

Diversity and Inclusivity in the EFL Education Context: Challenges and Proposed Practices

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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This study intends to investigate the difficulties that prospective English instructors experience while working to incorporate diversity and inclusiveness into their EFL teaching strategies, along with detailed proposals they recommend for better integrating these components in EFL activities, such as course planning, resource selection, and interactive class exercises. The researchers employed a basic interpretative approach as they delve into the challenges and advocated strategies of preservice English teachers enrolled in the English language education program. The research took place at a state university in Surabaya during the initial semester of the 2024-2025 academic session. The participants included eleven preservice English language teachers who are part of the English language education program. The method of data collection included utilizing open-ended questionnaires. The method for selecting research participants was based on convenience sampling. Data analysis commenced following the thorough collection of all data. The qualitative findings acquired from the polls were reviewed following a defined procedure, which entails familiarizing oneself with the insights, categorizing it, coding and streamlining it, and ultimately interpreting and illustrating the results. The results reveal several significant challenges in diverse learning environments, such as: tailoring instruction, ensuring equitable access to resources, fostering inclusive attitudes, enhancing teacher competence, and addressing communication barriers. In addition, the results point to the need for a varied strategy to promote diversity and inclusiveness in educational environments concerning curriculum creation, material choices, and class activities.

INTRODUCTION

In the conversation surrounding humanity, equal rights, including the right to education, consistently emerge as a pivotal concern (Hidayah & Morganna, 2019). The assurance that all children shall have the opportunity for education is outlined in several global agreements and texts, and it has been validated by both obligatory and non-obligatory measures. In this context, countries bear the duty to recognize, shield, and facilitate the educational rights of every individual learner (UNESCO, 2014).

The diverse range of influences that define the character of a modern higher education classroom includes globalization, technological innovation, and shifts in economic and social dynamics. These developments, in turn, enhance the diversity among students regarding their personalities, identities, and perspectives on the world. Moreover, students hailing from different geographic regions, religions, cultures, ethnic groups, languages, educational experiences, socio-economic backgrounds, and work histories contribute to a more intricate classroom environment (De Wit, 2011; Kaur, Awang-Hashim, & Noman, 2017).

The demographics and unwavering demands of the globalized economy compel higher education professionals to reassess and adjust their teaching and learning approaches. It is crucial that classroom methodologies, frameworks, and environments promote participation and equitable opportunities for every student, irrespective of their physical, cognitive, emotional, and conative variations (Gale & Mills, 2013; Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010).

The capacity to integrate inclusivity into teaching and learning methodologies represents one viable approach to recognize and tackle the complexities present in today's higher education classrooms (Barrington, 2004). While student diversity is a complex and multifaceted issue, the objective remains clear and focused, indicating that our practices should aim to dismantle barriers to participation and promote the engagement of every individual in the classroom (Ainscow, 1999). Therefore, it is crucial for higher education professionals to engage in strategic reflection to evaluate and comprehend how diversity and inclusion are defined and managed within their specific environments.

Numerous investigations have been conducted on the topics of diversity and inclusivity within the EFL education context. A notably important research initiative was executed by Muñoz-Martín et al. (2024). This paper argues that despite EU efforts to unify education systems, discrepancies in Initial Language Teacher Education across member states hinder the creation of an inclusive environment, especially regarding gender and sexual diversity. The paper explores these challenges and proposes a unified ILTE framework incorporating inclusivity, social diversity, and respect for all identities.

Another important study undertaken by Yonata (2024) proposes a conceptual framework for developing EFL materials at the undergraduate level that addresses the gap between current classroom practices and the needs of contemporary global citizenship education and Education 5.0. It draws on existing frameworks for language material development and diversity in ELT to create a model that accommodates inclusivity and diversity for future global citizens.

