



## CULTIVATING ORAL PROFICIENCY: MULTICULTURALISM AND PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' VIEWS ON SPEAKING

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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examines how multiculturalism shapes oral proficiency development among pre-service English teachers in an Indonesian university context. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with four final-year teacher candidates, the research explores participants' beliefs about speaking skills, the emotional factors influencing their oral performance, and the perceived value of culturally diverse pedagogical activities. Findings reveal that pre-service teachers' confidence in speaking English is closely tied to their familiarity with multicultural content: those exposed to varied cultural scenarios reported reduced anxiety and greater willingness to communicate. Conversely, limited intercultural experience heightened apprehension, underscoring the importance of culturally responsive teaching. Participants valued role-plays situated in authentic cultural contexts and peer-teaching exercises that encouraged the sharing of home-culture perspectives, which collectively fostered engagement and linguistic adaptability. Thematic analysis further highlighted that integrating multimedia materials, such as interviews and videos showcasing global English use enhanced learners' critical awareness of cultural nuance and pragmatic competence. Based on these insights, the study recommends embedding structured intercultural simulations and scaffolded cross-cultural speaking tasks into English teacher training curricula. It also advocates for professional development workshops focused on reflective practice to help pre-service teachers recognize and address their cultural biases. By positioning multiculturalism at the core of oral proficiency pedagogy, teacher education programs can better prepare future educators to facilitate inclusive, dynamic, and effective speaking environments.

**Keywords:** oral proficiency, multicultural pedagogy, pre-service teachers, speaking skills, intercultural competence

### INTRODUCTION

Among language proficiencies, oral proficiency has been considered as a core category of communicative competence in English language teaching (ELT). This proficiency indicates an individual's ability to produce fluent, accurate, and contextually appropriate spoken language. More than several decades, many experts in ELT have considered the importance of speaking skills not only for learners' linguistic development but also for their broader academic and professional trajectories (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). In teacher education, cultivating pre-service teachers' oral proficiency is doubly important: they must become both adept speakers of English and skilled facilitators of speaking activities in their future classrooms. However, in many EFL contexts, including Indonesia, pre-service teachers report pervasive anxiety, limited

opportunities for authentic interaction, and a narrow conception of speaking tasks, issues that compromise both confidence and competence (Brown, 2007; Horwitz, 2001).

Globalization and intensified cross-cultural exchange have further reframed the pedagogical landscape, prompting an increased emphasis on intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Byram's (1997) seminal model identifies five criteria which are attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpretation and relationship, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness, as essential components of ICC. Integrating multicultural perspectives into speaking instruction, therefore, can enrich learners' linguistic repertoires while fostering openness, empathy, and adaptability. Multicultural pedagogy does not merely expose learners to diverse content; it positions cultural difference as a springboard for meaningful interaction, enabling participants to negotiate meaning, compare cultural norms, and reflect on their own assumptions (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2010).

In ELT research, the affective dimension of speaking, for example, the role of motivation, anxiety, and self-efficacy, has attracted considerable attention. According to Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, negative emotions such as anxiety can raise a mental "filter" that impedes language acquisition. MacIntyre and Gardner's (1991) work on language anxiety similarly established that higher levels of apprehension correlate with lower willingness to communicate (WTC) and reduced output. More recently, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) have demonstrated that positive emotions (enjoyment) can co-exist with anxiety, suggesting that carefully designed pedagogical experiences may mitigate fear while enhancing engagement. However, much of this research has focused on learner populations rather than on pre-service teachers, whose dual role as learners and future instructors presents unique challenges and opportunities.

Within the Indonesian higher-education context, studies have documented that EFL pre-service teachers often receive limited exposure to authentic intercultural exchanges. Classroom activities tend to rely on decontextualized drills or scripted dialogues, which do not reflect the dynamic, unpredictable nature of real-world communication (Nurhayati, 2018). When tasked with spontaneous speaking, many pre-service teachers report fear of making errors, embarrassment before peers, and uncertainty about appropriate cultural conventions (Sulistyo, 2019). Such findings underscore the need for teacher-training programs to incorporate pedagogical strategies that address both linguistic and affective dimensions of speaking.

