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Research Article

NURTURING STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN A BILINGUAL SCHOOL: TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE IN CHARACTER EDUCATION

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Abstract.

Students' intercultural competence is essential to interacting with people from different cultures across the globe for diverse purposes. This research aimed to discover teachers' knowledge and practices of intercultural competence in the classroom and school environment. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with open-ended questions to find out the teachers' knowledge and semi-structured interviews to determine whether the teachers' practices were employed. The sample consisted of eight teachers who participated in the open-ended questions, and four of them were in a semi-structured one-on-one interview. The data analyses were done qualitatively. The result showed that the teacher in this situation leads and teaches students to have intercultural competence by integrating students with activities in the learning process and school activities that have established intercultural awareness to receive input from these activities.

Keywords: intercultural competence, bilingual school, teachers' knowledge, teachers' practice

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1. INTRODUCTION

Intercultural competence has become one of the objectives of 21st-century education. This competence is crucial as it affects how people think and behave (Liu, 2016), including how to communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, effectively (Leung & Tan, 2014). The cognitive component of cross-cultural communication is intercultural awareness which leads to flexibility and understanding of other cultures. Thus, intercultural competence is identified with positive behaviors, namely adaptability, tolerance, equality, and acceptance of diversity, which is necessary for the interaction with people from different cultures and countries, for social, academic, business, and other purposes (Henning, 2018; Holubnycha, Kostikova, Leiba, Lobzova, & Chornovol-Tkachenko, 2019; Leung & Tan, 2014). This competence is expected in the contexts

of cross-culture communication both domestically and internationally (Mardiani, 2018). Considering its crucial contribution toward students' success, intercultural competence should be integrated into the curriculum and implemented in schools. It is in this context, the Indonesian government enforces character education through the policy of *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile)*,* in which unity in global diversity (*berkebhinekaan global*) is one of its dimensions, which is equal to intercultural competence (Kemdikbudristek, 2021). This study focuses on teachers' knowledge and practice of character education in the dimension of unity in global diversity, which is equivalent to the conceptualization and contextualization of intercultural competence.

Character education is embedded in Pancasila Student Profile which consists of six dimensions dealing with moral virtues/spirituality, unity in global diversity, cooperation, creativity, critical reasoning, and independence (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). Unity in global diversity is explicitly mentioned in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology decree number 009/H/KR/2022 on dimensions, elements, and sub-elements of Pancasila Student Profile in the newly implemented *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) that students are expected to understand and value culture, have intercultural communication abilities in interpersonal interactions, carry out reflection and accountability for diverse experience (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). The character education-building program highlights the elements/aspects of religiosity, nationality, cooperation, independence, and integrity.

Hence, for students to be able to communicate appropriately, quickly adjust to new environments, and develop into individuals who have a broad understanding and embrace all types of diversity, teachers must have a comprehensive knowledge of intercultural competence. To implement pedagogies that nurture students' intercultural competence, teachers must be aware of the cultural differences between the student's native culture and the target culture to avoid ignoring any small details that could cause sensitivity by implicitly incorporating moral concepts of equality and respect for other cultures into students' curricula (Al-Obaydi, 2019). Teachers must guide students to learn, appreciate, and respect others to reflect on diversity and social differences to assist them in valuing their own cultural and social differences (Holguin, 2013). More than just delivering and accomplishing materials in the classroom, understanding other cultures is involved in developing intercultural communication competencies and skills; both attitudes and skills play an equal role in intercultural competence, which is expected to develop through learning activities (Ilie, 2019). Therefore, teachers need to have intercultural awareness, knowledge, and skill to introduce cultural differences through instructional materials in the classroom in direct or indirect interactions so that

students can understand the value of respecting differences in ethnicity, religion, and national or international culture.

