Multicultural Education of EFL Classrooms in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education: Challenges and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural education in English Language Teaching (ELT) has gained significant attention, although challenges still persist in its classroom implementation. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate challenges and strategies associated with implementing multicultural education in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes within Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. A case study method was used, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with six teachers actively involved in EFL teaching to explore the complexities and nuances of integrating multicultural education in this context. The results showed various challenges, including the need to balance cultural sensitivity with standardized curriculum requirements, addressing potential resistance or discomfort among students during discussions of culturally sensitive topics, and mitigating resource limitations hindering comprehensive multicultural education. Furthermore, teachers emphasized the importance of enhancing mutual respect, improving intercultural understanding, and integrating diverse cultural content into the curriculum. Future studies were recommended to emphasize collaborative efforts, institutional support, and ongoing professional development to help teachers adapt teaching methods effectively. Despite limited resources, teachers remained committed to creating inclusive learning environments that prepared students to become proficient English speakers and global citizens capable of appreciating and thriving in a diverse world. In conclusion, this study provided valuable insights for teachers, institutions, and policymakers to improve multicultural education in similar educational contexts.

Keywords: *challenges; education; EFL classrooms; Islamic higher education; multicultural strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural education in English Language Teaching (ELT) has gained significant attention in recent years due to the increasing prominence of English as a global lingua franca. This has led to a growing recognition of the need to transcend the dominance of Anglophone cultures and native English speakers in ELT (Fang & Baker, 2018). As a result, courses in global English and intercultural communication have been incorporated into ELT teacher training programs, emphasizing a more multilingual and multicultural technique to education (Baker, 2015). Multicultural education aims to achieve both national unity and cultural diversity, adapting to the changes brought about by economic progress and globalization (Maulidiah et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is a crucial element in fostering social justice for all minority groups, irrespective of the backgrounds (Jayadi et al., 2022).

In ELT context, there is a call for incorporating multicultural education into the curriculum from the earliest stages to establish a solid foundation for success and sustainability (Choe & Seo, 2021). Studies have also explored the method of pre-service language teachers to ethnic diversity, emphasizing the significance of multicultural education in addressing the needs of diverse learners (Smits & Janssenswillen, 2020). Furthermore, multicultural education is emphasized in foreign language teaching, focusing on the development of learners' intercultural competence alongside language proficiency (Chaika, 2023).

The implementation of multicultural-based ELT includes dimensions such as content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, and equity pedagogy, with positive student perceptions of its effectiveness (Asrianti et al., 2022). However, challenges and issues related to multicultural education in specific contexts have been identified. For instance, there are veiled and excluded issues in the implementation of multicultural education policies, necessitating a critical examination through a theoretical framework (Lee et al., 2020).

The attitudes of teachers toward multicultural education are crucial, as positive attitudes are essential for ensuring equality of opportunity in education without discrimination based on religion, language, or race (Karacabey et al., 2019a). Furthermore, the development of multicultural competence is considered a vital component of English language education, emphasizing the need for a method that nurtures students' diverse multicultural competence (Sukmawan et al., 2019).

Incorporating multicultural education in ELT is essential for promoting inclusivity, addressing the needs of diverse learners, and fostering intercultural competence. It requires a shift toward a more multilingual and multicultural method to ELT, emphasizing

the importance of preparing teachers to effectively address challenges and opportunities arising from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Multicultural education in the Indonesian context is a critical component of educational system, aiming to foster solidarity, harmony, and tolerance in community. The representation of multicultural values in Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture-endorsed EFL textbooks has been subject to critical discourse analysis, showing the importance of integrating multicultural values into educational materials (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). Furthermore, the contribution of policies and practices of education in Indonesia to the creation of tolerant and multicultural citizens has been examined (Raihani, 2018). This reflects the emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, including religion, based on the principle of "unity in diversity" and Pancasila (Amirin, 2012).