The investigation by Muñoz-Martín, et al. examined various obstacles and introduced a unified ILTE framework that emphasizes inclusivity, social diversity, and the dignity of all identities, whereas Yonata's analysis primarily focused on a theoretical structure for creating EFL resources aimed at undergraduate students that connects existing teaching methods with contemporary global citizenship education and the principles of Education 5.0. This ongoing inquiry differentiates itself from the two prior studies since it engages in a qualitative analysis that highlights the obstacles experienced by pre-service English teachers in their efforts to merge diversity and inclusivity into their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching methodologies, in addition to the tailored advice these pre-service teachers suggest for bettering the integration of diversity and inclusivity in EFL educational approaches, which involves curriculum planning, resource allocation, and classroom participation techniques. Given the minimal discourse surrounding curriculum design, the selection of materials, and classroom activities that integrate diversity and inclusivity into EFL teaching methods, this study aims to address that gap. The inquiries guiding this research are: what challenges do preservice English teachers perceive when attempting to incorporate diversity and inclusivity into their EFL teaching practices and what specific suggestions do preservice English teachers propose for improving the integration of diversity and inclusivity into EFL teaching practices, including curriculum design, materials selection, and classroom activities.?

RESEARCH METHOD

The researchers adopted a basic interpretative study designed to comprehend a phenomenon through detailed narratives, employing a range of data collection methods including interviews, observations, and document analysis (Ary et al., 2014). The researchers selected a basic interpretative study approach to explore the challenges and

recommended practices of pre-service English teachers in the English language education study program. Interpretive studies can support individuals in sharing their personal tales and outlooks. The focus is on understanding the importance that individuals attribute to their experiences.

The research took place at a public university in Surabaya throughout the initial semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. The participants of this study consisted of eleven pre-service English language teachers enrolled in the English language education program. The technique utilized for gathering data consists of open-ended questionnaires. The approach taken for data collection involved selecting research participants using convenience sampling. The criteria for participating in this research includes students from the class of 2024 who are set to enroll in diversity and inclusivity courses in the upcoming curriculum.

Data analysis began after the complete collection of all data. The first and second research questions were investigated utilizing the open-ended questionnaire. The qualitative data acquired from the questionnaire were analyzed in accordance with the methodology outlined by Ary et al. (2014), which involves becoming acquainted with the data, organizing it, coding and condensing it, and then interpreting and presenting the findings. The data were organized in a tabular format, categorized by challenges and suggested practices, with each response type assigned a code to group similar challenges and suggested practices together including curriculum design, materials selection, and classroom activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Diverse Learning Environments

The student responses documented reveal various challenges encountered in diverse learning environments. These challenges can be categorized into the following classifications:

1. Differentiated Instruction and Varying Learning Styles

This category encompasses the difficulties faced by educators in addressing the diverse learning needs and preferences of students. This includes accommodating different ability levels and learning styles. The data show that Student 1 (S1) points out the challenge of “differences in student ability levels that require a differentiated approach.” They also mention “differences in learning styles” that necessitate diverse teaching strategies. Similarly, S3 highlights the challenge of adapting to different teaching methods employed by lecturers. S10 echoes these sentiments, mentioning “differences in people's ability levels” and “learning styles of various people” as contributing factors to the challenges faced.

2. Resource Accessibility and Availability

This classification focuses on the challenges posed by unequal access to resources, particularly technology, which can hinder the learning process for some students. Student responses show that S1 specifically mentions “access and availability of resources” as a challenge, noting that not all students have equal access, “especially in terms of technology.” S7 reiterates this point, stating that “not all students have equal access to learning materials.” S9 lists “limited resources” as a key challenge, and S10 also

includes “limited resources and materials” among the challenges experienced. Finally, S11 points to “limited resources” as a barrier to inclusive learning, noting that not all schools have sufficient materials, technology, or teachers.

