



Article

Conceptualising Intercultural Literacy: Narratives from English Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This current study investigates how English language teachers in Indonesian higher educational institutions define and conceptualize intercultural literacy and practice it in their classrooms. Eight ELT practitioners were interviewed through narrative inquiry, and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis to explore their lived conceptualizations. The findings suggest three major themes on intercultural literacy, including conceptualization of intercultural literacy, implementation in professional practice, challenges in fostering intercultural understanding, and strategies to overcome these challenges. Teachers defined intercultural literacy as encompassing cultural understanding, adaptability, comparative analysis, and professional knowledge. They integrated it into their teaching through curriculum design, student-centered methods, and digital tools. This was done by weaving these into the curriculum design and retraining pedagogy with student-centric methods and other digital tools. However, the participants mentioned that they faced some obstacles, including institutional barriers, limited funding, and the difficulties of switching from the traditional to the newest teaching method. These issues were mitigated by professional development, collaboration, and inclusive instructional materials. The current research finding indicates the importance of comprehensive professional development and institutional support for teachers in developing intercultural competence in their students. These findings contribute to intercultural literacy in Indonesia and practical recommendations for improving it within Indonesian higher education. The finding highlights the how to prepare students for a globalized world through intercultural literacy and educator support.

I. INTRODUCTION

In language education, intercultural literacy has been highlighted as a key aspect of our globalised and increasingly interconnected world (Porto, 2019b). Since English is the lingua franca of international communication, a key role of EFL teachers is to promote intercultural understanding and competence (Araujo Portugal, 2021; Shin & Jeon, 2018; Tatzali & Beazidou, 2023). Intercultural literacy encompasses the ability to understand, communicate, and effectively interact with people across culture (Heyward, 2002; Phipps & St Clair, 2008). Therefore, for English language teachers who teach diverse student populations, it is a vital component in establishing inclusive

and equitable learning environments is to develop intercultural literacy (Fang & Elyas, 2021; Vižintin, 2018).

Research has shown that intercultural literacy increases students' critical literature do not include each other (Angelelli et al., 2021; Byram & Wagner, 2018; Caetano et al., 2020; Deardorff, 2006; Huh & Suh, 2018; Lau, 2015; Pocevi, 2023). Despite the presence of existing research on intercultural literacy in Western settings, no empirical evidence as regards how English language teachers working within non-Western contexts like that one in Indonesia perceive and enact their practices about it has been established to date (Fajriyah et al., 2020; Morganna et al., 2018; Morganna et al., 2020;

Mubarok & Sofiana, 2022; Munandar & Newton, 2021). Given this gap, one of the priorities is to explore how educators in non-Western settings may approach intercultural literacy differently because their socio-cultural context, belonging to a particular region, has different cultural dynamics, educational practices, and institutional frameworks. Instead, empirical research examining the constraints and affordances of cultural contexts where classroom teachers work is needed to enrich this void in the literature. This will provide some insights into how intercultural literacy could be integrated within English language teaching in Indonesian.

The importance of teachers' development of intercultural literacy is borne out in the education sphere to a greater extent because it determines their impact on students, leading them towards an understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017; Tambyah, 2019; Vižintin, 2018; Winarti, 2017). This implies the ability, knowledge, and skills that individuals need to acquire in order for them to understand one another, communicate with each other efficiently, and effectively interact irrespective of their cultural background (Byram & Grundy, 2002; Byram, 1997; Ilie, 2019; Karlik, 2023; Schulz, 2007; Valiandes et al., 2018). Teachers who possess high intercultural literacy, rather than engage in stereotyping thinking and mutual ignorance with students towards other cultures, can provide necessary resources for understanding different cultural contexts (Baker, 2012; Baker, 2015; Byram & Wagner, 2018; Segura-Robles & Parra-González, 2019). This model has been widely carried over to the language classroom to improve learner intercultural competence and communicative competencies.