The implementation of multiculturalism education in Indonesia is evident in strategies of teachers to incorporate local cultural values and character-building in early childhood education, emphasizing the diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural landscape of the country (Suri & Chandra, 2021). Cooperative learning methods have been used to develop character, nationalism, and religious understanding, reflecting the multifaceted nature of multicultural education in Indonesia (Efendi & Lien,

2021). Moreover, the perspective of Islamic education philosophy has been considered in the context of multicultural education, emphasizing strategic method developed to accommodate the diverse patterns in religion, ethnicity, and customs (Bahri, 2020).

In Islamic education context, the management of multicultural Islamic education through conflict resolution learning development has been identified, emphasizing the role of education in promoting peace and understanding within diverse cultural and religious contexts (Thoyib et al., 2021). Understanding multiculturalism education from a comparative perspective, with neighboring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, provides insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Indonesia in implementing multicultural education (Patras et al., 2022). In addition, challenges and opportunities of ELT within Indonesian Islamic education context have been explored, addressing the complexities and potential of integrating multicultural perspectives into language education (Hidayati, 2017).

Incorporating local cultures and folklore into English textbooks for secondary schools in Indonesia reflects the commitment to preserving cultural awareness and local wisdom through ELT, promoting multicultural values among students (Anggraini et al., 2022). The diverse range of study and practices in Indonesia further emphasized the

multifaceted nature of multicultural education as well as the need to integrate diverse cultural, religious, and linguistic perspectives into educational landscape to foster understanding, tolerance, and unity in diversity.

Integrating multicultural education offers various benefits in the context of ELT. It fosters a more inclusive and diverse learning environment, preparing teachers to be culturally responsive and empowering learners from different backgrounds (Huanshu Yuan, 2017). Multicultural education in ELT materials can improve students' awareness of global perspectives and promote intercultural communication, corresponding with ongoing globalization and multicultural awareness (Xu, 2013). Furthermore, it allows for the incorporation of diverse perspectives, such as the gender dimension, in ELT, contributing to a more comprehensive and equitable educational experience (Tarrayo et al., 2021).

The integration of multicultural education in ELT presents challenges. For instance, pre-service ELT teachers may not be fully prepared to address multicultural issues, showing a potential gap in readiness for multicultural teaching and learning (Altınsoy et al., 2018). English language teachers may also need to develop a heightened awareness of English as a Lingua Franca in multilingual and multicultural contexts, requiring a shift toward a post-normative method in ELT to produce contextually appropriate materials (Bayyurt et al., 2019).

Strategies should be implemented to address the mentioned challenges and maximize the benefits of integrating multicultural education in ELT. This includes preparing culturally responsive teachers through multicultural teachers' education programs. Moreover, there is a need for comprehensive training and professional development for pre-service ELT teachers to improve readiness for multicultural education. Adopting a post-normative method in ELT can empower English language teachers to critically evaluate and produce contextually appropriate materials, corresponding with the diverse and multicultural nature of the learning environment.

Multicultural education in EFL classrooms in Indonesia presents both challenges and opportunities. The implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia is complex due to the diverse community composition of the country, including various races, ethnic groups, nationalities, and religions (Efendi & Lien, 2021). However, it is crucial to develop tolerant and multicultural citizens through education policies and practices (Raihani, 2018). Multicultural education is strategic method in Indonesia that aims to promote equality and unity in its diverse community (Bahri, 2020). The urgency of multicultural education in Indonesia lies in developing the human potential to appreciate differences and increase students' appreciation of local cultural wisdom (Abduloh et al., 2022; Cahyono & Iswati, 2017).

Integrating multicultural literature and picture books through the Readers' Workshop in EFL classrooms can inspire intercultural competence and critical literacy among students, diversifying instructional methods (Shin & Brenna, 2018). Teaching multicultural literature can also improve students' multicultural understanding and tolerance (Nashrullah, 2021; Tristiana et al., 2022). However, the responsibility of higher education institutions to develop students' multicultural competence poses considerable challenges for Indonesian EFL teachers, as English is studied as a foreign language (Sukmawan et al., 2019).

