

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Globalization has affected our world more than we think, especially in the educational aspect, where it has experienced change. Classrooms are no longer uniform settings; rather, they have evolved into dynamic environments with students from various backgrounds. This diversity encompasses not only ethnicity and race but also variations in knowledge, skills, socio-economic status, and cultural identities. Within the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), this diversity poses both challenges and opportunities. Teachers are now responsible for more than merely teaching grammar and vocabulary; they are also expected to foster an inclusive atmosphere where every student, regardless of their background, feels a sense of belonging and has an equal chance to thrive.

The notion of multicultural education has emerged as an essential framework for meeting these needs. As noted by Parekh (2001), the objective of multicultural education is to foster abilities such as mutual respect, intellectual curiosity, dialogue, self-reflection, and critical self-awareness among students. This approach transcends merely celebrating various holidays or traditions; it represents a

systematic endeavor to promote equity. According to Banks (2019), a key aim of multicultural education is to help students from diverse backgrounds acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively in a fair and democratic society. In an English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom, where language serves as a medium for communication and identity, the incorporation of cultural competence is crucial for reducing the "affective filter" and enhancing students' motivation.

Cultural competence is essential in education because it can significantly influence how students feel about their academic experience. First, it fosters inclusivity and fairness by ensuring that every student feels appreciated, respected, and supported throughout their learning journey. Second, it improves academic performance by offering culturally relevant and responsive teaching that resonates with students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, cultural competence helps build positive relationships among teachers, students, families, and communities, contributing to a more collaborative and nurturing learning atmosphere. In summary, cultural competence is key to equipping students to succeed in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world (Haniko et al., 2024).

For students from different cultural backgrounds, the classroom is not only a space for academic learning but also a space where they are still recognizing and adapting to their identities, what they will become, etc. In Indonesia, cultural diversity in schools is a key feature, as it is a multicultural country. Indonesia's multiculturalism is encapsulated in its national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*,

which translates to Unity in Diversity. This slogan remains in use today by the government, symbolizing the unity of various ethnicities, cultures, and religions within the nation (Hartanti & Ardhana, 2022).

The significance of recognizing and embracing cultural diversity is also emphasized in Islamic teachings. The Qur'an states in Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ

خَيْرٌ ۝۱۳

From the implied meaning of the above verse, it can be said that diversity is part of God's creation and encourages mutual understanding and respect among people of different backgrounds. It aligns with the concept of cultural competence in education, where teachers recognize, value, and integrate students' diverse cultural identities into the learning process.

Eden et al. (2024) studied cultural competence in teaching and have often focused on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as a framework for understanding how teachers can better serve students from diverse backgrounds. CRT focuses on the ways teachers can adapt their teaching strategies to be more inclusive and recognize the cultural identities of their students. While this framework has been widely used, it often emphasizes curriculum adjustments and pedagogical techniques that reflect students' cultures directly.

In contrast to their research, this research used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as its foundation, which takes a slightly different approach. Vygotsky's theory

emphasizes that learning occurs through social interactions within cultural contexts. It suggests that students' learning is mediated by teachers who guide their students' interactions with cultural tools (e.g., language, traditions, and values) in the classroom. Sociocultural theory focuses on the importance of social context and the teacher's role in creating learning experiences that connect students' cultural backgrounds with the academic content. This research focuses on understanding how students from diverse cultural backgrounds experience belonging and inclusion in the classroom, as well as how they perceive the impact of culturally responsive teaching on their academic engagement and progress. Hence, the research was conducted on one of the many vocational high schools in Banjarbaru, which is SMKN 3 Banjarbaru, where the school offers the researcher a new perspective of teaching and learning activities in a vocational school.

While some research from Eden et al. (2024) and Haniko et al. (2024) examined the impact of CRT on student learning, they do so from a curriculum-focused perspective. This research, by contrast, explored how social interaction and teacher-student relationships, informed by sociocultural theory, play a role in fostering inclusivity and academic engagement. The case study approach used in this research, with its focus on direct observation of classroom dynamics, provided insights into the real-time experiences of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the researcher conducted research entitled **“EXPLORING CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHING: A STUDY**

OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND CLASSROOM INCLUSIVITY”.

B. Definition of Key Terms

1. Cultural Competence is the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. In this research, it will be taken in the context of a teacher's cultural competence in teaching and learning activities in the classroom by bringing an inclusive curriculum and having flexible assessments by adapting each assessment to students' individual needs.
2. Classroom Inclusivity refers to creating an educational environment where all students, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or differences, feel valued, respected, and supported. Classroom inclusivity will be influenced by teachers who consciously reduce the physical and psychological gap between teachers and students. This key term will be the dependent variable as it will be the outcome measure for this research.
3. Academic Progress is the significant improvement of students in their learning journey, including their knowledge acquisition, skill development, and overall performance in academic subjects. In the context of this research, it was one of the points that was observed relating to teachers' cultural competence. Feedback from students about the practices teachers brought in the teaching and learning activity is where the students used the teacher's guidance as a tool for

problem solving; hence, they went through the Internalization process starting from inner peace to self-regulation.

4. Sociocultural Theory is a theoretical framework developed by Lev Vygotsky that emphasizes the role of social interaction, cultural tools, and guided learning in cognitive development and knowledge construction, which makes it the main theory that was brought by the researcher for this research.

C. Research Question

1. What are the practices in teaching and learning activity that correlates to students' diverse cultural backgrounds regarding their sense of belonging and inclusion in the classroom?
2. How do students perceive the impact of culturally competent teaching practices on their academic engagement and overall progress?

D. Objectives of Study

1. To explore the practice in teaching and learning activity that correlates to students' diverse cultural backgrounds regarding their sense of belonging and inclusion in the classroom.
2. To explore how the students perceive the impact of culturally competent teaching practices on their academic engagement and overall progress.

E. Significance of Study

1. Theoretical Significance:

This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of cultural competence in education by drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. It explores how cultural competence influences students' cognitive development, academic engagement, and emotional well-being. Additionally, the research enhances existing literature on culturally responsive teaching by examining its role in fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. The findings may also provide a deeper insight into how social interactions and teacher-student relationships impact learning in multicultural classrooms.

2. Practical Significance:

This research provides practical insights for teachers to create more inclusive and supportive learning environments for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. By understanding how cultural competence affects academic engagement, teachers can adapt their instructional methods to improve student participation and learning outcomes. Furthermore, the research can inform educational policies and curriculum development, ensuring that teaching practices align with the needs of multicultural student populations.

Additionally, this research holds value for teacher education and professional development by contributing to the design of training programs that build cultural competence among teachers, equipping them with the skills to work effectively with diverse students. Ultimately, the research supports

efforts to promote equity in education, particularly for marginalized and underrepresented students.