



FOSTERING INCLUSIVITY THROUGH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SPEAKING COURSE LECTURERS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate how speaking classes at an Islamic university implement culturally responsive teaching (CRT). More specifically, the research is about three lecturers who teach speaking courses at Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI), a university in South Sulawesi with a multicultural student body. The main purpose is to analyze how lecturers ensure their classes are inclusive and value diversity. In-depth interviews were used to collect data using a qualitative and exploratory design. The research found that the lecturers approach teaching by including cultural languages, applying special learning methods, connecting with students' feelings, and encouraging group learning. They also reflect these values in the way they respond and develop teaching materials. According to the study, lecturers must incorporate cultural understanding and respond well to diversity in educational spaces. Results highlight that it would be helpful to provide language educators with training in culturally responsive teaching, especially in teaching speaking.

Keywords: *culturally responsive teaching, cultural diversity, inclusivity, speaking skills, Universitas Muslim Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

Today's multicultural and international classrooms make inclusive education a need rather than a pedagogical choice. To guarantee that all students, regardless of their circumstances, feel noticed, appreciated, and empowered in academic settings, educators are being urged more and more to rethink their teaching methods (Bank, 2019; Billing, 1995). Promoting inclusion has emerged as a top priority for educators globally in the increasingly varied field of higher education. A key educational strategy that recognizes and capitalizes on students' cultural backgrounds to improve learning experiences is called Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) (Abdalla & Moussa, 2024). CRT is said to as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective." (Gay, 2018; Kozleski, 2010). This method encourages equity and academic achievement among a variety of student demographics in addition to validating kids' cultural identities (Moon, 2011).

As higher education institutions in non-Western contexts navigate similar challenges, the relevance of CRT expands beyond its American roots. Since communication is intricately entwined with cultural nuances in language teaching, the importance of CRT is especially apparent. Students must express themselves, frequently in a second language, in speaking classes in particular; therefore, taking into account

their cultural backgrounds is crucial to effective participation (Reskyani, Adisaturrahimi, Mustaqimah, et al., 2024). Students' confidence, engagement, and general communicative ability are all improved when teachers include their cultural experiences in language training, according to research (Billing, 1995).

In Indonesian Islamic higher education, where moral principles, religious identity, and cultural diversity interact, the application of culturally responsive teaching becomes even more intricate. Teachers are expected to encourage both intellectual and character development while negotiating varied cultural and language realities (Mustofa & Romadhon, 2024). Classrooms of Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI), in particular, are distinguished by a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, including those of the Buginese, Makassarese, Torajan, Javanese, Papuan and Mandararese populations. For lecturers instructing speaking courses, this multicultural setting offers both opportunities and challenges (Anyichie et al., 2023; Gros et al., 2010; Hsiao, 2015). Although variety fosters more meaningful classroom interactions, it also calls for inclusive and culturally sensitive teaching methods. Research on the use of CRT in Indonesian Islamic colleges is, however, lacking, especially when it comes to speaking courses (Bank, 2019).

By investigating how UMI speaking course instructors use culturally sensitive teaching strategies to promote inclusivity, this study seeks to close this gap (Charoensilp, 2024; Dollah et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2024). The study uses an exploratory qualitative methodology to examine how lecturers incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into speaking lessons, the difficulties they face, and the perceived effects on learning outcomes and student involvement. By bringing attention to these practices, the study hopes to advance the conversation on inclusive pedagogy and offer guidance to lecturers working in similarly varied classroom environments (Siregar et al., 2023).

METHOD

The application of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) among speaking course lecturers at Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI) was examined in this study using a qualitative exploratory design (Creswell, 2013). The paucity of research in Islamic university settings, particularly in language training, made this strategy appropriate. Purposively, three English Education Department lecturers were chosen because of their background in instructing students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, especially those from Buginese, Makassarese, Torajan, Mandarese, Javanese, Papuan and others. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions centered on CRT tactics, student involvement, and inclusion practices were used to collect data. With the participants' permission, interviews were taped and lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes. In order to identify important themes and recurrent patterns in lecturers' CRT practices, the study used (Braun & Clarke, 2019) thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings from in-depth interviews with three speaking course lecturers at Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI). Through thematic analysis, five major themes emerged regarding how culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is implemented to foster inclusivity in speaking classrooms: (1) recognizing students'

cultural identities, (2) building emotional connection and classroom community, (3) differentiated strategies for engagement, (4) collaborative and inclusive learning environment, and (5) culturally grounded feedback and assessment.

1. Recognizing Students' Cultural Identities

Building culturally responsive learning begins with acknowledging students' cultural identities. For the learning process to be relevant and meaningful in this setting, lecturers must be aware of the social backgrounds, languages, values, and life experiences of their students. The information below shows how teachers recognize and address students' identities during the stages of learning planning and execution.

L1: I understand that their cultural background is the most important thing, so in class, there are several types of cultures, for example, between Buginese culture and Makassarese culture, or Torajan and Palopoan culture.

L2: As a lecturer, I need to see and understand their backgrounds so that I can create a supportive learning atmosphere.

L3: At the first meeting, I usually ask about their identity, including where they come from, because it is very relevant to my demeanor or my activities during class.