The attitudes of teachers toward multicultural education are crucial, as it aims to educate communities who are free-thinking, self-criticizing, and respectful of different ways of thinking and lifestyles (Karacabey et al., 2019b). In addition, the use of digital tools, such as Skype, has been found to benefit the facilitation of multiculturalism in EFL learning contexts, fostering multicultural connections and learners' curiosity about other cultures (Nguyen & Phan, 2019).

Challenges of implementing multicultural education in EFL classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic have been observed, with teachers predominantly using multiple platforms for online EFL classrooms in Indonesia (Rosayanti & Hardiana, 2021). Furthermore, the implementation of the flipped classroom model in the Indonesian EFL context has not been widely published, showing a gap in the literature regarding innovative teaching methods (Afrilyasanti et al., 2017).

Multicultural education in Indonesian EFL classrooms presents challenges related to the diverse community composition and the complexities of implementation. However, it offers opportunities to inspire intercultural competence, critical literacy, and tolerance among students. Teachers' attitudes, the use of digital tools, and the exploration of innovative teaching methods are essential considerations in promoting multicultural education.

In Indonesian Islamic EFL (English as a Foreign Language) higher education, students' diverse cultural backgrounds present unique challenges and opportunities for teachers. Multicultural education, which aims to foster inclusivity and respect for diversity, is crucial in this context. However, effectively implementing multicultural education is often hindered by various challenges, such as limited resources, varying levels of cultural awareness among teachers and students, and potential conflicts arising from cultural differences. Despite the importance of this method, there is a lack of comprehensive strategies and clear guidelines on how to effectively integrate multicultural education into the EFL classroom. Therefore, this study aimed to explore strategies used by teachers in Indonesian Islamic EFL higher education for promoting multicultural education and identifying challenges faced. To achieve

this objective, the following study questions were formulated, (1) What strategies are used by teachers in Indonesian Islamic EFL higher education classrooms to implement multicultural education, and (2) what are challenges faced in the process?

METHOD

Study Design

A qualitative case study method was used, which explored and addressed social phenomena within a specific context as a case (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2015). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were used to explore teachers' perspectives on multicultural education within EFL classrooms in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. The qualitative method was considered appropriate for capturing quality, contextualized insights into challenges and strategies related to implementing multicultural education in this specific educational setting.

Participants

A total of six teachers actively involved in teaching EFL within Islamic higher education in Indonesia were specifically selected as participants. The selection aimed to gather diverse perspectives from communities with varied experiences and roles within educational context.

The selection process was conducted using purposeful sampling, a method for ensuring a diverse range of perspectives on implementing multicultural education in Indonesian Islamic EFL higher education. The participants were selected based on specific criteria, namely active involvement in teaching EFL within Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. Moreover, the participants were chosen to represent a variety of experiences, teaching backgrounds, and roles within respective institutions, allowing the study to capture a comprehensive understanding of strategies and challenges encountered in integrating multicultural education. This method ensured that the selected teachers provided valuable insights into the complexities and nuances of multicultural education within Islamic EFL classrooms.

Table 1. Demographic data of participants

Participant	Gender	Years of Experience	Institution Type	Area of Specialization	Location
T 1	F	10 years	Public Islamic University	English Language Teaching (ELT) Pedagogy	Java Island
T 2	M	8 years	Private Islamic University	Curriculum Development in EFL	Sumatra Island
T 3	F	12 years	Public Islamic University	Cross-Cultural Understanding in EFL	Sulawesi Island
T 4	M	15 years	Private Islamic College	Multicultural Education in EFL	Kalimantan Island
T 5	F	7 years	Public Islamic University	Language Assessment in EFL	Java Island
T 6	M	9 years	Private Islamic University	English for Specific Purposes (ESP)	Sumatra Island

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected teachers to elicit the perspectives on challenges, opportunities, and strategies concerning multicultural education in EFL classrooms. The interview protocol comprised open-ended questions organized into sections covering

participants backgrounds, understanding of multicultural education, challenges, narrative inquiry, reflections, and recommendations.