Despite the well-documented formative process of intercultural literacy principles in language education, deeper understanding and further development within non-Western contexts can be challenging. Hence, the mechanism of education in Indonesia and their culture are a lot different compared to Western countries for example (Marmoah et al., 2021; Nurman et al., 2022; Zein, 2019). In addition, as English language teachers in Indonesia, the teacher must have other understanding related to linguistic and cultural diversity (Hamdani & Husain, 2023; Marcellino, 2015; Poedjiastutie et al., 2021). Teachers in many places must navigate between languages and do

not always teach or learn in their first language (Baker, 2015a). Furthermore, cultural elements in Indonesian society, such as collectivism and hierarchical relationships within certain norms, can also affect teachers' or students' views toward intercultural learning (Aulia, 2022; Timotius & Rofil, 2023). Indonesian higher education exemplifies how traditional teaching methods and hierarchical relations represent obstacles to intercultural competence (Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Pinariya & Sutjipto, 2021).

Although intercultural literacy is a recognized pivotal skill for living in diverse contexts (Novianti et al., 2020; Phipps & St Clair, 2008; Widiati et al., 2021), it has maintained low profile status as an articulated concept within educational settings, especially higher education environment of Indonesia. Learning about the life stories and experiences of ELTs concerning their approaches toward intercultural literacy seems particularly important considering this research focus. This study draws on and explores these narratives to further some discussion about how English language teachers engage with intercultural literacy practices, thus suggesting a pregnant pedagogical mode or programming research all at once.

Existing literature on intercultural literacy usually emphasizes theoretical orientation and teaching intervention or practical dimension but relatively less highlights the real experience and views of a language teacher (Bin-Hady, 2024; Göbel & Helmke 2010; Yan 2021). This research, therefore, aims to investigate and theorize intercultural literacy through the voices and narratives of English language teachers in Indonesia. Through exploring the lived experiences and narratives of these teacher educators, this study seeks to contribute to understanding how intercultural literacy is conceptualized, practiced, and negotiated in language education contexts within Indonesian higher education. The study also explores some of the problems, solutions, and perspectives on intercultural understanding in English language teaching among teachers encountered by these professionals. In the end, research in this field should produce findings that can be valuable for educators and teacher education programs as they seek to foster intercultural competence in second language learners.

Based on the purpose outlined above, the appropriate research questions addressed in this

study are:

1. How do English language teachers conceptualize intercultural literacy within their professional practice?
2. What challenges and strategies do English language teachers encounter in fostering intercultural understanding among their students?

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research design of narrative inquiry to seek lived experiences through storytelling. Narrative inquiry offers a capacity for researchers to look closely at personal and professional narratives from participants within the broader context of their life stories (Clandinin, 2006). This research investigates how English language teachers in Indonesian higher education institutions understand intercultural literacy and implement it when practicing with students. This study involves eight EFL teachers in higher education in Indonesia who were selected by using purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The participants have different teaching experiences, educational backgrounds, and overseas experiences, which allows for cross-contextual perspectives on intercultural literacy.

The primary data collection instrument was the semi-structured interview. This instrument enables in-depth examination of essential topics while remaining grounded within a predetermined structure. The interview guide consisted of questions about participants' definitions and understanding of intercultural literacy, experiences teaching the concepts, as well as difficulties and positive outcomes. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to drill down into answers,

which often enables a more complete picture of how participants view an issue (Adams 2015; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which aims to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Clarke & Braun, 2017). The analysis began with the transcription of the interview recordings and reading through each transcription again to read the data. Next, the coding process was conducted to identify the data related to the research questions. After the coding process, the data was categorized into tentative themes. The last step is to analyze the theme to uncover the hidden patterns and meanings as reflections of EFL teachers in Indonesian higher education toward conceptualizing intercultural literacy into practice. The application of thematic analysis allows the researcher to provide an organized, coherent description of their reflections and experiences, emphasizing both commonalities as well as differences between narratives (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

III. RESULTS

The thematic analysis process was used to categorize themes derived from the data of teachers. The researchers performed a detailed descriptive analysis of each corpus establishing as close to an explicit level as possible the meaning behind every word ordered in discourse by the teachers. Analysis of the data identified three overarching themes within the dataset.