3. Understanding and Embracing Diversity

This category highlights the challenges stemming from a lack of understanding or acceptance of diversity and inclusivity. The evidence shows S2 discusses the challenge of overcoming the human tendency to group with like-minded individuals, often viewing differences as obstacles rather than opportunities. S4 succinctly states “lack of understanding of diversity and inclusiveness” as a challenge. S6 mentions “lack of interest in inclusiveness” as a contributing factor to the challenges faced.

4. Teacher Expertise and Time Constraints

This classification addresses the challenges related to teachers' limited experience in managing diverse classrooms and the constraints imposed by limited class time. The responses show S7 mentions “teachers' limited experience in managing very diverse students” as a challenge. They also point to “limited classroom time” as a constraint on exploring diversity and inclusivity effectively. S8 describes the challenge faced by teachers in handling inclusivity “alone,” requiring proficiency in various areas such as communication for students with disabilities and managing diverse needs within limited timeframes. S9 lists “time limitations” as a significant challenge in diverse learning environments. S11 also notes that “limited time” is a barrier to preparing and implementing inclusive learning effectively.

5. Communication Barriers and Individual Differences

This category focuses on the challenges arising from communication barriers and the diverse backgrounds and abilities of students. The data show S5 lists “the level of ability among students,” “the different backgrounds of each student,” and “barriers to communication” as challenges. S11 points to “individual differences” as a challenge, noting that every student has a different background, ability, and learning style. They also mention “cultural barriers” as a potential source of miscommunication and misunderstanding.

These classifications provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges encountered in diverse learning environments, as perceived by the students. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote inclusivity and create a more equitable and supportive learning experience for all students.

The student responses analyzed reveal a multifaceted understanding of the challenges inherent in diverse learning environments. These challenges span pedagogical approaches, resource accessibility, attitudes towards diversity, teacher expertise, and communication barriers. As Garibay (2014) said, engaging in conversations about diversity within the classroom can pose a variety of challenges for educators. The particular hurdles likely change based on whether the educator is associated with a marginalized demographic in a class mostly filled with students from a dominant demographic or if the educator is affiliated with a dominant demographic in a class that is notably diverse. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach that

involves providing teachers with professional development opportunities, ensuring equitable access to resources, fostering inclusive classroom cultures, and implementing effective communication strategies. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, we can create more equitable and supportive learning environments that enable all students to thrive.

Proposed Practices for Diversity and Inclusivity

Curriculum Adaptations for Diversity and Inclusivity

The student responses regarding curriculum adaptations for diversity and inclusivity can be classified into the following categories:

1. Dedicated Course/Module

This category encompasses responses suggesting the creation of a specific course or module dedicated to diversity and inclusivity. Advocates of this approach believe that focused instruction is necessary to adequately address these complex issues. The data show S1 suggests “a special course that discusses diversity and inclusivity” for in-depth exploration. Similarly, S5 supports “a special course related to diversity and inclusivity.” S11 also prefers a dedicated course to avoid student confusion and provide a clear reference point.

2. Integration into Existing Courses

This classification includes responses proposing the integration of diversity and inclusivity content into existing courses across the curriculum. This approach emphasizes the relevance and application of these concepts within various subject areas. The responses show S6 suggests integrating diversity and inclusivity into other courses for “immediate application” and contextual relevance. S10 recommends incorporating these values into existing courses like Speaking and Cultural Studies, alongside additional modules and teacher training.

3. Supplemental Activities

This category comprises responses advocating for supplemental activities like workshops and mentoring programs to address diversity and inclusivity. This approach offers a more flexible and experiential learning opportunity. The data show S2 proposes “mentoring that discusses diversity and inclusivity” outside or within lectures to provide guidance and direction. S9 suggests “additional workshops, seminars or trainings” for practical, hands-on experience and skill development.