Data Analysis

The interview data underwent thematic analysis, adapted from Braun & Clarke (2019). The analysis involved multiple stages, including familiarization with the data, initial coding, identifying themes, reviewing and refining themes, as well as interpreting and contextualizing the results within the existing literature on multicultural education, cultural diversity, and language teaching.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results
EFL teacher's perspective on Multicultural Education in Classrooms

In the context of EFL classrooms within Islamic higher education, multicultural education represents a holistic approach to learning that goes beyond language acquisition. It demonstrates a holistic philosophy centered on embracing and celebrating cultural diversity, fostering mutual respect among students from diverse backgrounds, and cultivating intercultural understanding. More than a language-focused endeavor, multicultural education integrates a wide array of cultural perspectives, values, and experiences into the curriculum. By nurturing inclusive learning environments that honor cultural pluralism, it aims to empower students with a deeper appreciation for diverse cultures, promoting empathy, and facilitating meaningful interactions that transcend linguistic boundaries. T1 stated that

> *In the context of EFL classrooms within Islamic higher education, multicultural education embodies a holistic method to learning that embraces cultural diversity, fosters mutual respect, and promotes intercultural understanding among students. It is more than mere teaching language skills, as it involves integrating diverse cultural perspectives, values, and experiences into the curriculum.* (T1)

T2 describes teachers' commitment to fostering an inclusive classroom environment that prioritizes the appreciation and acknowledgment of students' diverse cultural identities. By valuing and respecting each student's background, teachers aim to create a safe space where communities from various cultures feel a sense of belonging. This involves an intentional integration of cultural elements into language instruction, such as incorporating diverse literary works and exploring global issues from multiple cultural perspectives. Encouraging open dialogues that embrace and celebrate differences also catalyzes deeper understanding and mutual respect among students, fostering a learning environment that honors cultural diversity while enriching language learning experiences.

For me, it is about creating classroom environment where students from various cultural backgrounds feel valued and respected. It means incorporating cultural elements into language teaching, such as using diverse literary works, discussing global issues through multiple cultural lenses, and encouraging open dialogues that celebrate differences. (T2)

T3 explains that multicultural education entails the broader objectives of EFL classrooms. It emphasizes the need to confront and dispel stereotypes or biases that could potentially hinder a respectful and inclusive learning environment. By acknowledging and addressing these biases, teachers aim to promote empathy among students, facilitating the understanding of different perspectives. In addition, multicultural education aims to instill a sense of global citizenship by preparing students not only to excel in language proficiency but also to navigate and contribute positively to an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. The focus transcends language skills, aspiring to cultivate communities who appreciate and thrive within diverse cultural landscapes, fostering a broader worldview and a deep respect for cultural differences.

Multicultural education in EFL classrooms involves acknowledging and addressing stereotypes or biases that might exist, promoting empathy, and nurturing a sense of global citizenship among students. It is about

preparing them not only as proficient English speakers but also as communities who appreciate and thrive in a diverse world. (T3)

The Implementation of Multicultural Education in EFL Classrooms

In EFL classroom, a diverse cultural experience unfolded during a storytelling lesson. Students were encouraged to share folktales or personal narratives from respective backgrounds. Despite initial reluctance, a student from a minority ethnic group eventually shared a treasured traditional story from their community, fostering an inclusive environment where diverse cultural perspectives were celebrated. This exchange of narratives not only enriched the learning experience but also cultivated empathy and understanding among classmates, creating a space where language learning was intertwined with appreciating and respecting different cultures. T4 expressed,

