



The Intercultural Reading Course at Majapahit Islamic University: an Analysis of Teachers' Practices

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Abstract

Teaching practice plays a crucial role in successful learning. Previous research indicates that low student performance is often not solely due to a lack of content understanding but is also significantly influenced by teachers' practices during the learning process. Intercultural understanding is recognized as a key component of English language proficiency. This research explores how teachers the teachers' practices while teaching intercultural reading course. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. The research examines the entire process of intercultural reading instruction in the fourth semester, from initial preparation to post-reading activities. This includes the preparation of materials, reading texts, and the methods of delivery and interaction used by teachers. The findings are based on four observation sessions and an interview with one teacher and two students. The study reveals that teachers provide texts, asked the students to answer related questions, and encourage them to develop critical thinking by connecting newly acquired cultural knowledge with their own experiences. The teaching practices emphasize active discussions and questioning the reading content to enhance students' reading skills while deepening their cross-cultural understanding.

Keywords: *Teachers' Practices; Intercultural Reading; Reading*

A. INTRODUCTION

Teachers are central to creating a learning environment that supports and facilitates student success. A deep understanding of individual differences within the classroom in terms of academic needs and personal characteristics is key to designing effective teaching strategies. In addition, knowledge of the scientific context and students' beliefs can influence the teacher's approach in presenting the subject matter. Teaching practice is an important component in determining the success of the learning process and the achievement of meaningful knowledge. Research reveals that low student achievement is not only caused by a lack of understanding of the material but is also influenced by how teachers manage and implement classroom activities. Student motivation can also be reflected in the quality of teaching practices used, how students understand the material, and their ability to apply knowledge in various contexts (Hattie, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Effective teaching practices foster a supportive and stimulating learning environment, encouraging active student engagement. This includes careful planning of materials, use of appropriate teaching methods, and positive interactions between teachers and students. When teaching approaches are well chosen, students will be better able to understand the material, improve their critical thinking skills, and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts (Marzano, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998).

In the context of English language learning, particularly in intercultural reading courses, good teaching practices are essential to develop students' understanding of cultural and linguistic differences. Integrating cultural aspects in teaching helps students not only understand the text they are reading, but also appreciate and understand the cultural context behind the text (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). Therefore, this study aims to analyze teaching practices in the context of an intercultural reading course. With a focus on intercultural understanding in English language learning, this research seeks to provide insights into how teachers integrate intercultural aspects into their teaching strategies and how this affects students' understanding of the English language as well as the cultural differences it contains. The purpose of this research also to know about teachers' practice in teaching an intercultural reading course but There is a limitation in this study that when analyzing the teaching practice of intercultural reading, the teacher uses one specific pattern which over several meetings the teaching practice is similar from the beginning.

B. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Teacher practice is a learning method or strategy teachers use in the classroom to obtain optimal benefits from all lessons. This includes all aspects needed for student development. The fundamental aspect of a teacher's job is implementing effective classroom teaching strategies, which can greatly impact students' learning. Thus, educators and policy officials seek effective classroom techniques that can promote student motivation, learning, and achievement. Although it is widely acknowledged that high-quality teaching must be encouraged, there is still much discussion about what qualifies as good practice because instruction is not simple. However, it is reasonable to state that constructivism and direct instruction are the two distinct orientations rooted in educational philosophies and practical research. As noted by Woods (Chen & Abdullah, 2022), teacher practice is the application or use of teacher knowledge, beliefs, and thinking in classroom teaching. In the global discourse of neoliberalism, a growing body of research aims to explain English teachers' equity practices.

Teacher practices refer to teachers' various approaches, strategies, and techniques to facilitate student learning and development. These practices can include instructional

methods, assessment strategies, classroom management techniques, and professional development initiatives. Various factors, including educational policies, cultural norms, and individual teacher beliefs and experiences shape teacher practices. Various aspects of teachers' practices are related to improving student outcomes and learning in the classroom (Chen & Abdullah, 2022). The essential components of "direct instruction"—close observation, appropriate pacing, classroom management, clear presentation, well-structured lessons, and enlightening and supportive feedback—have been demonstrated to positively affect student progress in most cases.

Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (Miftakh, 2018) Propose that there are three primary phases involved in international English language learning: explanation, collecting, and implementation. It is developed using the concept of communicative competence, which consists of five elements: intercultural competence, language pragmatics, discourse, and strategy. According to Masuhara (Ma, 2023), reading literary works also aids in developing cultural awareness since they encourage students to think about cultural differences, deepen their understanding of their own culture, and simultaneously help them become more accepting and open attitudes towards the cultures of others.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses qualitative research as a methodology. According to Sukmadinata (Imam, 2013), the qualitative method is research aimed at describing and analyzing phenomena, events, belief activities, attitudes, and social activities individually or in groups. Meanwhile, according to (Djam'an Satori, 2013), This research exploration of teaching practices carried out in intercultural reading courses, a descriptive qualitative approach fulfills the achievement of research objectives, namely knowing how teaching practices are used as they are in intercultural reading courses.

This research was conducted at Majapahit Islamic University, located in Tambak Rejo, Gayaman, Mojoanyar, Mojokerto, East Java. While the participants of this study are lecturers who teach Intercultural Reading courses and all students in the class. The data source taken by the researcher is the teacher's practices in teaching Intercultural Reading Courses, including all the teaching components aspects, such as the element of control and management in the class. The way the lecturer teaches, prepares, and implements intercultural competence through reading According to Sugiyono (Imam, 2013), a research instrument is a tool used to measure observed natural and social phenomena. The goal is to collect useful data or information to answer research problems. In this study, the researcher used several instruments which is interview guidelines and observation checklist. Observations were used to analyse the teaching practices in the classroom, while interviews were used to validate the observations so that they were not only based on the researcher's point of view. The data analysis technique used in this study was thematic analysis. Thematic Analysis is one method of analyzing qualitative data. It is effective if the researcher wants to explore in detail qualitative data to find interrelated patterns of how phenomena occur through the researcher's eyes (Nowell et al., 2017). In addition, thematic analysis is a flexible method because it is independent of theory and epistemology, so it can be applied to various theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Findings

The researcher analyzed the five main components of the learning process. These components include all the special and important items adopted by the class reading the observation checklist according to the needs of this research, namely Preparation, Nature, and Manners for the beginning. Then, the learning process is carried out as follows: Pre-Reading Phase, Guided Reading Phase, Post-Reading Phase, Material, and Assignments. The results will describe each meeting and responses to the items in the observation table. After that, the results of the observations that have been explained will be strengthened by interviews with lecturers and students who actively took part in intercultural reading courses during that semester. These components are items analyzed during the practice of teaching intercultural reading.

a. Preparation, Traits, and Manners

The Instructor makes it easy to navigate and engage in teaching even for the learners who are just starting with online learning, gets a commendation response, which means this is in each meeting so that it can be observed and get quite satisfactory results, such as the teacher makes it easy to navigate and engage in teaching even for the learners who are just starting with online learning. In this case, the intercultural class does not have students who have not previously had online learning. Teachers are clear and intuitive, up-to-date, and active, and contain a variety of examples and/or variations. In the next item, the response was observed, as caring for learners, being friendly/sociable, and demonstrating a reasonable degree of concern for others (while instructing learning progress) in every meeting, and the results were quite satisfactory. The greeting teacher made the introduction session comfortable and friendly, cared whether students could hear the teacher clearly, and ensured two-way communication by asking students to turn on the camera during the meeting. The teacher also knows how to operate the learning platform, technology and other material resources used for online learning during all four meetings. It was also said in the interview after the learning progress.

“Have you mastered the technology used in learning intercultural reading online?”

“Some use Google Forms for intercultural teaching, if I'm not mistaken. Then, the rest is just sharing the website to be called an expert; if you can, you can. As for operating Zoom, in some of the meetings, I also broke the class, breakout room, and use breakout room. In general, I can manage it, but not to be called an expert yet.”

b. Pre-Reading Phases

During the pre-reading discussion, the teacher asked the learners to preview the text by having them read the selection title, look at the illustrations, and then discuss the possible contents of the text. The results of the observation table show that this item received a commendation response, which means that it was not only observed but also of high quality. This aligns with what students said in the interview session that the researcher asked about the activities carried out before the reading activity began.

“Then we are asked to understand the title of the slide that was given”

(SAR)

“for example, 'good luck symbol', what do we know about the good luck symbol, then the good luck symbol from which country” (SAV)

This shows the teaching practice used in the pre-reading phase by providing titles or illustrations in PowerPoint slides, and then students are asked to discuss the possible contexts in the text. In addition, students are also encouraged to activate their background knowledge using K-W-L (what I know, what I wonder, what I learn, but not in the form of charts or webs as in the item, but this does not reduce the response given which is commendation because the practice carried out by the teacher, in this case, is considered high quality.