Many scholars have conducted the development of intercultural competence that used a course, assessment, English content materials, and lesson plan as dependent variables (Mistiani, Istiyono, & Syamsudin, 2022; Permatasari & Andriayanti, 2021; Rokhayati, 2016; Tsareva, Gulnaz, & Murtazina, 2020; Zakso, Agung, Susanto, & Capnary, 2021). Tsareva et al. (2020) conducted an experimental study on intercultural competence in English for Engineering courses. They found that the treatment has given an impact on the verbal and non-verbal behavior of students. The students' English language components, such as vocabulary and grammar are improved, the application of knowledge on the theory of intercultural communication, the improvement of critical thinking skills, and the display of empathy (showing more tolerance towards each other and foreigners in the group). The disappearance of anxiety contributed to the increase in students' intercultural competence level in the treatment group (Tsareva et al., 2020). Mistiani et al. (2022) attempted to develop a character assessment instrument for students in high schools based on Pancasila Student Profile. For the character of global nationality, Mistiani et al. (2022) found that students are proud to wear traditional Indonesian clothes, students do not discriminate between friends in socializing, and live in harmony with friends of different religions, races, customs, and groups (Mistiani et al., 2022). Permatasari and Andriyanti (2021) administered classroom action research to develop students' intercultural competence by integrating cultural text-based in EFL teaching. Permatasari and Andriyanti (2021) discovered that the integration of cultural texts in a range of formats, such as images, mind maps, reading passages, and videos, enabled students to engage through indirect communication with people of many groups and cultures. Cultural elements and the contents of the texts shaped their critical thinking and showed their enhanced English skills (Permatasari & Andriyanti, 2021). Further, Rokhayati (2016) developed an English textbook on intercultural approach and character education as guidelines for learning English. From the results of the questionnaire and observation Rokhayati (2016) revealed that English textbooks explicitly mentioned the students' diversity and the target language diversity that knowledge, experience, and discourse reflected in the text (Rokhayati, 2016). Finally, Zakso et al. (2021) studied the effect of strengthening character education on tolerance in the west Kalimantan province border area. They found some variables such as the principal leadership, extracurricular school, parent participation, and community leader role influence the students' positive attitude on the increase in tolerance (Zakso et al., 2021).

Despite many studies on character education have been done previously (see Mistiani et al., 2022; Permatasari & Andriyanti, 2021; Rokhayati, 2016; Tsareva et al., 2020; Zakso et al., 2021), there is still little information found about teachers' knowledge and practice of character education in the dimension on unity in global diversity or intercultural competence, especially in a bilingual school context. Thus, this research aims to describe the teachers' knowledge and practice of character education focusing on intercultural competence based on Pancasila Student Profile in a bilingual school in Malang city, East Java, Indonesia. The research question of this study is how intercultural competence is nurtured through character education based on Pancasila Student Profile in a bilingual school. This study is important to add knowledge and improve the practice of instilling intercultural competence in a bilingual school setting (Creswell, 2014).

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to understanding teachers' knowledge and practice of intercultural competence (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). The objective of descriptive qualitative research is to provide a thorough summary of certain events that people or groups of people have experienced (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The participants of the study were recruited based on some requirements as follows: 1) they are *guru penggerak or* teachers' activators, 2) they have been teaching in a formal school for about 5-10 years, 3) they work in a school that has been implementing the Pancasila Student Profile and Independent Curriculum. The data collection was conducted using questionnaires and interviews. The research participants' gender was 6 females (T1, T2, T4, T6, T7, and T8) along with 2 males (T3 and T5). Their ages were between 30-55 years old. They have been participating in professional development such as Independent Curriculum, Pancasila Student Profile, Pancasila Student Profile Project, Character Education, and 2013 Curriculum. They have created teaching innovation products in the project Pancasila Student Profile. There were 8 teachers who completed questionnaires containing open-ended questions eliciting their basic knowledge about the dimension of unity in global diversity in Pancasila Student Profile (Weller et al., 2018). Among the 8 participants, 4 teachers gave their consent for the interview. To keep the participants' confidential information, their names were coded as, Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and so forth.

The questionnaire contained 3 sections with 17 items: the first section consisted of participants' personal information, the second section was the school context, and the third section was about the teachers' knowledge of the new policy in the education

system. The interviewer uses a set of predetermined questions in a semi-structured interview, and the respondents respond in their own words. Semi-structured interviews are compelling when it is necessary to obtain detailed information from a large number of respondents or interviewees in a methodical manner (Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006). The interview protocol consisted of 3 parts and contained 20 questions that involved teachers' practice on Pancasila Student Profile (unity in global diversity), teachers-students-parents relationship, suggestions, and recommendations for further practice.

Data collection of qualitative descriptive studies focuses on discovering the nature of the specific events under study. The procedure was as follows. First, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to know the teachers' knowledge of intercultural competence and teachers' that have rich information on the knowledge of intercultural awareness. Second, the researcher did one-on-one interviews to find out the implementation of intercultural competence in the teachers' practice in the classroom. The researcher transcribed every interview to see the richness and depth of the result.