I vividly recall a particular instance in my EFL classroom where cultural diversity became a catalyst for an enriching learning experience. During a lesson on storytelling, I encouraged students to share folktales or personal narratives from their respective cultural backgrounds. One student, from a minority ethnic group, hesitated at first but eventually shared a traditional story passed down through generations in their community. (T4)

During the storytelling session, a remarkable shift occurred within classroom ambiance as students became engrossed not only in the narrative but also in the intricate cultural elements woven into the story—expressions, beliefs, and values specific to the ethnic group represented. This captivating experience facilitated meaningful conversations, prompting reflections on the importance of honoring and valuing diverse traditions, and fostering an environment where respect for different cultures was actively discussed and embraced. T6 explained,

> *As the story unfolded, classroom atmosphere transformed. Students were captivated, not just by the narrative but by the cultural nuances embedded within it—expressions, beliefs, and values unique to that particular ethnic group. It opened doors to discussions about respecting and appreciating diverse traditions.* (T6)

T3 identifies the profound impact of a storytelling session on classroom dynamic, emphasizing how the act of storytelling helped connect students from diverse backgrounds by fostering empathy and curiosity. The shared experience of delving into cultural narratives allowed students to relate on a deeper level, breaking down barriers and creating a more inclusive environment. By exploring these cultural stories, students developed a stronger understanding and appreciation for each other's backgrounds,

leading to increased respect and acceptance within classrooms. T3 explains the significance of cultural narratives, not just in language education but also in building bridges between different cultures and promoting a more harmonious and understanding atmosphere among students.

> *What struck me the most was how this storytelling session bridged gaps among students. It fostered empathy and curiosity, leading to a more inclusive and respectful classroom dynamic. This experience shows the power of cultural narratives in not only teaching language but also fostering cross-cultural understanding among students.* (T3)

Challenges in Integrating Multicultural Education in EFL Classrooms

T1 identifies a significant challenge faced by teachers in integrating multicultural education within the framework of EFL classrooms in Islamic higher education institutions. It also addresses the struggle to strike a balance between honoring cultural sensitivity and meeting the demands of standardized curriculum requirements. Although teachers expressed a commitment to infusing diverse cultural content into teaching methods, there were challenges due to the rigidity of prescribed syllabi, restricting the flexibility needed to explore and incorporate the intricacies and nuances of various cultures. The pressure

to adhere strictly to the standardized guidelines limits teachers' capacity to delve deeply into cultural elements, impeding the efforts to provide a more comprehensive and inclusive educational experience that reflects the diversity of students' backgrounds.

One of the primary challenges in implementing multicultural education in EFL classrooms within our Islamic higher education setting is navigating the balance between cultural sensitivity and the standardized curriculum requirements. While we aim to incorporate diverse cultural content into our teaching, there is often pressure to adhere strictly to prescribed syllabi, leaving limited space for exploring cultural nuances. (T1)

T2 explains the complexity of navigating sensitive cultural topics within the EFL classrooms, particularly in addressing potential resistance or discomfort among students. Teachers acknowledge that discussions about certain cultural topics can elicit discomfort or disagreement among students due to diverse beliefs or cultural backgrounds. This shows the importance of creating a space where open dialogue is encouraged while ensuring a respectful learning environment. Teachers aim to foster discussions that acknowledge and honor the diversity of perspectives, allowing students to express their viewpoints while maintaining a sense of mutual respect. The emphasis lies in managing the sensitive discussions tactfully, ensuring that differing opinions are acknowledged and discussed constructively within a framework of respect and understanding.