Theme 1: Conceptualization of Intercultural Literacy

During the interview, the participants were asked to share their perspectives on intercultural literacy. The majority of the teachers define and conceptualize intercultural literacy based on

Table 1: The participants of the study

Participants	Age range in (years)	Years of teaching experience	Educational Background	Overseas Experience
Participant 1	46 and above	11 – 20 years	Doctoral Degree	Yes
Participant 2	41 - 45	5 – 10 years	Doctoral Degree	Yes
Participant 3	36 - 40	11 – 20 years	Master Degree	None
Participant 4	41 - 45	11 – 20 years	Master Degree	None
Participant 5	41 – 45	11 – 20 years	Doctoral Degree	None
Participant 6	46 and above	21 + years	Master Degree	Yes
Participant 7	31 - 35	5 – 10 years	Master Degree	Yes
Participant 8	36 - 40	5 – 10 years	Doctoral Degree	None

Table 2. Teachers' definitions

Participants	Definitions of Intercultural Literacy	Components
Participant 1	Intercultural literacy is the ability of how someone can understand each other between different cultures.	Cultural understanding, communication
Participant 2	Addressing the differences, we have the ability or knowledge to adapt.	Adaptability, cultural awareness
Participant 3	Intercultural literacy is understanding the culture of the language we are studying or studying and comparing it with our culture.	cultural knowledge, comparative analysis
Participant 4	Thinking globally, intercultural literacy is not dealing with reading and writing but intercultural, but mostly about having specific information about different culture. We have the ability to understand the differences, value the differences, and respect the differences.	Cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, respect
Participant 5	Appreciating other cultures and how other cultures become things that can enrich our insight.	Cultural appreciation, enrichment
Participant 6	Knowledge, attitudes and skills in communicating with someone from a different culture are integrated in English learning.	Integration in teaching, communication skills
Participant 7	Basically intercultural literacy is the intercultural knowledge possessed by an English lecturer.	Cultural knowledge, professional knowledge
Participant 8	Ability to understand sources, reading, seeing or hearing sources, processing, then relaying it based on the contexts.	Information processing, contextual understanding

their own perspectives and understanding. They expressed their personal experience without referring to the related theories. Table 2 indicates the teacher's definition of the participants' perspective of intercultural literacy.

Table 2 indicates participants' perspectives on intercultural literacy. Some participants consider intercultural literacy as understanding and knowledge of cultural diversity (P1, P4, P3, P7, and P8). This ties into the more significant idea of intercultural literacy or being both knowledgeable about and critically aware of cultural context. After that, P2 highlights the relevance of being flexible and sensitive to cultural diversity. This indicates a dynamics and responsiveness to intercultural literacy. P3 also mentions intercultural literacy as comparing the targeted culture and their own culture, which can be seen as reflective intercultural communication and interaction. At the same time, P5 defines intercultural literacy as offering deeper insight by celebrating other cultures. P7 comments on the function of expert knowledge as an English lecturer. P8 also discusses intercultural literacy as the ability to process and relay information based on contexts that reflect critical thinking and contextual analysis competence.

The responses of all participants above indicate a comprehensive intercultural literacy, understanding of culture and cultural practices, adaptation to diverse ways cultures operate, and

respect for these differences while incorporating this knowledge into their professional work and communicating across it. The participant's responses provide a new perspective on intercultural literacy. Intercultural literacy covers knowledge, skills, and necessary attitudes to engage with diverse cultural contexts. This includes a deep understanding of one's own and other cultures, the ability to adapt and communicate effectively across cultures, and the integration of intercultural competencies into professional practice.

Theme 2: Implementation in professional practice

Intercultural literacy is a key dimension of the professional practice required by English language teachers who aim to develop an inclusive, culturally responsive educational environment. Teachers have an important effect on student attitudes and skills when discussing intercultural understanding. The ability of teachers' competence to embed intercultural literacy and teaching strategies in curriculum and to apply culturally diverse methodologies also impacts students' intercultural competence. Furthermore, the participants were asked about the specific ways of incorporating intercultural literacy into their teaching, successful stories, and areas of improvement and development.