The collected data from open-ended questions in the questionnaire and one-on-one interviews were analyzed qualitatively using two themes from the research question which is guided by the teacher cognition framework (Borg, 2006), namely 1) teachers' knowledge and 2) teachers' practice. The researchers present the data in the form of excerpts relevant to these two themes. The author interpreted the data based on the dimension of unity in global diversity in the policy of Pancasila Student Profile (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Teachers' Knowledge of Intercultural Competence

The data from the questionnaire indicated that the teachers have basic knowledge of Pancasila Student Profile, without necessarily mentioning intercultural competence explicitly as can be seen in Teacher 1 and 7 as follows.

"Activities designed and carried out to help students develop their character **in line with Pancasila values**." (Teacher 1)

"The profile that is expected to exist in Indonesian students consists of character education which is an act of **educating continuously to form better individuals.**" (Teacher 7)

Teachers 1's and 7's excerpts illustrate the six dimensions of Pancasila Student Profile that teachers to understand the importance of school activities that support each student's development into a lifelong learner who is knowledgeable, has a positive character, and behaves in accordance with Pancasila values (Kemdikbudristek, 2022, p. 1). Students can develop psychological, behavioral, and cultural intelligence through the use of these Pancasila values, and their effectiveness is structurally connected to one another.

"It represents students who have a **broad moral awareness** and behave themselves in accordance with **globally diverse values like Pancasila**. Basic education places significant importance on developing a person's personality, including their heart, mind, and action." (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2's excerpt represents the second dimension of Pancasila Student Profile "unity in global diversity" which advises teachers to be aware of moral consciousness must penetrate into students' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, in order to create respect for one another as well as accept the existence of a new culture that is positive and does not contradict the nation's noble culture. It can be said individuals and social groups require broad moral awareness (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

"Profile of students who demonstrate the required six characteristics, such as creating innovative and **adaptable** individuals who can deal with difficulties and propose solutions to environmental issues." (Teacher 3)

In this case, teacher 3's excerpt shows "knowing and appreciating culture" that Pancasila students need the ability to recognize, identify, and describe different types of groups, as well as describe how their identity and groups were constructed in order to analyze how to enroll as a member of social groups at the local, regional, national, and global levels (Kemdikbudristek, 2022)

"Pancasila students symbolize Indonesian students as lifelong learners with **cross-cultural competence** and Pancasila-compliant behavior. Interdisciplinary knowledge and skill as the ability to observe the issues in the environment to find solutions." (Teacher 4)

"The conceptualization of Indonesian students as lifelong learners with **cross-cultural proficiency** and Pancasila-compliant behavior. Develop the mindsets, attitudes, and abilities necessary to examine environmental issues and think of solutions." (Teacher 5)

Both teachers 4 and 5's excerpts represent "intercultural communication and interaction," emphasizing that Pancasila students must be able to identify problems in the environment and propose solutions. Cross-cultural competence and proficiency are

required in this ability so that students can communicate with people from different cultures equally by paying attention, understanding, accepting the existence of, and appreciating the uniqueness of each culture as a wealth of perspectives, leading to mutual understanding and empathy for others (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

"The Pancasila Student Profile is a lifelong learner who demonstrates competency in line with the Pancasila values, namely the character of students who are expected to be self-aware and capable of taking responsibility for the learning process and outcomes. Through the **culture** of the educational unit, intra-curricular learning, projects to improve the Pancasila Student Profile, and extra-curricular activities, each individual student is given the opportunity to develop the character and abilities that characterize the Pancasila Student Profile." (Teacher 6)

Teacher 6 explains knowledge about unity in the global diversity dimension for phase D (junior high school) in the context of the education culture unit, specifically in the sub-element of "fosters respect for cultural diversity" (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). According to Teacher 6, students are supposed to demonstrate competence in accordance with Pancasila values by developing characteristics such as personal, social, and Indonesian identity and attempting to preserve culture in everyday life through school-based learning activities.

"Regarding the character development of students in accordance with Pancasila values, such as creativity, collaboration, mutual cooperation, and **global diversity**. Cross-disciplinary learning to observe and think of solutions to problems that exist in the surrounding environment." (Teacher 8)

Teacher 8 illustrates unity in the global diversity dimension for phase D (junior high school) in the context of social justice, specifically in the sub-element of "actively builds an inclusive, fair, and sustainable society" (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). According to Teacher 8, cross-disciplinary learning identifies problems in their surroundings and the impact of these problems on economic, social, and environmental systems, as well as proposes solutions that take into consideration the principles of equality for humans, nature, and society.

