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Multicultural Engagement Activities to Support Internationalization of Bilingual Higher Education Programs

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Multicultural Engagement Activities to Support Internationalization of Bilingual Higher Education Programs

Abstract

In this paper, we aim to offer multicultural engagement activities to support the internationalization of higher education. This research applies the interpretive qualitative case study with twelve key participants from three different bilingual higher education programs. The study used semi-structured interviews to investigate multicultural engagement activities. The findings of the study show that two important patterns emerged from the data: national multicultural engagement activities and international multicultural engagement activities. The national multicultural engagement can be held in the contexts of formal multicultural engagement activities, semi-formal multicultural engagement activities, and project-based multicultural engagement activities. In addition, the international multicultural engagement activities can be short-term, mid-term, and long-term international overseas multicultural engagement activities. The implication of this study is that multicultural engagement activities can be a model for other bilingual programs in higher education contexts.

Keywords

multiculturalism, engagement, internationalization, bilingual higher education, qualitative case study

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Multicultural Engagement Activities to Support Internationalization of Bilingual Higher Education Programs

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In this paper, we aim to offer multicultural engagement activities to support the internationalization of higher education. This research applies the interpretive qualitative case study with twelve key participants from three different bilingual higher education programs. The study used semi-structured interviews to investigate multicultural engagement activities. The findings of the study show that two important patterns emerged from the data: national multicultural engagement activities and international multicultural engagement activities. The national multicultural engagement can be held in the contexts of formal multicultural engagement activities, semi-formal multicultural engagement activities, and project-based multicultural engagement activities. In addition, the international multicultural engagement activities can be short-term, mid-term, and long-term international overseas multicultural engagement activities. The implication of this study is that multicultural engagement activities can be a model for other bilingual programs in higher education contexts.

Keywords: multiculturalism, engagement, internationalization, bilingual higher education, qualitative case study

Introduction

Internationalization is still an important discourse in higher education sectors. The internationalization of universities demands more pedagogical approaches to accommodate the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural backgrounds of students and to assist the acquisition of multicultural competencies (Stier, 2006). Internationalization of higher education aims not only to promote mutual understanding, partnership, and mobility but also to acquire global competence so that students can meet the demand of the international labor market (Henard et al., 2012).

Further, the internationalization of higher education has several purposes including preparing students with global intercultural skills, internationalizing the university curriculum, portraying the university globally, improving research and innovation performances, and employing academics from diverse backgrounds (Marmolejo, 2010). In addition, the internationalization of higher education provides opportunities for students and academics to form multiple global identities in the context of globalization (Caruana & Ploner, 2010). Thus, internationalization demands different multicultural education approaches to accommodate the diverse need of students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

One of the multicultural education approaches is the variety of cultural engagement activities for students that can facilitate them to acquire intercultural competencies. Multicultural engagement helps students to be aware of equality, diversity, and fairness both

inside and outside campuses. More importantly, research on multicultural engagement in the context of internationalization has received little attention and remained unclear. Therefore, this study offers important insights into multicultural engagement in the internationalization of higher education.

Multicultural Engagement

Multicultural engagement is the capacity to work with collective and qualified competency across diverse ranges of cultures (Grimwood et al., 2015). Grimwood et al. have identified that multicultural engagement is influenced by intercultural discourse, universal social conscience, academia, curriculum design and development, global partnership, and interaction. This definition emphasizes that social and professional abilities to operate within different cultural contexts are a form of multicultural engagement. Intercultural engagement may happen at both national and international levels.

The multicultural engagement activities at national levels that support the learning can occur at formal and informal occasions. The formal occasions include the learning and engagement occur informal institution that is offered as part of the institutional programs (Bull et al., 2008). Formal engagement is also recognized as the engagement-doing things together and involves one-to-one interaction (Wenger, 2010). Hence, formal multicultural engagement activities are the learning and engagement activities that occur in a formal institution to promote multicultural competencies.

On the other hand, the informal multicultural engagement is the learning occurs in both formal institution and community voluntarily (Ainsworth & Eaton, 2010). The aim of informal multicultural engagement activities to promote intercultural competency (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2018; Rosmaladewi & Abduh, 2017). Multicultural competence reflects the mastery of knowledge and skills of other cultures. Thus, the multicultural ability can perpetuate the process of the internationalization of higher education.

At the international level, multicultural engagement is the interaction that occurs transnationally by respecting different cultures. Grant and Portera (2011) highlight that intercultural and multicultural education can enhance global partnership and interconnectedness. This statement indicates that people who have the intercultural ability can establish social and professional networking beyond the local, regional, and national borders. This intercultural ability can enhance the success of the promoting internationalization of academic culture in higher education (Azis & Abduh, 2019). The promotion of internationalization opens the possibility of creating a culture of equality and inclusion (Banks, 2009). The values of equality of inclusiveness are the driving factors in the context of multicultural engagement and internationalization of higher education.