Most participants across the study believe that all EFL teachers should be interculturally

literate while governed by a broader state and federal political framework. P8 has also identified embedding intercultural literacy into the curriculum as an important factor. In the interview, he underlies:

“systematic approach is of high importance for well-designed educational planning and delivery, particularly in the context of intercultural literacy, to be applied by teachers in their classroom practice”. (P8)

This is a testament to the critical role that Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) play in guiding how we develop and roll out educational content, providing uniformity across teaching practices. The main concern is well-defined learning objectives that inform lesson planning and double up as measures against student progress. The teachers reported that the faculty and curriculum developers or institutions should inform teacher educators about courseware and whether to include intercultural competence in their classes or not. It is also examined in several subjects or topic areas in much earlier work on intercultural literacy embedded and interleaved with lesson plans and learning objectives (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6). In addition, the way or strategies of making it possible to become intercultural literate through teachers. Most teachers employ student-centered learning like group discussion, project-based methods, and case studies (P 1, P 7, P6, P8). Various other differentiated learning models (P3, P4, P5) are also all based on role-playing and real debates to teach students about interculturality, as reflected in the following quotations:

“I think I focus on the method, like the case method. Students are given a case first, given a video that has a case, after that they discuss on their own, they look for references first, the next day we discuss it”. (P3)

“I am more of an independent learning approach and they are indeed given the space to choose the texts they want to know but still with the general topic that we are discussing at that meeting, for example now we are talking about technology, well later we lure him with several types of texts and then we discuss, sometimes the discussion spreads to development, to others, by spreads I mean it doesn't focus on the content...”. (P4)

In implementing intercultural literacy, teachers use a variety of teaching references as well as technology integration, such as online platforms, social media, and digital storytelling, to assist with intercultural learning. Most participants expressed similar ideas (P1, P2, P3, P4) and suggested respondents are utilizing online resources more, perhaps due to improvements in

technology and the availability of digital format. Four participants (P4, P5, P7, and P8) mentioned international journals; another four cited expert-authored textbooks as evidence of diverse sources to draw upon for teaching materials. Furthermore, incorporating digital tools (P7, P8) and multimedia (P3, P8) reflects a future-looking perspective to enhance effectiveness in teaching intercultural literacy.

“Yes, because my most common method is corporation. For example, I will ask the students, ‘Who watched video on Youtube today? Do you understand? Please explain to your friends? So my work is sitting around like that. That's a corporation, so the name of the corporation is that we invite people who know more in their environment to connect with the corporation like that”. (P8)

Thus, although there is some agreement on the trend towards digital sources, as noted earlier in this article. Each offers different points over the materials used to support such intercultural literacy, including traditional print resources, contemporary cutting-edge computing tools, and multimedia content.

Theme 3: Challenges in fostering intercultural understanding and strategies to overcome these challenges

One of the most important and challenging jobs faced by EFL teachers is to promote classroom intercultural understanding. This theme addresses the multiple dilemmas that teachers would come across while enabling students to have intercultural literacy. Most of these challenges were due to personal and professional constraints. These problems provide a view of the complexity of teaching intercultural literacy and what gets in its way. Understanding these challenges is crucial for crafting policies that help teachers improve their ability to create an inclusive cultural learning environment.

P1 reports no significant difficulties because of the availability of best-practice articles in high-ranking international journals. This indicates that the participants have access to high-quality resources to fulfill their needs and overcome their limitations.

“So far I have not found any significant difficulties because I can look for ideas from best practices articles published in reputable international journals that are data-based”. (P1)

This also indicates that teachers who have limited

access to high-quality resources will face significant challenges in intercultural literacy. P1 illustrates the need for continual professional learning and the ability to integrate current research-based methodology in developing intercultural literacy strategies.

