



The English Teachers' Strategies for Embracing Students' Diversities at Indonesian Schools in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study focuses on the description of the English teachers' strategies for embracing students' diversity at Indonesian schools in Malaysia. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design. The primary data were obtained by interviewing two English teachers and observing the English classes at two Indonesian schools in Malaysia. The secondary data were collected by documenting all supporting references and taking pictures of relevant events/objects in both schools. The data were analyzed through the analytical process which consists of transcribing, pre-coding and coding, ideas growing, interpreting, and conclusion drawing. The strategies to embrace the students' diversity done by the English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia are in the form of adapted learning material and accustomed teaching technique to be employed in or out of the classroom. The teachers give equal treatment to all students but furnish actual guidance or instruction to the students who need it. Some other strategies are done by the English teachers following the policy and program carried out by the schools to handle the students' diversity. The strategies are integrated into intracurricular and extracurricular activities.

Keywords

English learning, students' diversities, teachers' strategies

Introduction

The education of Indonesian Migrant Workers' (IMWs') children in Malaysia has received a lot of attention due to its challenging milieus. The difficulties of the children to access education services are claimed to be solved through several diplomatic efforts namely establishing Sekolah Indonesia, forming Community Learning Center (CLC), sending tutor teachers, assisting in the procurement of legal residence documents, and offering repatriation scholarships (Dewi, 2018; Hartati & Andawiyah, 2020; Anita et al., 2021). The CLC has an encouraging role to develop the literacy of IMWs' children community (Sondari & Zaimar, 2018). The CLC has a significant role in fostering the nationalism of IMWs' children (Suarno et al., 2021). The fundamental problems of the education of IMWs' children have been obviously fixed by the Indonesian government in cooperation with the Malaysian government, private parties, and educational practitioners/volunteers.

However, there are other facts about the education of IMWs' children in Malaysia that are fruitful to be addressed and discussed. Based on the preliminary interview of this study, the teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia also face the challenge of the students' background diversity. The students have diverse cultural backgrounds because their parents migrate to Malaysia from different areas/islands of Indonesia. Their linguistic background diversity becomes more mixed because they are exposed to the multilingualism that exists in Malaysia. The IMWs' children in CLC come from diverse tribes and different family conditions so the teachers sometimes find it difficult to shape their character or behaviour (Suarno et al., 2021). As the result of the preliminary study, students of different ages are occasionally taught together in one class. The students' diversity case becomes more complex.

Diversity in education is inevitable since we live in a multicultural world. Responding to diversity in the classroom is then imperative to provide all students with an equal education and enhance their success. Students bring their own identities such as race/ethnicity, immigration status, dis/ability, age, socioeconomic status, and religion to the learning environment; the teachers should actively develop inclusive learning environments for all students (Garibay, 2015). Embracing the students' diversity requires the teachers to adapt their teaching strategies to create a culturally and linguistically comprehensive learning environment. Teaching strategies are the approaches across curricular areas used by the teacher to support the learning of students (Herrell & Jordan, 2008).

Theories of embracing the students' diversity in the classroom have been advocated by some experts. Bartolo et al., (2007) raised two key ways of responding to students' diversity: differentiated teaching and inclusive education. In line with that, Moore & Hansen (2012) said that to create culturally sensitive learning communities in elementary to high schools, the teacher should design lessons that motivate all students to learn and implement those lessons using differentiated instructional strategies. Hoosein (2014) exposed teachers' practices in the multicultural diverse classroom that are promoting thinking and questioning, having positive mindsets and views, and applying an interactive approach and students' engagement. More specifically, Garibay (2015)

proposed teaching strategies that can create a welcoming environment for diverse students i.e., project-based and experiential learning, research projects, class discussions, reflective writing, cooperative learning and group projects, student presentations, using student inquiry, and allowing students to select topics for course content. Bisai & Singh (2020) discussed some strategies that can be implemented in a classroom with students from diverse linguistic backgrounds including Context and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), translanguaging, code-switching, and code-mixing.