Overall, the teacher's knowledge of intercultural competence is related to the profile of Pancasila students, and the dimension of unity in global diversity is conveyed implicitly and explicitly and is related to the character of the Pancasila Student Profile. It is in line with the finding of Liu (2016) that intercultural awareness could affect people's behavior and thinking. In this case, the teacher can visualize students who want to learn continuously throughout their lives, promoting creativity, collaboration, and the ability to accept global differences, identify problems around them, and find solutions through

intra-curricular learning activities, Pancasila Student Profile projects, and extracurricular activities.

3.2. Teachers' Practice of Intercultural Competence

In terms of knowledge, teachers have similarities about intercultural competence which are mentioned explicitly and implicitly in open-ended questions. Meanwhile, in practice, teachers have different ways of shaping students' intercultural competence. In this case, the teacher's practice is divided into 3 categories, namely the implementation of intercultural competence in classroom learning, the advancement of intercultural awareness of students' diversity, and the implementation of intercultural competence in school activities.

The Implementation of Intercultural Competence in Classroom Learning

The data from an individual interview with four teachers indicated that intercultural competence is integrated through activities such as choosing friends for group work without any discrimination, as said by Teacher 4 as follows.

``My students and I always **collaborate during discussions**, and I ask my students to choose their own groups. I teach the students that **everyone is equal in the eye of God; therefore we shouldn't make distinctions between friends.**" (Teacher 4)

The excerpt from Teacher 4 described the daily practice of unity in the global diversity dimension for Phase D (Junior High School Level) in the context of personal, especially in the sub-element "explore and compare cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices" (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). At the same time, Teacher 4 shared her view of equality among human beings despite their diverse background based on her religious belief, which is relevant to another dimension of Pancasila Student Profile, namely "Have faith, fear God Almighty, and have noble character" (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

Another teacher (Teacher 6) reported the practice of unity in global diversity in the form of learning themes that promote unity in the diversity of ethnic groups and religion. Teacher 6 said:

``Then, i**n learning activities for diversity, the themes that teachers choose also vary, not only for Javanese but also from Sabang to Merauke**. Especially for learning themes, not **only local topics from the Javanese area but also in a global context**. Children respect each other, and diversity also has been taught in their respective religions." (Teacher 6)

Teacher 6 view represents an attitude that "fosters respect for cultural diversity" (Kemdikbudristek, 2022), which is also expressed by Teacher 7 and Teacher 5, who

put the practice of developing students' intercultural competence through an activity of making class agreement where students are expected to respect others' opinion and works. Teacher 7 explained:

``**We provide a comfortable environment for everyone, and we teach our students to appreciate one another**. Teachers also exemplify how to appreciate each other by giving the students a project of appreciating works in art class and **introducing cultural diversity in a global context**. Although the students come from various backgrounds, they are taught to appreciate one another through **class agreements** that have been created together." (Teacher 7)

Teacher 5 also mentioned class agreement as the context of character education practice, in which explicit rules were necessary to be agreed upon and acted as forms of respect for others.

``When a class **agreement** is made, it is written on paper similar to a contract, so everything agreed upon is written down. Then, the agreed contract upon the discussion is combined and glued on manila paper in the shape of a poster, which is then plastered on the wall in the classroom. There is **a dream class.** Therefore, each student makes a commitment to creating their ideal class. It seeks to drill students to **respect one another, be responsible, and establish a learning style they genuinely love.**" (Teacher 5)

The excerpts from Teacher 7 and Teacher 5 are relevant to the practice of dimension unity in diversity in the sub-element "Participate in joint decision-making processes" in the context of agreeing on the students' dream class under the teacher's guidance (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

To sum up, teachers incorporate intercultural competency into classroom instruction. This practice is comparable to the finding of Al-Obaydi (2019) that teachers must be culturally conscious by including moral ideals of equality and respect for many cultures in students' curricula. Teachers teach and guide students to be more aware by choosing their own group project so as not to discriminate between friends in class discussions or projects, Christians must be with other religions, and those from certain majority races are not allowed to be in the same group, learning materials also vary from national and global contexts, then there is a class agreement program where the teacher asks students to discuss and make the class according to their wishes so that they are committed to the whole learning in class. The class agreement here focuses on the six dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile.