Some of the big challenges are student engagement and comprehensibility. However, P2 adds that it is hard to teach students outside of a teacher-centered learning paradigm, and there are still curriculums with which teachers have the requirement to keep pace. Case stories from P2 illustrate the tensions between new and traditional practices of teaching. The difficulty in moving from teacher-centered to student-centered practices of instruction reveals a deficiency in training and institutional support for enacting proposals that critically transform teaching techniques.

“I don’t think cross-cultural teaching should be implemented in the early semesters. Indeed, there is a specially designed policy or we say it is more like an agreement so that later if you meet with circumstances or conditions related to this cross-cultural information. It does not have to be in the course that will be designed but it can also be in other courses that information about cross-culture can appear. This means that there is a form of agreement with other courses to include cultural elements. Usually the lecturer must have included it. When I meet with the context, for example in teaching Reading, there must be a direct telling of students, as if telling, recalling information when they have taken courses that are specifically designed for cross-cultural teaching”. (P2)

P2 statements indicate the need for comprehensive training programs to equip teachers with skills to improve student engagement and adapt teaching to promote intercultural literacy.

P3 mentions the need for reading and watching. There are videos of cultural elements that she watches to get a lesson and try to share with her students. P3 argues that this is a good example of how multimedia can be useful in promoting intercultural engagement.

“As for the course, no difficulties, just have to read a lot, read and watch a lot. I happen to like watching, sometimes I like watching short movies on social media for that purpose too. Sometimes we watch those short movies, those short videos to find out about people’s culture. I like watching Darman’s videos. Darman is a short video film that contains how outsiders interact indeed how, for example, black Americans are discriminated against...”. (P3)

However, this activity requires time to locate and digest the materials during office work. The barriers

are in the form of time constraints for teachers. They have established a curriculum to follow and limited class and prep times. P3 suggests that providing teachers with high-quality media resources can help the teacher to integrate intercultural literacy into their courses.

P4 does not formally apply the intercultural content, but it appears naturally during the reading class. Although she argues that she used intercultural content, this may lead to some problems.

“Cross-cultural literacy, in my opinion, literacy is related to reading and writing activities. Maybe the reference is that we think globally, so that we can relate teaching materials from information related to cultures that exist in other than our country. But that does not mean talks to many in one meeting. For example we discuss seven texts, one of which is about us and the others from other countries”. (P4)

Her decision not to formally integrate the intercultural content into the curriculum may lead to the uneven coverage of critical issues. This shows that the other challenge is to ensure that intercultural literacy is not integrated into the curriculum. As P4 indicates, explicit criteria for implementing intercultural literacy should be provided in the lesson plan so the student can identify the key concepts.

P5 shows another problem in designing the curriculum that fits students’ knowledge and cultural understanding.

“Yes ... there must be difficulties like that in designing there must be because we collide later with how much input we have. Sometimes when we design this, our expectations of how cross-cultural is included in our course are too high, it turns out that our students do not have input or concepts about cross-culture itself or something that is not acceptable to them. So it is indeed those difficulties that must often be found how students how this is suitable for their students later”. (P5)

She mentions that what she expected is sometimes different from reality. The P5 challenges of aligning the curriculum with students’ prior knowledge and cultural contexts. She suggests the need for ongoing reassessment and refinement of curricula to meet students where they are. Teachers need tools to evaluate their students’ intercultural competency and adjust instruction so that all learners can access the same intercultural literacies.

P6 has difficulty finding relevant cultural materials, especially those pertaining to local contexts. P6’s struggle to find culturally relevant and localized teaching materials underscores a significant barrier to fostering intercultural

understanding.

“I find it difficult to get video materials from the internet that are relevant to the topic being taught, especially those based on local culture”. (P6)

This challenge points to developing and disseminating culturally appropriate resources that reflect the local context. Providing access to diverse teaching materials can help educators like P6 present intercultural content that resonates with their students’ experiences and backgrounds.

P7 said that she can teach intercultural topics quite easily because they often run parallel to students’ own culture, and so rely on existing knowledge structures.