The challenge is addressing potential resistance or discomfort among students when discussing sensitive cultural topics. Oftentimes, due to varying beliefs or cultural backgrounds, certain discussions might evoke discomfort or disagreement among students. Encouraging open dialogue while ensuring a respectful learning environment becomes crucial in such instances. (T2)

T3 describes resource limitations affecting the implementation of comprehensive multicultural education in EFL classrooms within Islamic higher education context. The restricted access to diverse materials representing various cultures impedes teachers' ability to offer a robust and inclusive educational experience. Addressing these challenges is seen as contingent upon collaborative efforts among teachers, institutional support, and continuous professional development initiatives. Teachers advocated for a collective method, emphasizing the need for collaboration among teaching staff to pool available resources and share strategies for incorporating diverse cultural materials into teaching practices. Also identified, was the necessity of institutional support and ongoing professional development to equip educators with the skills and tools necessary to adapt teaching methods and

curricula effectively within resource-constrained environments.

> *Resource limitations pose another significant challenge. Access to varied materials representing diverse cultures can be limited, impacting our ability to provide comprehensive multicultural education. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among teachers, institution support, and continuous professional development to adapt teaching methods and curricula effectively*. (T3)

EFL teachers' strategies to improve Multicultural Education in Classrooms

T5 shows the importance of improving teachers' cultural competence to elevate the quality of multicultural education in EFL classrooms. It also emphasizes the necessity for ongoing professional development opportunities, such as workshops or training sessions. These learning platforms could focus on key aspects like cultural sensitivity, enabling educators to understand and respect diverse cultural backgrounds. The focus on intercultural communication aims to improve teachers' abilities to effectively interact and connect with students from various cultural backgrounds. Lastly, emphasizing inclusive teaching practices shows the need to create classroom environment that welcomes and supports students from all cultural backgrounds, ensuring equal opportunities for learning and

participation. This method is generally considered crucial in creating more effective and culturally responsive teaching in EFL classrooms.

> *Increasing cultural competence among teachers is fundamental for improving multicultural education in EFL classrooms. Continuous professional development workshops or training sessions focusing on cultural sensitivity, intercultural communication, and inclusive teaching practices would be invaluable*. (T5)

T2 identifies the need to adapt and improve existing curriculum frameworks to allow for the inclusion of diverse cultural content while still achieving language learning objectives. It suggests revisiting and modifying the current curriculum to offer more flexibility, enabling teachers to seamlessly integrate cultural elements without detracting from the primary language learning objectives. Moreover, the proposal to provide teachers with a curated collection of diverse materials, such as literature, videos, and authentic resources, is a practical solution. This resource repository can help teachers in accessing and incorporating culturally relevant materials into lessons, making it easier to infuse multicultural education into the language learning process effectively. Generally, the aim is to create a curriculum that not only focuses on language acquisition but also embraces and celebrates cultural diversity,

enriching the learning experience for students.

Revisiting and revising existing curriculum frameworks to allow for more flexibility in integrating diverse cultural content without compromising language learning objectives is essential. Providing teachers with a curated repository of culturally diverse materials, such as literature, videos, or authentic resources, can also facilitate the incorporation of multicultural education. (T2)

T3 emphasizes the significance of cultivating a supportive institutional culture that values diverse perspectives within educational framework. In addition, it proposes the establishment of forums or committees dedicated to cultural exchange and collaboration among teachers. These platforms can serve as spaces for sharing successful strategies and ideas, fostering a collaborative environment where teachers can pool the expertise in integrating multicultural education effectively. By encouraging these interactions and discussions, institutions can actively promote culture that values diversity, supporting teachers with the resources necessary to implement multicultural education initiatives cohesively and effectively.

