mr. H, for example, claimed that he came thirty minutes earlier and urged the students to come on time. He further stated that:

"I implement something to them about time because I tell the guys we are studying at the management. You want to be managed, and you want to come excellent like 8.30 to class? One hour later than your employee, you are fired; you are bankrupt!"

From the statement, Mr. H showed that he was aware of Indonesian people's habits and tried to transform the negative habit into a positive one. He was teaching the material and trying to educate students to be better people in the future. The other foreign teacher, Mr. R, also demanded the transformation so students could come on time by consistently giving examples. Starting from the first meeting, the teacher has urged the students to come on time, so the class runs effectively.

8. Being patient

Culturally Responsive Teaching gives students a diverse understanding of social or cultural topics. In the present case, teachers are expected to be patient in accommodating the students' needs. Mr. H stated that the teacher needs to be both patient and open-minded. He added that patience is essential because when the students say something, the meaning needs to be checked. After all, sometimes the students' statements (in English) did not mean the same as their ideas. It is a challenge, especially when the students need to state their opinion in a foreign language like English. Additionally, teachers need to be open-minded because by having a social or cultural discussion in the class, both teachers and students are learning together about different perspectives. Mr. H relates this action to Prophet Muhammad SAW, who always encourages everyone to learn. In this matter, Mr. H added that teachers and students need to learn to reduce bias, eliminate discrimination, and respect each other's culture. In the interview, Mr. H pointed out:

"Because we should appreciate the culture. However, when you are coming to the class, we call all as a unity, as a one. Because if we want to talk about the culture and your audience are not educated, you will bring discrimination."

9. Sharing the experience

In the interview, one of the respondents mentioned that he shared his teaching experience with his fellow teacher. Specifically, Mr. R stated that he always talks to his colleagues about the class, especially about topics and materials to be delivered. Moreover, by sharing with his colleague, he had a chance to improve his teaching performance. He stated that:

"I handle I (class) and she handles H, but we always communicate the topics, devices, and materials we need. She noted my style of teaching, my negatives. Then we will discuss what do you think?"

The present research was aimed to examine the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching. From the perspective of in-service teachers of Indonesian Higher Education Institution, the study identified nine

aspects that characterized Culturally Responsive Teaching in the multicultural classroom within the university. The first aspect was giving more freedom to students in selecting a familiar topic. Learning preferences are one principle in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Swann, 2019) which gives students autonomy. The example showed that the teachers tried providing options for the students to choose a topic based on their interests to perform better. Students have different learning styles and techniques; accordingly, teachers need to provide options for the students to improve their achievement. More specifically, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy allowed the students to explore the areas of their interest and take ownership of their learning experience (Liontas & Siegel, 2019). However, the diverse topics may also be challenging as teachers may not have adequate knowledge and skills on the preferred topics. Therefore, comprehensive teacher training is needed, particularly in differentiating curriculum, interaction, instruction, and assessment to accommodate students with diverse cultural backgrounds (Yuan, 2019).

The second aspect that characterized the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching was the emphasis on preserving the local wisdom. It is essential because knowing other cultures does not necessarily mean adopting and diminishing indigenous culture. Unfortunately, indigenous cultures have not yet appropriately provided space or valued the existing curriculum (Kazanjian, 2019). The existing curriculum only serves the host culture or other related ones and does not cover all various cultures properly enough. In her journal, Baishya (2019) stated that the teacher is expected to link the lesson with indigenous knowledge. As she believes that school is a miniature of society, teachers need to be able to explore various cultural perspectives in linking the materials with their daily life. Focusing on The Minangkabau Culture, Ramadhanti (2019) asserted that students are likely to easily construct their knowledge by interpreting and observing all phenomena in life, including culture.

As the third aspect, Culturally Responsive Teaching was implemented by celebrating different perspectives in the class discussion. Classroom discussion is an important stage in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, as reported by Ramadhanti (2019) so that the students understand and interpret the cultural phenomena that may initially be strange. Research conducted by Samuels (2018) also advocated using meaningful conversation in a discussion, especially those serving diversity and difference. By doing so, he argued that the students have the opportunity to discuss the current events related to social justice that may also be expanded to the idea of race, sexual orientation, gender, and socioeconomic status. With the same notion, Kidwell (2019) identified this as an essential activity to cultivate students' understanding of multicultural education. In the Indonesian context, Kidwell stated that discussion was an effective practice in the lesson, which was done at best by higher-level students with older students. In addition, she argued that the teacher needs to struggle to have a practical cultural discussion with younger students.