“I really appreciate students who write essays on the theme of culture, especially their own culture. It means they recognize and are proud of their own culture. If they can also write on the theme of a culture different from their own, it means that their cross-cultural knowledge is good enough so that they can later make cultural comparisons in their writing”. (P7)

P7 strategy of leveraging students’ cultural background facilitates intercultural learning by making content relatable. This approach highlights the importance of contextualizing intercultural education within the students’ own cultural frameworks. However, it implies that teachers must have these skills to build connections and adjust instruction based on various cultural differences, supporting the call for focused professional development in this area.

P8 underscores the significance of knowing about students’ cultural issues in connecting with them efficiently. He integrates students’ behavior into his lesson.

“People have experiences and knowledge. With these experiences and knowledge, it means that he can adapt to existing cultures. This could be the definition of intercultural. This means that a person who can quickly grasp or learn a language is a person who can adapt to his environment”. (P8)

The P8 adaptive teaching approach enforces the importance of creativity skills that need to be personal and culturally sensitive for better intercultural understanding. This method shows that successful intercultural literacy education means having a positive regard for their cultural contexts and using the most effective teaching approach or educational programs must train teachers within these areas.

The assessment of constraints about personal and professional capacity in promoting

intercultural sensitivity articulated from the review includes the need for high-quality and accessible resources, challenges in distributing traditional and innovative teaching methods, the challenges in using effective multimedia resources, the necessity for deliberate inclusion of intercultural content, the alignment of curricula with students’ existing knowledge, the availability of localized materials, and the significance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability. These challenges require focused training, institutional assistance, and guidelines for developing an all-encompassing, effective, culturally relevant teaching material. By recognizing and addressing these limitations, educators can better support intercultural literacy in their classrooms to create a more inclusive culture-aware learning environment.

IV. DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis used in this paper offers a nuanced description of how EFL teachers in Indonesia’s higher education describe and understand intercultural literacy. The participants have different definitions of intercultural literacy, but they can highlight some key aspects, including cultural understanding, adaptability, comparative analysis, and respect for cultural differences. These differences align with other models that describe intercultural competence as a combination of knowledge, skill, and attitudes needed to navigate and engage with different cultural contexts effectively (Byram, 1997; Byram & Zarate, 1996; Michael Byram & Wagner, 2018). As Byram (1997) mentions, there are four levels of intercultural communicative competence: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. Similarly, Deardorff (2006) highlights that intercultural competence emphasizes attitudes (respect, openness), knowledge (cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge), and skills (listening, observing, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, relating). This study, therefore, makes a significant contribution by placing professional knowledge as the center of attention and intertwining intercultural literacy into a professional practice lens previously missing in earlier studies.

Some of the participants emphasized that their memories and personal encounters often preceded academic knowledge about what people call today intercultural literacies. Consequently, it points to the importance of professional development initiatives as their aims should not only speak to

teachers' personal experiences but also draw from theoretical grounds in an effort; to both increase intercultural clarity and improve teaching efficacy. Well-designed programs, grounded in theory and emphasizing reflection and enactment, have shown long-lasting impacts on educators and their students (Garson et al., 2016; Romijn et al., 2021). Intercultural experiences can lead to more balanced attitudes towards teaching practices and increased awareness of culturally sensitive pedagogy (Gu, 2005). However, while studies have explored the relationship between faculty's backgrounds and their intercultural sensitivity, there is limited conclusive evidence on how these traits translate into classroom practice (Schuerholz-Lehr, 2007). To effectively increase teachers' intercultural competencies, professional development should adopt an embedded and contextual approach, guiding reflection and fostering enactment (Romijn et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of holistic teacher education that combines personal experiences with theoretical knowledge to enhance intercultural clarity and teaching efficacy.

The documentation of changing intercultural literacy across the professional practice is identified as an emerging theme. Teachers reported that they had applied several strategies to include intercultural elements in their teaching including integrating the curriculum with cultural content, using student-centered learning methods and technology such as digital tools or multimedia resources. These practices are consistent with pedagogical approaches that forefront active, engaged learning and the incorporation of multiple sources for increased intercultural competency (Havis, 2020; Vižintin, 2018).