Multicultural pedagogical activities, such as role-plays set in varied cultural contexts, peer-teaching of home-culture narratives, and analysis of multimedia case studies—offer promising avenues for addressing these needs. Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) advocate the use of realia (authentic materials) and video to immerse learners in diverse speech communities, thereby heightening their pragmatic awareness and intercultural sensitivity. Likewise, Deardorff's (2006) process model of intercultural competence emphasizes experiential learning, self-reflection, and guided feedback as critical steps in developing the skills of interpretation and interaction. Embedding such activities within oral-skills courses may thus foster lower anxiety, and richer metacognitive reflection among pre-service teachers.

Despite the theoretical concept, empirical investigations into the impact of multicultural-infused speaking tasks on pre-service teacher development remain inadequate, especially in Southeast Asia. To address this gap, the present study examines how final-year English teacher candidates at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta perceive their own speaking abilities, the emotional factors influencing their performance, and the



value they attribute to various multicultural pedagogical activities. By emphasizing participants' voices through semi-structured interviews, this research aims to investigate the interaction between cultural familiarity, affective states, and oral proficiency. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- a. What are pre-service teachers current views on oral proficiency?
- b. How does multiculturalism inform their speaking practice?

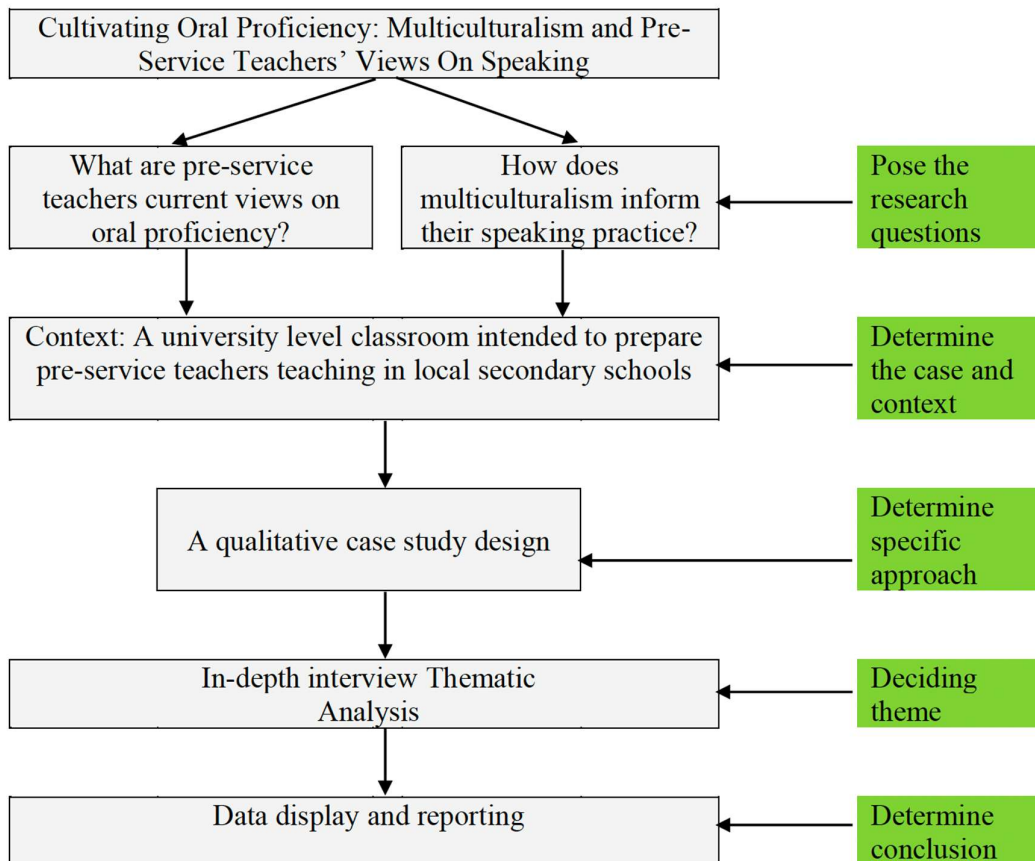
By integrating literature on ICC, affective dimensions of language learning, and culturally responsive pedagogy, this study contributes to both theory and practice. It offers evidence-based recommendations for teacher educators aiming to cultivate oral proficiency through a multicultural lens, ultimately preparing future teachers to facilitate inclusive, dynamic, and contextually rich speaking environments.