4. Not a Significant Urgency/Alternative Approaches

This classification includes responses that question the urgency of specific diversity and inclusivity courses or suggest alternative approaches. The responses explain S3 expresses skepticism about the “significant urgency” of such content in EFL learning, suggesting special courses only “if needed.” S7, while acknowledging the importance, questions the necessity of a dedicated course, suggesting alternative methods like incorporating the topic into existing subjects or providing relevant references. S8 also questions the need for a separate course, suggesting that diversity and inclusivity should be naturally integrated into all subjects.

These classifications represent the diverse perspectives on how best to incorporate diversity and inclusivity into the curriculum. Understanding these viewpoints is crucial for developing effective strategies that cater to various learning styles and institutional contexts.

The student responses compiled offer valuable insights into the varying perspectives on how best to incorporate diversity and inclusivity into the curriculum. These perspectives can be broadly categorized into four main approaches: dedicated courses, integration into existing curricula, supplemental activities, and alternative strategies. Education systems vary in their approach to achieving objectives and in the manner they establish aims for enhancing equity and inclusion. These are articulated at a broad level (for instance, general educational objectives) as well as in more detailed forms (such as curriculum design). Initiatives aimed at fostering equity and inclusion in education are formulated within regulatory frameworks, which exist both within and beyond the educational landscape (OECD, 2023). Additionally, these diverse perspectives highlight the complexity of incorporating diversity and inclusivity into educational settings. Understanding these viewpoints is crucial for developing effective strategies that cater to various learning styles, institutional contexts, and student needs. A comprehensive approach may involve a combination of these methods, ensuring that diversity and inclusivity are addressed in a meaningful and impactful way.

Material Selection for Diversity and Inclusivity

The student responses documented concerning material selection for teaching diversity and inclusivity can be categorized into the following classifications:

1. Real-World Examples and Case Studies

This category encompasses responses emphasizing the use of real-world examples, news, documentaries, and case studies to illustrate diversity and inclusivity concepts. Students believe that such materials provide relatable and practical contexts for understanding these complex issues. The data show S1 suggests using “news, articles and journals, as well as documentaries taken from real events” for greater connection to individual experiences. S4 recommends “documentary learning resources and case studies” for a more open-minded approach. S5 supports using “case studies, news or journal articles” due to their factual basis. S7 advocates for “documentaries or case studies” for a more engaging learning experience.

2. Relevance to Current Events and Social Media

This classification includes responses highlighting the importance of connecting learning materials to current events and social media trends. Students believe that relating these concepts to contemporary issues enhances relevance and engagement. The responses explain S2 suggests using materials related to “phenomena or events around us” and information from social media, where young people express themselves and access information.

3. Combination of Resources and Perspectives

This category comprises responses advocating for a combination of learning resources and diverse perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of diversity and inclusivity. The data show S3 believes that combining learning resources and viewpoints leads to a “broader and more open understanding.” S6 suggests using “diverse” materials like textbooks, journals, documentaries, and case studies with local and global perspectives. S9 proposes a combination of textbooks, journal articles, documentaries, news films, and case studies, along with local and global perspectives.

4. Focus on Learner Abilities and Empathy

This classification includes responses emphasizing the importance of tailoring materials to learner abilities and promoting empathy. The response shows S8 suggests providing learning materials “tailored to the learner's ability and empathy” to ensure equal learning outcomes.

These classifications represent the diverse perspectives on material selection for teaching diversity and inclusivity. Understanding these viewpoints is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies that cater to various learning styles and preferences.

The student responses collected provide valuable insights into the diverse perspectives on selecting appropriate materials for teaching diversity and inclusivity. These perspectives can be broadly categorized into four main approaches: real-world examples and case studies, relevance to current events and social media, a combination of resources and perspectives, and a focus on learner abilities and empathy. As stated by Slabbert (2000: pers. comm.), educators must exhibit creativity and innovation to address the challenges arising from insufficient resources. These diverse perspectives underscore the complexity of selecting appropriate materials for teaching diversity and inclusivity. A comprehensive approach may involve integrating these different strategies to create a rich and engaging learning experience that caters to various learning styles and preferences. By considering these student viewpoints, educators can develop more effective teaching strategies that promote a deeper understanding of diversity and inclusivity.