Various practices related to those theories to respond to the students' diversity have been studied by many previous researchers. Innovative teaching strategies such as active learning, collaborative classroom activities, long-term simulations, and comparative problem-solving exercises were applied to respond to students' diversity at higher education levels in Pakistan (Naz & Murad, 2017). Multiple texts were used to teach critical reading skills to linguistically diverse undergraduate students in a community college in New York (Thomas & Choi, 2019). Teachers catered for diverse primary school students who newly arrived in Sweden through cooperative learning (Ferguson-Patrick, 2020). Most of the science teachers in Banjarnegara, Indonesia, have moderately positive attitudes toward teaching diverse students in general classrooms; they have personal experiences in interacting with special educational needs students (Atika et al., 2022). A social-emotional learning program was carried out for preparatory Dutch vocational secondary education in a diverse population of low-achieving students (Van De Sande et al., 2022). Distinct strategies, media, methods, and attitudes are employed by the teachers, a special program is also offered by the school, to respond to a certain case of students' diversity.

Likewise, the strategies to respond to the students' diversity in an English language classroom have been examined through plentiful research. The migrant or refugee students in intensive English language centers in South Australia were approached socioculturally whereby their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds are as beneficial to education (Due et al., 2016). The seventh-grade English language learners in linguistically diverse classrooms in South Florida were supported by strategy-focused instruction in writing argumentative text (Campbell & Filimon, 2018). In EFL-inclusive classrooms at a junior high school in Bengkulu, Indonesia, the teachers applied four teaching strategies ranging from active learning, peer-tutoring, and cooperative learning, to direct instruction (Hidayah & Morganna, 2019). Primary school English-foreign-language learners in Germany from linguistically diverse backgrounds were assisted to use their linguistic resources and engage in affective-experiential activities (Busse et al., 2020). It is somewhat similar to the sociocultural approach applied in English language centres in South Australia.

Next, in the high-school EFL classrooms in East-Java, Indonesia, the teachers displayed agency in addressing the complexities of culture, students' learning, and contextual constraints (Munandar & Newton, 2021). Ethnic-diverse learners, Roma-Gypsy students at high school in the North-West of Spain, were engaged in English as a foreign language learning through the implementation of culturally responsive teaching (Meléndez-Luces & Couto-Cantero, 2021). In teaching culturally-diverse students in English as a language

of instruction at a university in Philippines, the teachers focused on English's multidimensional significance and relevance to academic and professional success and differentiated language of instruction (Protacio, 2020). Teaching English to linguistically diverse students from migration backgrounds at secondary schools in Austria, the teachers were taking on the translanguaging stance that values multilingual practice (Erling et al., 2022). The teachers are in favor to utilize and specialize in the cultural and linguistic differences of the students to embrace the students' diversity in English classrooms – converting the conflicting factors become encouraging ones in learning.

This study focuses on the description of the English teachers' strategies for embracing students' diversity at Indonesian schools in Malaysia. The strategies applied by the teachers should have distinctive patterns within the specific diversity settings at Indonesian schools in Malaysia. The results of this study would be a beneficial reference for teachers about the practices of embracing students' diversity in English classrooms and other analogous learning contexts. This study is also expected to contribute to the theories development of English language teaching and diversity in education.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design. The locus of research is two Indonesian schools in Malaysia. The primary data were obtained by interviewing two English teachers and observing the English classes in both schools – one teacher and one meeting in each school. The interview was in semi-structured form and conducted along with note-taking/audio-recording technique. The observation was done by sitting in the English classes and note-taking/video-recording technique. The secondary data were collected by documenting all supporting references and taking pictures of relevant events/objects in the two schools.

The data were analyzed through the analytical process which consists of transcribing, pre-coding and coding, ideas growing, interpreting, and conclusion drawing (Dornyei, 2007). The results of the interview and observation were transcribed and translated into English. Through pre-coding and coding stages, the transcriptions were selected to identify the data related to teachers' strategies to embrace students' diversity. The growing ideas stage was done by grouping and labeling the patterns of teachers' strategies in embracing students' diversity. The interpreting stage was accomplished by triangulating the growth ideas from the interview, observation, and documentation, then, elaborating on the patterns of the teachers' strategies. At last, the conclusion on the teachers' strategies in embracing students' diversity is drawn by listing the gist of the strategies patterns.