“First we are given questions about ‘what do we want to learn now?’, ‘what do we know for’ then we give the material, we are asked about the topic”
(SAV)

Students encouraged to state or write predictions related to the chosen reading topic based on the observation table. This item received a commendation response because students expressed their predictions about the text that would later be read, students stated the possible contents so well that besides being observable this was also of high quality. Before starting reading, the teacher helps students to identify the type of material that will be used as well as determine the purpose of why they have to read the text; the results obtained are in the form of commendation because the teacher also states the purpose of learning intercultural reading that can be obtained from the reading text that will be given as in this first meeting the text given is related to the good luck symbol so that students can identify the reading text given in the form of articles. They know the purpose of reading about good luck symbols will increase knowledge about differences in social beliefs related to things believed to bring good luck from various worlds. The object for learning intercultural reading was also identified quite clearly to the students, as was how the object was sustained in the previous meeting. In every meeting, the response obtained from the observation was commendation in the form of the high quality of this item given.

c. Guided during Reading Phases

The learners were asked to evaluate their initial predictions; at one point the teacher asked students to convey their predictions related to the content of the reading that they had previously put forward in the pre-reading phase, some students had correct predictions related to the content of the reading, some others had no opinion at all, the results of the observation of the responses found were observed which means that this item can be found and observed during the learning process with satisfactory results. Then, students are asked to identify or read aloud the part of the text that confirms their prediction or the opposite does not prove their prediction while connecting with their cultural background. From the observation table above, it can be shown that the response obtained regarding this item is observed, which means it can be observed in the first meeting and get quite satisfactory results; it's just that during the reading phase, the teacher does not take all students to answer because it has the potential to damage the focus of reading that has been built before, the teacher gives a short reading at the beginning of the reading phase with the same purpose. One of the students interviewed said this as an informant regarding how the teaching practices were carried out during the intercultural reading course.

“so she opens with an introduction first, then we are asked to understand the title of the slide that was given and then asked to read some texts and then explain the contents of the text. After which we were given the content

of the slide, we were given access to a website with more complete readings and an answering website.” (SAR)

The comprehension discussion focused on defining the selected reading and sharing students' opinions on intercultural competence. This could be seen in every meeting when they started answering questions about what was in the text and sharing opinions based on their cultural background. An appropriate mix of factual questions and higher-order questions are incorporated into the comprehension discussion. This item received an observed response at every meeting, which means it can be seen and observed to have satisfactory results.

The teacher monitored when students read the short passage on the PowerPoint slide, asked questions about vocabulary beyond students' understanding, and then asked whether they encountered obstacles in understanding this. One of the students interviewed provided information regarding the appropriate assistance provided.

“First we are assisted by the practitioner lecturer, he asks if there are vocals that we don't understand, and if there are usually he first gives a clue about the vocab, if we really don't understand, then after that we are told the meaning of this, or how to mention this” (SAR)

The teacher tries to focus on reading as a meaningful process, in addition to the instructional techniques used, and mindfulness reflection as a recommendation practice, which is also applied from the beginning until the end of the meeting. In the interview with the Intercultural Reading course instructor, the instructor also stated,

“Not only reading, reading quickly. Because if it's skimming-scanning, I think it will be difficult to understand the intercultural. So it's more like real reading.” (LLH)

D. Post Reading Phases

This phase was conducted after two reading sessions provided by the teacher, a long reading text provided through the website and questions related to students' understanding of the reading content. afterwards, students were asked to explain their opinions and critical judgments about the text based on their knowledge of intercultural knowledge. Afterwards, the teacher asks students to provide responses to the reading (for example, retelling, summarizing, evaluating, connecting, or comparing with their cultural background). In this phase, the discussion session was active throughout. The teacher also asks students to answer questions about the content of the reading. In every meeting, some of these items get the same result, which can be observed and show quite satisfactory results. The activity is a question-and-answer related to information that can be obtained from the reading text. Continuing with the previous item, students' understanding of the reading content and intercultural knowledge is also seen in the question and answer session after completing the reading activity. Therefore, the response obtained based on the observation results is commendation, meaning it is highly quality.