There was a strong emphasis on curriculum integration; participants rallied around the need for coherent and organized, scaffolded methods to macro-level constructs such as the internationalization of learning objectives or curricula. An embedded intercultural literacy component in the curriculum is also important for fostering a full appreciation for cultural diversity (Brown & Alford, 2023; Coulby, 2006; Cummins, 2015; Otten, 2003), and this structured approach ensures that it remains central to the educational experience rather than an add-on. Furthermore, the higher application of digital tools and multimedia resources means dealing with contemporary educational tendencies as well as a variety of

cultural content available by electronic methods. It is contended that through this technological integration, learners have experienced more interactive learning and been able to be exposed to numerous cultural perspectives, which in turn promote them for the digital age along with enhancing their global awareness (Eristi, 2009; Eteokleous-Grigoriou, 2009).

Although the approaches were innovative, educators struggled to create intercultural understanding in many significant ways. Lack of access to high-quality, culturally relevant learning materials was a key gap identified and one that raises the ongoing struggle between maintaining traditional versus creative education techniques. This underscores a broader set of challenges that have appeared across some research in intercultural pedagogy surrounding the issues and resource demands associated with introducing culturally diverse material into educational practices sustainably (Jin & Cortazzi 2017; Vižintin, 2018).

Thus, many constraints however encountered in the field also prevented a successful integration with intercultural literacy education such as personal professional limitations and time or lack of methods. For example, concerns were expressed about how time-intensive reading and preparing culturally pertinent materials would be. These results imply that teachers may need to participate in professional development programs tailored to help cope with these challenges. Respondents also discussed the challenge of connecting students' backgrounds and cultural histories with educational content, emphasizing a call for adaptable teaching treatments. These gaps suggest that the present professional development and institutional support systems need improvement to enable teachers to effectively foster intercultural literacy (Romijn et al., 2009; Tambyah, 2013).

The findings from this study have significant implications for educational practice and policy. Teacher training programs must be extended to develop institutional intercultural competence among educators, and professional development can foster teachers doing it (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008; Romijn et al., 2021). These programs could be oriented around the idea of increasing teachers' theoretical ideas so as to make their teaching practice more based on intercultural literacy principles and provide them with examples of strategies for implementing diverse cultures into

curriculum planning options. Also, guidelines and frameworks that foster systematic inclusion of intercultural literacy through educational programs are still necessary (Bak 2021; Gilmore et al., 2020; Romijn et al., 2021). That means building related content that can understand cultures, is culturally responsive, and is tailored to the tastes of various digital learning mediated by technologies.

V. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of implementing intercultural literacy among English teachers in higher education institutions in Indonesia. The result shows that EFL teachers have different definitions of intercultural literacy, leading to different teaching approaches. The research also highlights several issues regarding teachers' challenges in implementing intercultural literacy into their classes, including challenges in incorporating intercultural literacy into the curriculum, availability of relevant teaching materials, switching from traditional to innovative teaching approaches, and professional competence in pedagogy. The current study suggests some solutions to overcome the challenges, such as providing professional development programs for the teachers, providing high-quality and open-access teaching materials, and implementing continuous assessments to tailor the learning activities to the student's needs. This effort required support from the educational institution as well as support from the government to provide sustainable programs to develop EFL teachers' competence. Educators and policymakers can work toward providing inclusive and culturally responsive educational environments that prepare students

for global citizenship and effective intercultural communications. Future research should investigate the long-term impact of intercultural literacy education on students' attitudes, behaviors, and academic outcomes. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of different teaching strategies and interventions in fostering intercultural competence among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Further research could also investigate what professional development is necessary to help educators better integrate intercultural literacy in their work.

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

The authors have read and followed the ethical requirements for publication in Jurnal Arbitrer. This research adheres to strict ethical standards to ensure the protection and respect of all interview participants. Confidentiality is maintained by anonymizing personal data, and all information are securely stored. The data is only be used for the purposes of this study, and participants' privacy and autonomy are respected throughout the research process.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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