Each lecturer accepted the diversity of students' cultures and highlighted how important it is to understand where students they come from at the beginning of the course (Fatmawaty et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2021; Reskyani, Adisaturrahimi, & Mustaqimah, 2024). For instance, lecture 1 realized that knowing about students' ethnic backgrounds (Buginese, Makassarese, Torajan, Palopoan) allowed her to provide the support they needed. Just as with L2, L3 stated that she starts the first lesson by asking students which part of Indonesia they come from and tries to use their local languages to make them feel more at home (Harahap et al., 2024; Vélez Salas, 2022).

2. Building Emotional Connection and Classroom Community

Building a respected classroom community and strong emotional bonds between lecturers and students are crucial first steps in establishing a secure and welcoming learning environment. This subject emphasizes how educators foster a close relationship with their students and establish classroom environments that promote supportive, candid, and sympathetic interactions. These dynamics in learning processes are illustrated by the following findings.

L1: What I do, for example, is first build emotional bonds between students and between students and lecturers.

L2: By building strong relationships by showing that they care and value students, their lives, their culture, and their academic success.

Most lecturers pointed out that an emotional bond is essential for an inclusive environment (Ashrafova, 2024; Haniko et al., 2024). L1 pointed out that before introducing collaboration, she believed in building a strong emotional bond among the students and the lecturer. L2 wanted lecturers to build relationships with students and be genuinely concerned about their lives and any difficulties related to their cultural backgrounds. Thanks to these relationships, students felt appreciated and safe to use English in lessons (Harahap et al., 2024).

3. Differentiated Strategies for Engagement

Lecturers must use differentiated tactics to allow for the active participation of all students, taking into account the variety of their backgrounds and learning preferences. This theme focuses on how educators choose and modify instructional strategies to fairly meet the requirements of both individual and groups of students. The information provided demonstrates the range of tactics employed in multicultural classrooms.

L2: By using a differentiated approach in their teaching to meet the individual needs of each student. Using a variety of methods, such as the use of images, music, games, and various project-based activities, can help address this gap and keep all students engaged in the learning process.

L3: Some students come from areas where non-standard Indonesian is used, so I need to simplify my language and provide more clarification.

Lecturers used various methods to meet the needs of students from different cultures and languages (Karacsony et al., 2022). She shared her approach of using visuals, organizing games, playing music, and telling stories to ensure all students could access the learning material. L3 encouraged lecturers to modify explanations to suit how students like to communicate (Hardianti et al., 2023).

4. Collaborative and Inclusive Learning Environment

Students from different backgrounds can feel welcome, contribute, and learn from one another in collaborative and inclusive learning environments. This theme emphasizes methods that foster student collaboration and a feeling of community within the classroom. The results presented demonstrate how educators support civil relationships throughout educational activities.

L1: Building a point of view between students and lecturers, and students between students because their cultural backgrounds are different. before conducting collaborative teaching, the emotional bond must be built because the cultural environment of the background is different. Well, when the emotional bond that has been built has a diverse point of view, the perception can be the same, then a comfortable learning environment will be created.

L3: They must collaborate well in small groups, large groups of classical discussions, and so on, and in various forms of collaboration. However, there are several things that need to be considered in forming a collaboration team. For example, in terms of the characteristics of the students, in terms of the level or ability of the students, of course, in forming a collaboration class, they cannot be formed in a homogeneous manner.

According to all the lecturers, encouraging students to work together helps create an inclusive environment (Billing, 2021; Gay, 2018). L1 suggested that students should form shared ideas first and build a point of view for each student, but L3 mentioned that forming groups of students with varying abilities and cultural views encourages them to learn from each other (Reskyani et al., 2025). Thanks to this method, guidance was given to troubled students, as well as helping people of different cultures learn to respect each other (Charoensilp, 2024).

5. Culturally Grounded Feedback and Assessment

Assessment and feedback that are grounded in students' cultural contexts are crucial markers of how well culturally responsive instruction is working. This subject demonstrates how educators give assessments that take into account each student's individual experience and potential, in addition to academic standards. The information below demonstrates a fair, relevant, and learning-motivation-boosting evaluation strategy.

L1: As a lecturer, I try my best to make the learning material as close as possible to the cultural context. So, for example, in the class, there are several cultures with different cultural backgrounds, then we try to find some local wisdom related to the learning material, and we provide feedback on real examples in the students' lives...

L3: For example, for the speaking for formal setting course, they are asked to make a project or make a YouTube, and the content is taken from the power or cultural diversity that they can take from each of their regions... the project is in the form of YouTube and the progress of making the YouTube content is reported, for example from the concept, from the production process, from video revisions, and so on... Related to feedback, which of course is responsive during interactions in class...

They explained that lecturers provided feedback and assessments using examples and scenarios that relate to students' own lives (Peter & Lopush, 2025). Materials for L1 lessons were adjusted to fit students' local life, and lecturers prompted them to use whatever they had learned from their culture during class discussions. L3 proposed that students create YouTube videos about their area's customs, dining, and language as a way to merge their culture with their classwork. The report pointed out that giving feedback with respect to a student's background and learning options is essential (Charoensilp, 2024; Dollah et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is imperative that Indonesian Islamic universities adopt inclusive and culturally sensitive pedagogy. Lecturers show concern with recognizing students' cultural identities, building emotional connections, and implementing different strategies to meet the needs of each individual. They use local languages, pay attention to cultural backgrounds, and create a safe and respectful learning environment. Training in culturally responsive pedagogy is needed to improve lecturers' ability to manage diversity in the classroom and ensure that students feel accepted and motivated in the learning process, especially in developing speaking competence. This supports the creation of an inclusive and meaningful learning environment.

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