Authentic assessment practices used in this lesson could be observed in the first meeting, and the rest of the assessment practices were conducted in general. In addition, the teacher's planned objectives, actual teaching, and assessment practices also received a commendation response, which means high quality.

E. Material and Task

The choice for Intercultural reading learning is only one reading in every meeting, suitable for students' abilities but not for different abilities and grade levels. This is because there is no placement of students' ability levels, so the reading is generalised. However, the teacher still pays attention if the material is too difficult to understand. Intercultural reading materials are also displayed in every meeting, representing authentic text types that can be observed with satisfactory results. In the selection of materials or reading materials, what is observed by the teacher is that in addition to containing intercultural material, it is also made easy to understand in terms of content and context, the type of context chosen in addition to articles, news, or internationally certified journals that are well known. Teachers choose Intercultural Reading materials and assignments that reflect sensitivity to students' diverse learning needs. The appropriate number and type of independent tasks organised according to the level of the learners and the teaching objectives to be achieved can also be observed from all four meetings.

2. Discussion

The teaching practices used by Intercultural teachers mainly focus on discussions related to the content of the text and, afterwards, comparing it with the culture shared by the students. Overall, the practices used not only aim to improve students' reading skills but also provide new insights and knowledge about different cultures and beliefs. Habits and customs that exist around the world. Rasing on (Banks 2009), who applies equity as a learning strategy and classroom environment that can help some disadvantaged students, the teaching practices used in cross-cultural reading also apply online where in practice, teachers are interest-oriented and student-centred, students are prioritised in terms of linguistic and sociocultural, they are given equal learning opportunities and access to learning resources, this can be related to the previous theory that teacher practice, as (Woods 2009) stated, is the application or use of teacher knowledge, beliefs, and thoughts in classroom teaching. In the global discourse of neoliberalism, more and more research aims to explain English teachers' practices. Teacher practice is the learning methods or strategies used by teachers in the classroom to gain optimal benefits from all learning. It includes all aspects necessary for student development. A fundamental aspect of the teacher's job is to implement effective classroom teaching strategies, which can have a major impact on student learning. In this study, the practices carried out by teachers at Majapahit Islamic University implemented varied learning strategies by adjusting the needs of students, such as mixing scammng-skinning, question and answer, and focus group discussion. Therefore, effective classroom techniques that can improve student motivation, learning, and achievement are highly sought after by educators and policy officials. while the application of intercultural aspects taught through reading is in accordance with the theory according to (Bradella 2023) who said that, the idea of cross-cultural reading allows students to expand their cultural horizons and adopt various beliefs and attitudes in order to stay abreast of cross-cultural values and lifestyles.

While the difference between this research and the previous research is in the focus of the research, namely the teaching practice used; in this research, the practice taught mixes various kinds of existing reading learning techniques and focuses on increasing students' understanding of the content of reading that is able to capture what the author wants in the reading written while comparing with the cultural background of

each student who will later output the end of this course in the form of speaking, and the addition of cross-cultural insights.

E. CONCLUSION

The teacher is well prepared from the material, the reading materials, the navigation of the system used for learning, to the way of delivery and interaction and instruction outside the learning material before the class begins, in four meetings observed and one interview with one teacher and two students researchers found that the practice of teaching used is the provision of short texts that after reading students are asked to answer questions related to information in the reading, after moving to a website where there are similar readings with longer content, students were asked again to answer the reading related questions before being asked to build their critical thinking and connect only the culture they found with the culture around them. The teaching practice used focused on active discussion activities, questioning the content of reading to improve student reading ability while adding to cross-cultural insights previously unknown; the researchers found that teachers stated in the determination of the material used there are no special restrictions either in terms of culture, customs, custom, of a particular country, teachers sometimes give full freedom to students to sort their own reading material they will read to then present the content or comparison of such cultural backgrounds. Every class had their own problem within. while the problem found in teaching practice revolves around the lack of space because learning is done online, so there are boundaries that cannot be pushed beyond what should be. Teachers are unable to have full control over the classes they receive, but this does not diminish the effectiveness of teaching materials towards achieving the goal of learning intercultural reading, which is to enhance the student's knowledge about the subject and specific topic, about how they develop their ability to think, critically, and also to understand the reading text in an integral way, not only from the grammatical point of view but also the meaning that the author wants to convey to the reader.

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