Results

Based on the data obtained, there are three kinds of diversity backgrounds of the students at two Indonesian schools in Malaysia. The students have diverse cultural backgrounds. The cultural differences cover ethnicity, immigration status, socioeconomic status, and religion.

Excerpt 1 : "The background of the students' parents are mostly migrant workers to Malaysia."

The students' parents are from different parts of Indonesia and different tribes who migrate to Malaysia to become workers/laborers. Along with the diverse cultural backgrounds, the students also bring their local languages and dialects with them. Besides, the students have individual differences concerning age, knowledge, comprehension level, interest, talent, and skill.

To embrace the students' cultural and individual diversities, the English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia have done several strategies. In general, the teachers apply "K13 curriculum" of Indonesian elementary and secondary education which essentially embraces the students' diversity including individual differences. The English materials taught to the students are referring to K13 curriculum/syllabus which the complexities suit the students' level or grade.

Excerpt 2 : "We apply K13 curriculum."

Excerpt 3 : "For 1st and 2nd grade students (of elementary school), the material taught are parts of the human body and things around. The 3rd and 4th grade students learn simple sentences. The 5th and 6th grade students learn and memorize the vocabulary; they are then directed to make simple sentences using the vocabulary."

The English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia adapt their lesson plans and teaching methods regarding the students' abilities.

Excerpt 4 : "I teach using special methods which are popular to be used in English course. The details of the methods in the lesson plan are adjusted to the students' abilities."

Next, the teachers conduct fun activities, use learning media (mainly pictures), engage all the students to use English in the classroom, and make the students' different backgrounds as potential excitement in the learning.

Excerpt 5 : "We do fun activities in the classroom and all students should speak using English."

Excerpt 6 : "We often use pictures as learning media to attract all the students to study English."

The English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia give equal treatment to all students in terms of the same activities to achieve the learning objectives.

Excerpt 7 : "I use full English when teaching and emphasis that all the students have to be able to speak English well."

Excerpt 8 : "At the end of every meeting, I give the task to all the students to memorize vocabulary. In the next meeting, they have to memorize the vocabulary in the class and use the words during the learning in that meeting."

Excerpt 9 : "I require all the students to memorize 20 words after every meeting. In the next meeting, they have to memorize the words. When a student could not memorize the words, he/she should memorize additional words (the number of the words memorized for the next meeting is greater)."

Both of the English teachers, by chance, use memorizing technique as a routine task to improve their students' vocabulary mastery and speaking ability. Memorizing vocabulary technique done by the teachers is proven effective and relatively easy to be done by all the students though they have cultural and individual background differences.

Excerpt 10 : "The memorizing technique succeeds in resulting the students who are fluent in speaking English."

It is supported by the proof when one teacher called two students to be interviewed using English. They could answer all the questions accurately and fluently. Then, they confirmed that "memorizing technique and using the vocabulary in the classroom make us able to speak English well." In the teachers' room, there are pictures of the students' achievements in several English competitions, proving that they can compete with the students from other schools.

The English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia also teach their students outside the classroom without making the students' diversity as adversity.

Excerpt 11 : "After class, we always train our students who will participate in an English competition and others who wants to join the training/competition preparation."

As well, the teachers always pay attention to the students' obstacles in learning and provide solutions.

Excerpt 12 : "We limit the activity outside the school considering the students' immigration status. We are concerned about the safety of the students so the English camp is done only at school."

Additionally, the Indonesian schools in Malaysia provide extra class/learning which accommodates the students' cultural and individual differences. The English teachers guide all the students in extracurricular activities as fairly and proportionally as in classroom learning.

Excerpt 13 : "We provide extra time in which the students are free to discuss whatever topic that has been learned in the classroom. The topic could be from mathematics or English class, Qur'an recitation, and other relevant lessons."

One Indonesian school in Malaysia also accommodates the students' different tribes/cultures and fosters nationalism spirit through a weekly program.

Excerpt 14 : "To still remember Indonesian cultures, every Friday, our school re-introduce the cultures of Indonesia to the students and refresh our knowledge about the cultures."