Creating a supportive institutional environment that values and encourages diverse perspectives is crucial. This might involve establishing cultural committees or forums where teachers can exchange ideas, share successful practices, and collaborate

on integrating multicultural education effectively. (T3)

Discussion

The participants emphasized the importance of integrating multicultural education beyond language instruction, defining it as a holistic method that embraced cultural diversity, fostered respect, and improved students' understanding of different cultural perspectives. This corresponded with the perspective of integrating multicultural education into the curriculum from primary education, in order to foster respect and understanding of diverse cultural perspectives (Arasaratnam, 2014). The application of integrative multicultural education can use cooperative learning models, such as the Inside-Outside Circle instructional model, and can be integrated into an inclusive curriculum with other subjects, promoting respect for cultural diversity (Akhiruddin et al., 2021). The global and ongoing integration processes, while preserving national identity, influence the development of multicultural education, emphasizing the need to understand and integrate dimensions for an effective multicultural education system (Alghamdi, 2017; Vasilyeva & Nurutdinova, 2018). The study also presents arguments on multiculturalism and integration, aiming to explore challenges, strategies, and prospects of students integration in both educational environment and community, showing

the importance of addressing multiculturalism beyond language instruction (Gilani et al., 2020).

Multicultural education in ELT context faces several challenges, including a lack of cultural awareness among teachers, which can hinder effective teaching and learning experiences. In addition, integrating students' diverse cultural backgrounds into the curriculum remains difficult, making lessons less relevant and engaging. Many teachers lack training in multicultural education, resulting in insensitivity to cultural differences in classrooms. Inequality in English language proficiency among teachers from different cultural backgrounds further complicates the delivery of multicultural education (Diem & Abdullah, 2020). Moreover, teachers often avoid discussing sociopolitical and culturally sensitive topics due to the enormity of course content and discomfort in facilitating these discussions (Pandey et al., 2020). The implementation gap between new curriculum requirements and teachers' classroom practices shows the considerable professional and psychological challenges faced, as well as the backwash effect of the prevalent examination culture in community (Yan, 2015). Furthermore, challenges such as cultural and religious taboos, parental resistance, and inadequate teacher training can hinder the implementation of sex education programs in schools (Rafiq et al., 2022).

Teachers face challenges in developing culturally sensitive graduates and promoting candid discussions about relevant but often excluded topics in classrooms (Halloran, 2009; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Implementing sensitive topics in education can be fraught with ethical dilemmas, as well as social, political, or cultural complications (Markowska-Manista & Górak-Sosnowska, 2022). Moreover, schools contextual constraints can limit the ability to create a conducive learning environment, challenging curriculum implementation fidelity (Zhu et al., 2011). With globalization, there is a growing need for culturally sensitive instruction design and curriculum, particularly in online learning environments (Farmer, 2010).

The reluctance among teachers to pursue training related to the well-being curriculum is influenced by the lack of value ascribed to it relative to the core curriculum and time constraints resulting from an overloaded curriculum (Byrne & Carthy, 2021). In addition, the teaching of history and social science topics seemingly disconnected from students' lives may serve as a way for culture to address social issues obliquely, avoiding direct examination of these issues (Evans et al., 2000). These challenges show the complexity of addressing sensitive cultural topics and the need for inclusive pedagogy in educational context.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, integrating multicultural education in the ELT context offered several benefits, including promoting inclusivity, improving global awareness, and incorporating diverse perspectives. However, it also presented challenges related to teachers' readiness and awareness. By implementing strategies such as multicultural teachers' education programs and comprehensive training, these challenges could be effectively addressed and the benefits of multicultural education maximized. Multicultural education in EFL classrooms in Indonesia faced both challenges and opportunities. The country's diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds made it essential to promote multicultural education, although there were still barriers and areas for improvement.

Future studies were recommended to expand the sample size and include diverse teachers from various regions and institutions to improve the generalizability of results. Integrating students' perspectives was crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of multicultural education in Islamic EFL classrooms. In addition, developing clear guidelines and offering professional development on multicultural education for teachers were recommended to facilitate the management of cultural diversity. Longitudinal studies would also be beneficial in examining the long-term impact of these strategies on educational outcomes.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

MD was responsible for analyzing the data and interpreting the results. UH contributed to the data collection process, ensuring the accurate gathering of information for this study. Both authors contributed to the writing and revision of the manuscript.

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