Roles of Multicultural Engagement in the Internationalization of Higher Education

The roles of multicultural engagement in the internationalization of higher education have manifested in several ways including transformation, recognition, and literacy. Davis, Phyak, and Bui (2012) investigated the roles of multicultural education and engagement in Nepal and Vietnam. They reveal that multicultural education is a community engagement that can transform national, regional, and local policy levels into transnationalism, liberalism, and globalization. The transformation of local, regional, and national values can occur through global interaction, partnerships, and education. The mastery of skills and knowledge of global interaction can help people transform their respected local values into globalization.

Also, Nieto (2001) suggests that the way to transform local culture and ethnicities values into a global perspective is through the promotion of tolerance in a multicultural

environment. Nieto argues that tolerance reflects the recognition and respect of different beliefs and perspectives of others. Through this recognition, people can interact in global or international circumstances with the acceptance of differences.

Further, Kapoyannis (2019) argues that the transformation of multicultural education can be done through literacy engagement. Literacy engagement involves multiliteracy approaches and literacy activities containing multicultural education themes and issues. Multicultural literacy engagement is through reading, broadening multicultural vocabulary, and intercultural activities.

The reported studies above show the important evidence regarding the Multicultural engagement in the internationalization of higher education, there is still the need for examining multicultural engagement in another university context. So far, no empirical endeavor has investigated how multicultural engagement is promoted within bilingual higher education levels to help students and lecturers understand the ways to build intercultural and multicultural competency within a multicultural setting. To fill this gap, the present study attempts to continue the scholarship of multicultural engagement to better understand the model of developing interculturalism in the university contexts of a developing country.

In this study, we as researchers and educators for multicultural education attempt portray multicultural engagement activities in bilingual higher education. We expect that this study can contribute to better understanding of multiculturalism and internationalization in higher education contexts. Further, we hope this study can become references for multicultural engagement research in other similar settings.

Research Method

This research applies the qualitative case study. This case study is the study of the phenomenon of the case (Yin, 2013). The case here is the multicultural engagement of students studying in bilingual programs. This case study is interpretive. The interpretive case study aims to build social construction through shared interpretation of interviews and documents (Gall et al., 2007). Therefore, through the interpretive case study, researchers decipher the meanings of interviews to build the social construction of the knowledge.

The Study Context and Participants

The ethics committee of the Universitas Negeri Makassar approved the ethics application of this study. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, the names of the participants in this study were coded P1 (participant 1) and P2 (participant 2) consecutively. Consequently, none of them were identified using their real names. All participants in this study have signed the consent form voluntarily to participate in this study.

This study took place in three Indonesian universities within three different departments: Science, Social Science, and Economics Departments. Twelve lecturers (see Table 1) who teach in three different programs participated in this study. This study seeks lecturers' views on the multicultural engagement of students studying in bilingual higher education programs.

Table 1
Participants' Profile

Participants	Age	Sex	Educational background	Language spoken
1	30s	M	Master	Bilingual
2	30s	M	Master	Multilingual
3	30s	M	Master	Bilingual
4	50s	M	PhD	Bilingual
5	50s	M	PhD	Bilingual
6	30s	F	Master	Bilingual
7	40s	F	PhD	Bilingual
8	40s	F	PhD	Bilingual
9	50s	M	PhD	Bilingual
10	40s	F	PhD	Bilingual
11	30s	F	Master	Bilingual
12	40s	F	Master	Bilingual

1 Instruments of Data Collection

Primary data gained through semi-structured interviews to obtain multicultural engagement activities in bilingual higher education programs that lasted approximately from 45 minutes to one hour. The language of the interviews was Indonesian because participants felt comfortable using that language. The participants of the study had the opportunity to re-check the transcription of the interviews because the researchers sent back the transcription to them. The rechecking of the transcription by participants can improve the accuracy of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and offers a convincing result of the research (Creswell, 2012).

Data Analysis

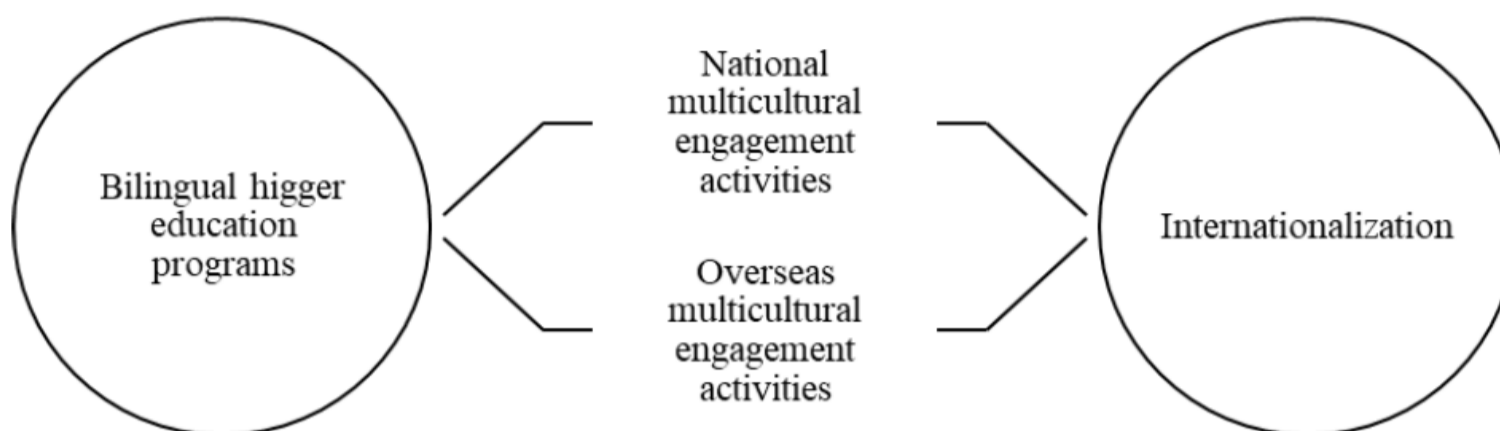
The data analysis approach used in this study is the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first stage is to read the whole data, and then perform initial coding. The next is searching for the themes and reviewing the emergent themes by making connections between them and making a comparison between categories and codes. The core categories are refined and articulated to achieve meaningful and theoretical types of participants.