The fourth aspect that characterized Culturally Responsive Teaching was the opportunity to gain and check to understand. Diverse students which also means a diverse perspective, can be a challenge for students because they may not understand certain practices or ideas in other cultures. Correspondingly, the students' lack of multicultural attitudes, understanding, and skills can lead to a pedagogical gap among them (Yuan, 2019). Cultural competence, in this case, plays an essential role in their success in learning. In regards to this, the teacher's attitude and assumption about culture or race shape the tone and quality of their teaching. When the teachers provided opportunities for students to gain and check their understanding of cultural topics which likely to happen in a different race, they have been culturally responsive. The activity is important to avoid racial stereotyping or prejudice (Cherng & Davis, 2019). However, some teachers may be challenged with diverse cultural knowledge and skill that they need to adequately have in multicultural education. Without a doubt, teaching about certain cultural issues requires a pedagogical stance that the teachers need to be both empathetic and knowledgeable (Jackson & Boutte, 2018).

In the fifth aspect, personal communication indicated the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Communication between teachers and students plays a vital role in the effectiveness of Culturally Responsive Teaching. The finding of the present research revealed that the teacher tried to communicate with students not only in the class but also after class. This was done to make the students feel more comfortable talking to the teachers which might be challenging to do while the class is taking place. Equally important, Muniz (2019) believed that the use of proper eye contact, language, gesture, and expression influenced the way students and teachers communicate. Since some marginalized students who were vulnerable to stereotypes may perform weakly in a multicultural classroom, teachers are expected to provide support to the students. One of the supports indeed was giving opportunities for the students to talk to the teacher after class. Research reported that Culturally Responsive Teaching enables the teachers to be more personal with the students so that knowing their backgrounds make them contextualize the lesson (Mellom et al., 2018).

The sixth aspect that characterized the implementation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is the teachers' attempt to focus on the positive side of cultural knowledge, rather than the negative ones. When teachers in the multicultural classroom focus on the positive side of a certain cultural group, they have tried to combat the racism perspective. Culturally Responsive Teaching is combat against cultural destruction or even

colonization (Kazanjian, 2019). This can be tricky as students who have diverse perspectives may develop their understanding of various cultural practices. Therefore, teachers can minimize or even alter the feeling of superiority of certain cultural groups.

As the seventh aspect of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, teachers play a significant role as a model to the students. They are the role model for the students to promote equity and compassion attitudes (Mccorkle, 2019). Storm (2019) added that Culturally Responsive has multiple implications such as understanding racial and cultural identity, connecting them in the teaching practices, and making a transformation to the teaching content as well as practices. In doing so, the teacher needs to be a role model for the students. The eight findings revealed that being a caring, patient teacher is the way the teacher implements Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Caring teachers as part of responsive teachers, not only accommodate students' emotional but also educational needs that they usually listen to and respond to students individually (Jones, 2019). If the teacher has a bad temper, students will not likely approach him or her for better engagement in the class. This may be a challenge for some teachers as it is not an easy task to individually cater to diverse students' needs; following that, teachers' self-motivation is an important aspect of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Baishya, 2019). Further, teachers need to take the pedagogical practice seriously so that the students have equal opportunities to interact, ask questions, respect others, and think critically.

The last aspect that characterized the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching is the way the teacher shared the experience with his or her peers. In this case, teachers can ask her or his colleagues to observe, give feedback and become supportive mentors (Jones, 2019). The findings revealed that the teachers have asked other teachers to observe their teaching so they can get feedback to improve their performance. Besides, the teacher also has her colleague share and discuss pedagogical issues they encounter during the teaching process. Referring to the result of this research, the foreign teachers who have a different culture from the host culture sometimes ask questions to their colleagues. As one of the important aspects of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, teachers were also building meaningful, vigorous interactions with colleagues (Mellom et al., 2018).

The present research indicated that Culturally Responsive Teaching was implemented in the Multicultural Classroom, which showed the diversity of students' cultural backgrounds. What has been done by the teachers shows that they are responsive ones who think that "one size will not fit all" which implies their adjustment for each student's needs (Jones, 2019). Similarly, Cressey (2019) also believed that educators need to have targeted and or individualized strategies and interventions for students with various emotional, behavioral or social needs. Given that most of the respondents are globally mobile teachers, they have adequate intercultural competence not only to respect other cultures but also to collaborate with people from various cultures. In multicultural education, these globally mobile teachers play an important role as they were better equipped to interact with students with diverse cultural backgrounds so that they can help to reduce or even diminish prejudice against certain cultural groups (Little et al., 2019). Moreover, applying the pedagogical concept requires more effort from the teacher to improve their skills, knowledge, and practices as reported in the Dutch setting (Alhanachi et al., 2021). Referring to the results of the findings, the research also recommends the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching in all classes in higher education.

CONCLUSION

It is revealed that Culturally Responsive Pedagogy was implemented by examining nine aspects that are shaped by intercultural competence. The nine aspects found in the present research have indicated the implementation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy performed by teachers who participated in the research. However, specific training addressing the teachers' knowledge and skill development is important to improve the quality of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy taken place in the setting. Based on these conclusions, the main implication derived from the study suggests educational practitioners particularly preservice and in-service teachers to consider implementing culturally responsive teaching in their pedagogical practices. To better understand the implications of these results, future studies could address culturally responsive teaching in the school context.

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