Effective Learning Methods for Diversity and Inclusivity

The student responses concerning effective learning methods for diversity and inclusivity can be classified into the following categories:

1. Case Discussions and Debates

This category encompasses responses that highlight the effectiveness of case discussions and debates in promoting critical thinking, diverse perspectives, and active participation. The responses show S1 suggests case discussions as the best activity for individual expression of opinions and viewpoints. S3 recommends case discussions and debates for active participation and inclusivity. S4 supports case discussions for honing critical thinking, creative thinking, and communication skills. S5 favors case discussions for gaining different perspectives.

2. Case Discussions and Projects

This classification includes responses that emphasize the combination of case discussions and projects for applying diversity and inclusivity material, fostering critical thinking, and active learning. The data show S2 recommends case discussions and projects for critical thinking, active information processing, and embedded learning.

3. Case Discussions and Text/Film Analysis

This category comprises responses that advocate for case discussions and text/film analysis to encourage participation, especially from introverted students, and to provide diverse perspectives. The data show S6 suggests active learning methods like case discussions and text/film analysis. S11 recommends case discussions and text/film analysis for encouraging introverted students to express their opinions.

4. Case Studies and Discussions

This classification includes responses that highlight the use of case studies and discussions for developing analytical skills, empathy, and understanding of different perspectives. The response shows S10 recommends case studies and discussions for developing analytical skills, empathy, and understanding diverse perspectives. These classifications represent the diverse student perspectives on effective learning methods for diversity and inclusivity. Understanding these viewpoints is crucial for educators to design engaging and impactful learning experiences that cater to various learning styles and preferences.

The student responses compiled offer valuable insights into the diverse perspectives on effective learning methods for diversity and inclusivity. These perspectives can be broadly categorized into four main approaches: case discussions and debates, case discussions and projects, case discussions and text/film analysis, and case studies and discussions. As noted by Duhaney & Zemel, (2000), effective strategies can significantly strengthen and enrich interpersonal relationships within the classroom. The degree of interaction among teachers and students rises as they collaborate to achieve diverse learning goals. Consequently, classroom activities shift away from being predominantly teacher-centered and become increasingly centered around the learners. These diverse perspectives underscore the importance of considering various learning styles and preferences when designing educational strategies for diversity and inclusivity. A comprehensive approach may involve integrating these different methods to create a rich and engaging learning experience that caters to a wide range of learners. By incorporating these student viewpoints, educators can develop more effective teaching strategies that promote a deeper understanding of diversity and inclusivity.

CONCLUSION

The results highlight numerous significant obstacles in varied learning settings, such as: customizing instruction, guaranteeing fair access to resources, promoting inclusive mindsets, improving teacher proficiency, and resolving communication issues. Tackling

these obstacles necessitates a comprehensive strategy that includes professional training, resource distribution, and nurturing inclusive classroom environments.

Furthermore, the results also indicate a complex strategy for enhancing diversity and inclusivity within educational settings. Students support a blend of specialized courses, integration into current curricula, and additional activities to tackle these essential issues. The selection of materials should focus on real-life examples, case studies, and culturally significant content, utilizing technology and social media when suitable. Effective teaching methods should promote active engagement, discussions, and teamwork projects to nurture critical thinking and empathy. A comprehensive method that encompasses these elements can create a more equitable and welcoming educational environment for all learners.

Conducting supplementary research that examines the prolonged outcomes of these educational interventions on students' convictions about diversity and inclusivity, in addition to their activity in diverse situations, is beneficial. Research of this nature could involve extended studies that observe alterations in opinions and conduct throughout a lengthy timeframe. Another avenue for further research involves exploring the scalability and practical application of these educational methods across various educational settings. This research could tackle issues associated with resource distribution, teacher development, and curriculum incorporation.

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