**METHOD**

**Research Design**

A qualitative case study design was used in this study (Stake, 1995) to gain an in-depth understanding of how multiculturalism informs oral proficiency development among pre-service English teachers. A case study approach was chosen because it allows for contextualized exploration of participants' perspectives in their real-life teaching practicum environment (Yin, 2014). The researcher focus examine the beliefs, emotions, and pedagogical preferences that shape speaking practice in a multicultural framework.

Table 1. Research design



## Participants

The participants of this study were four pre-service English teachers selected through purposive sampling based on two criteria: (1) enrollment in the micro teaching course during the semester of data collection, and (2) self-reported interest or prior experience in intercultural language teaching. The sample included two female students and two male students, aged between 20 and 21 years. All participants had completed at least two semesters of methods coursework and were supposed to conduct sessions of teaching practicum in secondary schools after having their micro teaching course. Pseudonyms (P1–P4) are used throughout to protect confidentiality.

## Data Collection

Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. An interview guide was developed to ensure consistency across sessions while allowing for flexible probing of emerging themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews were conducted in campus, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken during and immediately after each interview to capture nonverbal cues and researcher reflections.

## Data Analysis

Transcripts were analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis protocol.



1. Familiarization: Reading and re-reading transcripts while making initial margin notes.
2. Generating Initial Codes: Systematically coding features of the data relevant to the research questions (e.g., “cultural comfort,” “peer support,” “anxiety triggers”).
3. Searching for Themes: Collating codes into potential themes such as Confidence through Cultural Familiarity, Anxiety with Intercultural Uncertainty, and Value of Multimedia Materials.
4. Reviewing Themes: Checking candidate themes against the data set to ensure coherence and distinctiveness.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Refining each theme's scope and selecting illustrative excerpts.
6. Producing the Report: Integrating thematic insights into a coherent narrative linked to the theoretical framework of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997) and affective filter theory (Krashen, 1982).

To enhance analytic rigor, member checking was conducted by sharing a summary of findings with participants to confirm accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Analysis of the interview data yielded two overarching themes aligned with the research questions: (1) Pre-service teachers' current views on oral proficiency, and (2) How multiculturalism informs their speaking practice. Each theme comprised several subthemes, illustrated below with anonymized participant quotations.



## *Pre-Service Teachers' Current Views on Oral Proficiency*

All participants described oral proficiency primarily in terms of fluency and intelligibility. For example, P3 defined proficiency as “being able to speak without too many pauses or sounds of hesitation” and “using words that my listener can actually understand.” Similarly, P1 emphasized pronunciation:

*“Even if my vocabulary is limited, if I can pronounce words clearly, I feel I’ve achieved proficiency in that moment.”*

Participants thus equated proficiency with smooth delivery and clarity of articulation. It helped them to justify the audacity to utter some expression even though they perceived to only have limited number of vocabulary.

Despite their aspirations, participants acknowledged persistent gaps. Commonly reported weaknesses included limited spontaneous vocabulary access and occasional grammatical errors and accuracy while speaking. P2 reflected,

*“Sometimes I know the word I intend to speak, but when I’m in front of classmates, my mind goes blank. My sentences become choppy.”*

Likewise, P4 noted difficulty with turn-taking and repairing misunderstandings:

*“In micro-teaching, when students ask unexpected questions, I struggle to reformulate my response quickly.”*

All four participants reported that anxiety and self-confidence significantly moderated their speaking performance. P1 described a “butterflies in my stomach” sensation before presenting, whereas P4 contrasted this with moments of enjoyment:

*“When I’m discussing topics I love, like Indonesian culture, I actually feel relaxed and excited, not nervous.”*

## *How Multiculturalism Informs Speaking Practice*

Exposure to familiar cultural content emerged as a powerful anxiety-reduction strategy. Participants recounted feeling more at ease when role-plays mirrored contexts they knew well, such as describing local festivals or family rituals. P2 commented,

*“When the scenario was ordering food in a restaurant in my hometown, I didn’t worry about what to say. It flowed naturally.”*

This suggests that anchoring speaking tasks in participants’ cultural backgrounds bolsters confidence by lowering the affective filter.