The Advancement of Intercultural Awareness of Students' Diversity

The data from the interview also vividly show that tolerance and inclusivity are promoted in the school to prevent students from the practice of bullying and discrimination due to ability/disability, sociocultural and socioeconomic gap, as can be seen from the excerpt from Teacher 4, Teacher 5, and Teacher 7.

``In my class, there are various and different students, especially in the regular class, there are **inclusion students**. In this case, the children succeed and **protect each other; there is no bullying**. Inclusive children are also invited to work together in group discussions. The students' economic status varies from the lower to the upper classes and are treated equally." (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4's excerpt indicated the practice of developing students' intercultural competence through taking a role in a democracy (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

``Our students here, ma'am, are from **a variety of backgrounds, including economic, social, ethnic, religious, and cultural**. There are individuals from **Papua, Ambon, and Jakarta**. Moreover, there are **classes with special needs**; teachers provide understanding. We inform new students that some of their friends have short hair, some have curly hair, and so on, and it is beautiful that there are no bullying cases in the school environment in this case." (Teacher 5)

Teacher 5 showed the practice of developing students' intercultural competence in the sub-element "actively build an inclusive, and sustainable society" (Kemdikbudristek, 2022)

``The **setting at school needs to be based on a global context**. As an example, our school offers three different programs: *Tahfidz* class, international class, and regular class. Even if there are many different ethnic groups in Indonesia, **we must be tolerant of their diversity** and give them the same respect." (Teacher 7)

Teacher 7 emphasized the importance of developing a positive attitude of tolerance in the school setting, which is in line with the sub-element "Harmonizing cultural differences" (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

In a nutshell, teachers should promote the students' positive behaviors of adaptability, tolerance, equality, and acceptance of diversity (Holubnycha et al., 2019). Thus, teachers also explicitly provide understanding and guidance on intercultural awareness to students regarding the conditions and situations of schools, that there are many different types of students from religions, races, ethnicity, economy, and students with special needs, and that they are expected to respect and care for each other.

The Implementation of Intercultural Competence in School Activities

The data from the interview describes the practice of democracy by celebrating diversity in religion and culture as told by Teachers 6 and 7 as follows.

``We live in a predominantly Muslim country, we nonetheless **respect and tolerate freedom and hold events for both Muslims and non-Muslims whenever there is a religious holiday.**'' (Teacher 6)

Teacher 6 highlights that the school promoted tolerance among religions by celebrating special days not only for Islam as the religion of the majority but also for other religions that the students follow, which aligns with the sub-element "Harmonizing cultural differences" (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). This practice is also described by Teacher 7 below.

``The celebration of the youth pledge, and school performance at the end of the semester and the end of the year, usually include art performances. **Students dress in traditional clothing**, and there are also contests. **Various forms of Indonesian art are displayed in students' art performances.**'' (Teacher 7)

Teacher 7 recalled that in a celebration of the youth pledge and other occasions, diversity in cultural symbols is displayed, and this school custom could "foster respect for cultural diversity" (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

More than just delivering and accomplishing materials in the classroom, Ilie (2019) stated that understanding other cultures is involved in developing intercultural communication competencies, both skills and attitudes. Hence, teachers also develop intercultural competence through school activities to develop the student's skills and attitudes such as tolerating each other when schools celebrate Muslim and non-Muslim celebrations, through formal events, namely celebrating national days students are asked to collaborate, there are art performances at the end of each semester and year where students wear traditional clothes from various regions.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The purpose of this study is to reveal the teachers' knowledge and practice of intercultural competence concerning unity in global diversity on Pancasila Student Profile. The findings reveal that teachers are knowledgeable about the dimension of unity in global diversity. The findings emphasize that the school's attempts to develop students' intercultural competence have been manifested through activities promoting tolerance, inclusivity, and democracy. The findings add knowledge on integrating intercultural competence into students' curricula and teachers' pedagogy. Besides, the findings also improve practice on implementing Pancasila student profile focusing on unity in global

diversity. The limitation of the study is the population and sampling, which is very limited, which means that the results from this study did not represent other bilingual schools at the Junior High School level in Indonesia. Therefore future research is recommended to investigate other dimensions of Pancasila Student Profile and include more participants and schools in the study.

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