Specifically for linguistic diversity, all languages are held at Indonesian schools in Malaysia. The students' local languages, Indonesian language, and Malay language are treated and used proportionally at schools.

Excerpt 15 : "The students use Malay when communicating outside the classroom. In the learning process (of all subjects except English), the teachers use Indonesian and the students should follow that."

Excerpt 16 : "The students have basic English because the Malay language they use every day is a mix of English. The English teachers just need to clarify the different pronunciations between Malay English and Standard English like the words "*teksi*" and "*taxi*."

The English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia always do affective and psychological approaches to embrace the students' individual differences in learning.

Excerpt 17 : "When a student is less focused, he/she is directed to sit in the front."

Discussion

Based on the results of this research, there are three kinds of diversity backgrounds of the students at two Indonesian schools in Malaysia. First, the students have cultural diversities since their parents come from different parts of Indonesia with different tribes. Second, the students also have linguistic diversities due to their different cultural backgrounds. Third, the students have individual diversities concerning their age, knowledge, comprehension level, interest, talent, and skill. The age difference influences the students' comprehension. It also contributes to the students' interest and talent dispersal.

From the data analyzed, the English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia have done several strategies to embrace the students' diversities. First, the teachers apply K13 curriculum that embraces the students' diversity. Based on K13 curriculum, the teacher affords learning that is interactive; inspiring; fun; challenging; motivating the students to actively engage; giving space for initiative, creativity, and independence concerning talent, interest, physical and psychological development of the students (Anggraena et al., 2022). It is compatible with the idea of teachers' practice in the multicultural diverse classroom exposed by Hoosein (2014) that is applying an interactive approach and students' engagement.

Second, the English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia adapt their lesson plans and teaching methods regarding the students' abilities. They use popular methods used in English course. The students' diverse abilities and knowledge are part of individual differences which could be influenced by cultural differences. To create culturally sensitive learning, the teacher should design and implement the lessons using differentiated instructional strategies (Moore & Hansen, 2012).

Third, the teachers conduct fun activities, use learning media like pictures, engage all the students to use English in the classroom, and make the students' different backgrounds as potential excitement in the learning. Classroom management is an important aspect to create an effective teaching and learning process (Sulaiman, 2021). Doing fun activities and using pictures are popular techniques that can motivate and engage all students in learning English which can be done interactively and cooperatively. Motivating, engaging, interactive, and cooperative activities are factual to be used in a diverse classroom (Moore & Hansen, 2012; Hoosein, 2014; Garibay, 2015; Ferguson-Patrick, 2020).

Fourth, the English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia give equal treatment to all students in terms of the same activities to achieve the learning objectives. All students have the responsibility to follow the teacher's instructions, join the classroom activities, and complete the task or homework. The English teachers use memorizing technique as a routine task to improve their students' vocabulary mastery and speaking ability. They really understand that vocabulary is essential for language learning as it underpins all language skills. One of the teachers applies a constructive punishment if a student does not complete the memorizing task. The penalty applies to all students. It is significant to use an appropriate technique for teaching an English language skill or aspect (Lestari & Hartatik, 2021; Wati, et al., 2023).

The application of the routine memorizing task (and its penalty for students who do not complete the task), directing the students to participate in competitions, and displaying the pictures of the students' achievements at schools are done to motivate all students to learn English. For classrooms with culturally diverse students in elementary to high schools, the teacher should design lessons that motivate all students to learn (Moore & Hansen, 2012).

Fifth, the English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia also teach their students outside the classroom without making the students' diversity as adversity. When learning outside the classroom, the students positively develop their own well-being to reach their full potential (Mygind & Bølling, 2022). It can help all the students with individual differences to increase their values and interest and, at the same time, to be aware of the ideas of diversity.

Sixth, the teachers always pay attention to the students' obstacles in learning and provide solutions. The teachers ensure that all the students have the same opportunity in learning. The teachers maintain the safety and comfort of the students in learning. It is relevant to the research conclusion of Munandar & Newton (2021) that the teachers displayed agency in addressing the students' learning and contextual constraints.