All participants valued multimedia resources such as, videos, interviews, and authentic dialogues from diverse English-speaking communities. P3 observed,

*“Watching interviews of people from Korea, Australia, and the U.S. made me realize English isn’t just one accent or style. It inspired me to try different intonations.”*

These materials not only expanded participants’ perceptual world of English varieties but also motivated them to experiment with pronunciation and pragmatics.

Participants highlighted peer-teaching activities in which each candidate presented an aspect of their own culture in English. P4 stated,

*“Teaching my peers about Indonesian shadow puppetry made me practice storytelling structures and new vocabulary. It felt meaningful because it was my own heritage.”*

This peer-sharing fostered both linguistic accuracy and intercultural understanding within the cohort.

Structured simulations such as doing story telling about a certain folklore and presenting it in front of their classmates or cross-cultural business meetings were perceived as particularly effective. Participants appreciated detailed preparatory materials (role descriptions, cultural briefings) that scaffolded their performance. P1 articulated, *“Having background on my own culture helped me focus on the language rather than making mistakes in other cultural settings”*.

Table 2. Thematic Results

Theme	Code	Description	Excerpts
Pre-Service Teachers' Views on Oral Proficiency	Self-Perceived Competence	Fluency and intelligibility as central markers of proficiency.	“Being able to speak without too many pauses...using words my listener can understand.” (P3)
	Recognized Skill Gaps	Difficulties with spontaneous vocabulary retrieval, grammar under pressure, and turn-taking strategies.	“Sometimes I know the word I want, but...my mind goes blank. My sentences become choppy.” (P2)
	Affective Influences on Speaking	Anxiety (“butterflies in my stomach”) and enjoyment depending on topic familiarity.	“When I’m discussing topics I love... I feel relaxed and excited, not nervous.” (P4)
Multiculturalism Informing Speaking Practice	Cultural Familiarity Reducing Anxiety	Role-plays and tasks rooted in participants’ own cultures lowered affective filter and increased confidence.	“When the scenario was ordering food in my hometown...I didn’t worry about what to say.” (P2)
	Multimedia Materials Enhancing Engagement	Authentic videos and interviews of global English users broadened participants’ pragmatic awareness and motivation to experiment.	“Watching interviews of people from Korea, Australia...inspired me to try different intonations.” (P3)
	Peer-Teaching of Home-Culture Narratives	Presenting home-culture topics in English fostered meaningful practice, vocabulary growth, and intercultural exchange within the cohort.	“Teaching my peers about shadow puppetry...felt meaningful because it was my own heritage.” (P4)
	Scaffolded Intercultural Simulations	Structured simulations (e.g. story telling on folklores, business meetings) with cultural briefings provided challenge with support for intercultural tasks.	“Having background on my own culture helped me focus on the language rather than making mistakes in other cultural settings.” (P1)

Collectively, these findings indicate that pre-service teachers view oral proficiency through both cognitive (fluency, accuracy) and affective (confidence, enjoyment) criteria. Multicultural pedagogical strategies which were grounded in participants’ own cultural experiences and augmented by authentic materials play a crucial role in shaping both their self-perceptions and their practical engagement with speaking tasks.



## Discussion

The present study investigated pre-service teachers' conceptions of oral proficiency and examined how multiculturalism informs their speaking practice. Two primary insights emerged: first, participants define oral proficiency through both cognitive and affective dimensions; second, multicultural pedagogical activities substantively shaped their confidence, engagement, and pragmatic awareness. This discussion situates these findings within existing scholarship and articulates implications for teacher education.

### *Integrating Cognitive and Affective Dimensions of Oral Proficiency*

Consistent with Celce-Murcia et al. (1996), participants emphasized fluency and intelligibility as core components of oral proficiency. However, their narratives also foregrounded affective states, particularly anxiety and enjoyment, as critical modulators of performance. This dual focus aligns with Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) "two faces of Janus" model, which posits that anxiety and enjoyment can coexist and jointly influence speaking outcomes. In the current study, participants reported "butterflies in the stomach" yet also moments of excitement when discussing personally meaningful topics. These findings suggest that pre-service teacher training must attend not only to linguistic form but also to emotional regulation strategies (Horwitz, 2001).