Seventh, the Indonesian schools in Malaysia provide extra class/learning which accommodates the students' cultural and individual differences. The English teachers guide all the students in extracurricular activities as fairly and proportionally as in classroom learning. The schools' programs and teachers' strategies through extracurricular activities regarding religion and interest in particular subjects are a kind of differentiated learning. Implementing lessons using differentiated instruction is one of the key strategies to respond to students' diversity (Bartolo et al., 2007; Moore & Hansen, 2012).

Eighth, the One Indonesian school in Malaysia also accommodates the students' different tribes/cultures and fosters nationalism spirit through a weekly program. The program is to refresh the students knowledge of various cultures of Indonesia. The cultural differences are not considered as trouble but can be tailored as learning material to strengthen the Indonesian students' cultural understanding and nationalism since they live out of the country. This case is comparable to the research finding of Due et al.

(2016) that migrant students can be approached socioculturally in which their own cultural backgrounds are utilized in learning.

Ninth, the students' linguistic diversities are embraced by the teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia. Indonesian is used as formal and instructional language; Malay is used in informal communication; English is used as the instructional language in English classroom; local languages and dialects are used in particular local culture programs and are not forbidden to be used in informal communication. With multilingual experience, the students frequently do code-switching. The English teachers sometimes do it as well for the purpose of helping the students to understand the features of the languages they have. Such understanding is beneficial for the students' communicative competencies. Code-switching, code-mixing, and translanguaging are strategies that can be used in a classroom with students from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Bisai & Singh, 2020; Erling et al., 2022). The students from linguistically diverse backgrounds can be assisted in learning using their linguistic resources (Due et al., 2016; Busse et al., 2020).

Tenth, the English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia always do affective and psychological approaches to embrace the students' individual differences in learning. One of the actions of the approaches done by the teacher is directing the less focused student. The affective and social-emotional approaches are commonly used in a diverse classroom especially for less motivated and low-achieving students (Busse et al., 2020; Van De Sande et al., 2022).

In essence, the strategies to embrace the students' diversity done by the English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia are in the form of adapted learning material and accustomed teaching technique to be employed in or out of the classroom. The teachers give equal treatment to all students but furnish actual guidance or instruction to the students who need it. Some other strategies are done by the English teachers following the policy and program carried out by the schools to handle the students' diversity. The strategies are integrated into intracurricular and extracurricular activities.

All strategies done by the English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia can be considered as profitable ones to embrace the students' cultural, linguistic, and individual differences. The teachers with their good qualifications have successfully managed the diversity in the classrooms and then led their students to achieve the learning objectives and to have fine English competencies. The schools and the teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia keep on striving to improve the quality of education including overcoming the problems that may occur associated with the students' diverse backgrounds.

Conclusion

The English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia have done several strategies to embrace the students' diversity. The schools and the English teachers apply K13 curriculum which is compatible to address the students' diversity. The teachers taught the English materials which suit the students' level. The English teachers adjust their lesson plans and teaching methods regarding the students' abilities. Next, the teachers

conduct fun activities, use learning media, engage all the students to use English in the classroom, and make the students' different backgrounds as potential excitement in the learning.

The English teachers give equal treatment to all students to achieve the learning objectives. The English teachers also teach their students outside the classroom without making the students' diversity as a problem. Then, the English teachers always pay attention to the students' obstacles in learning and afford solutions. They maintain the safety and comfort of the students in learning. Accordingly, the English teachers consider the students' immigration status and still include those who do not have complete residence documents in the learning activities.

As well, the English teachers guide all the students fairly in extracurricular activities. The schools and the English teachers accommodate the students' different (Indonesian local) cultures and languages. In the classroom, the English teachers sometimes do code-switching to help the students in understanding the features of the languages they have. Moreover, the English teachers always do affective and psychological approaches to embrace the students' individual differences in learning.

The strategies done by the English teachers at Indonesian schools in Malaysia can be replicated by other teachers. The teachers should customize the strategies to their students' diversity conditions. As well, the schools should support the teachers to embrace the students' diversity through a kind of policy or program. An in-depth study on one topical strategy done by a teacher or a school to respond to students' diversity can be conducted to explicate the efficacy of such a strategy.

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