### *Multicultural Content as an Affective Filter Reducer*

Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis argues that high anxiety impedes comprehensible input and output. By anchoring speaking tasks in familiar cultural contexts, such as local traditions or home-culture narratives in which participants experienced reduced apprehension and increased willingness to communicate. This mirrors previous research in EFL contexts indicating that culturally relevant materials boost learner confidence (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2010). For pre-service teachers, incorporating home-culture content serves a dual purpose: it eases anxiety through familiarity and reinforces their identities as cultural brokers in future classrooms.

### *Authentic Materials and Pragmatic Competence*

Participants' enthusiasm for multimedia materials, from YouTube interviews to authentic dialogues, underscores the value of realia in fostering pragmatic awareness (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). Exposure to diverse English varieties prompted participants to experiment with intonation and speech styles, reflecting emerging metapragmatic competence (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). This finding extends prior studies by demonstrating that pre-service teachers not only benefit as learners but also develop the critical eye necessary to select and adapt authentic materials for their own students.

### *Scaffolded Simulations and Skill Development*

Structured intercultural simulations, complete with role descriptions and cultural briefings, were highly valued for balancing challenge and support. These activities resonate with Deardorff's (2006) process model, which advocates experiential learning coupled with reflection and feedback. By providing scaffolding, teacher educators can help candidates navigate cultural complexity without becoming overwhelmed, thereby facilitating deeper engagement and skill acquisition.

### *Implications for Teacher Education*

Collectively, these insights point to several practical recommendations. First, curriculum designers should integrate culturally anchored speaking tasks that leverage pre-service teachers' home-culture knowledge. Second, courses should incorporate authentic multimedia resources representing a spectrum of English varieties to cultivate pragmatic competence. Third, scaffolded intercultural simulation with clear preparatory materials and guided debriefing can provide optimal tension for growth. Finally, affective strategies—such as pre-task relaxation exercises or peer-support pairing—should be embedded to manage anxiety and foster enjoyment.

### **Limitations**

This study's case-study design and small sample size limit generalizability; future research should employ longitudinal designs with larger cohorts to assess the sustained impact of these interventions. Additionally, classroom observations could complement self-reported data, providing a fuller picture of how multicultural tasks translate into pedagogical practice.

By foregrounding pre-service teachers' voices, this research affirms that multicultural pedagogy is not merely an add-on but a central lever for cultivating both linguistic proficiency and intercultural sensitivity. Embedding such approaches in teacher education promises to yield educators equipped to foster inclusive, dynamic speaking environments in today's globalized classrooms.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study explored pre-service English teachers' beliefs about oral proficiency and examined how multiculturalism informs their speaking practice. Findings indicate that participants conceptualize oral proficiency as an integration of cognitive facets such as fluency, accuracy, and pragmatic appropriateness, and affective dimensions, including confidence, motivation, and anxiety regulation. Multicultural pedagogical activities, particularly those grounded in participants' own cultural backgrounds or featuring authentic multimedia materials, emerged as potent vehicles for lowering the affective filter and fostering active engagement. Role-plays anchored in familiar contexts reduced anxiety by offering a sense of cultural safety, while exposure to diverse English varieties prompted critical reflection on pronunciation, intonation, and pragmatic conventions. Structured simulations with clear cultural briefings further supported learners' navigation of intercultural tasks without overwhelming their emerging skills.

These insights underscore the necessity of embedding multiculturalism at the core of oral proficiency pedagogy within teacher-training programs. Practically, curriculum planners should (1) design speaking tasks that draw on pre-service teachers' home-culture knowledge to build confidence; (2) incorporate authentic, varied multimedia resources to enhance pragmatic competence; (3) scaffold intercultural simulations through detailed role descriptions and debriefing sessions; and (4) integrate affective strategies, such as peer-support structures and pre-task anxiety-management techniques to optimize emotional readiness.

While this qualitative case study provides rich, contextualized understandings, its limited sample and single-institution focus suggest caution in generalizing findings. Future research might employ longitudinal designs with larger, more diverse cohorts to examine the sustained effects of multicultural-infused speaking curricula. Observational

studies could also elucidate how pre-service teachers translate these experiences into their own classroom practices.

Ultimately, positioning multicultural pedagogy as a foundational element of oral skills instruction holds significant promise for preparing English teachers who are not only linguistically adept but also culturally responsive. By aligning cognitive, affective, and intercultural dimensions, teacher education programs can cultivate educators capable of orchestrating inclusive, dynamic, and contextually meaningful speaking environments an imperative in our increasingly interconnected world.

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