Findings

Two distinct patterns emerged from the data. From these patterns, we categorized the following themes: national multicultural engagement activities and international multicultural engagement activities (Figure 1). One theme, national multicultural engagement, had subthemes that define and focus on notable specific elements are divided into sub-themes: formal multicultural engagement activities, semi-formal multicultural engagement activities, and project-based multicultural engagement activities. In addition, the international multicultural engagement activities have several sub-themes: short-term, mid-term, and long-term international overseas multicultural engagement activities. The purpose of reporting these three themes is to elicit and communicate what we learned about being students' multicultural engagement in international bilingual programs.

Figure 1

Model of Multicultural Engagement in Bilingual Higher Education to Support Internationalization



National Multicultural Engagement Activities

The result of the analysis of this study showed that the key forms of activities can be listed as follows: formal multicultural engagement activities, semi-formal multicultural engagement activities, and project-based multicultural engagement activities

Firstly, the formal multicultural engagement activities include the types of actions offered to students, to support their intercultural competence and English language proficiency, which are organized by the institutions. The types of these engagement activities consist of subject matter immersion activity, content tutorial activity, and activities for multicultural and academic English sessions. These engagement activities are highly essential to maintain high exposure to diverse ideas and multicultural mindset and to increase language proficiency. The following participants highlight the importance of such engagement activities: “I care about their intercultural development because we want them to be a good citizen. That is why this program is offered. This is just to improve interculturality and their English competency” (Participant five [P5]).

Participant five in this study stresses the importance of the involvement in multicultural activities not only to improve students’ foreign language activities, but also to enhance students’ intercultural competence. These competences can assist students to become multicultural and global citizenship.

It indicates that diversity of activities helps students to expand their ideas and open up their opportunities to interact with other students in bilingual programs. Like other participants in this study point out multicultural programs to facilitate learning other languages and other cultures that: “it runs a three-hour weekly tutorial multicultural program in English. This is an exclusive endeavor to help students improve their understanding of other cultures and their languages” (P4). These multicultural sessions are held in English, consequently, students are not only learning other cultures but also for those whose backgrounds are non-English, they can improve their international language. One participant in this comment on the importance of these multicultural engagement programs: “the compulsory unit that students should take to improve their intercultural encounters and English proficiency is a cross-cultural unit” (P3). This particularly aims to improve students’ intercultural horizon, so that they are prepared when they take an international exchange program and exposure to different cultures domestically and internationally.

The second is the semi-formal multicultural engagement activities. They are the prerequisite involvement of learners to attend series of lectures, invited speakers, and guest experts. The series of lectures normally consists of invited qualified lecturers, predominantly

from domestic experts, with occasionally some from overseas. The invited speakers are the speakers who are from the workplace and industry to share the current situation and demands of the workplace. The guest experts are at the events, which generally invited are native English-speaking experts from overseas including Australia, America, and Europe. Such activities are held regularly to expose bilingual students not only to the cutting-edge trend in their disciplines but more importantly, they are exposed to multicultural perspectives and English by listening, observing, and perhaps imitating native English experts. One of the participants in this study highlights activities to support multicultural engagement:

We regularly invite international experts as guest lecturers ...those guest speakers vary from different countries. There are some from Australia, America, Japan, Netherland and recently from Germany. These lecture series are not only to talk about content but also to expand their multicultural understanding and help them immersed in English. (P1)

The multicultural event that can assist students understanding of other cultures and enhance their intercultural competence is important to maintain as part of the multicultural engagement for international class programs. Also, one of the participants in this study comments: "All international experts and guest lecturers that are invited to talk here, they provide different insights and perspectives. Such model of engagement activities assists students to get better and better" (P2). This event can stimulate ideas and open new avenues to develop students' awareness and competence in multiculturalism.

The third is project-based multicultural engagement activities that deal with the required involvement in international events & projects in home universities. The three bilingual programs in the three different universities have each established their annual events, such as international seminars and conferences, which demand students' participation. The students' participation ranges from planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating the project. The encouragement of students' engagement in international projects is highly essential to make them familiar with the academic events and to facilitate their establishing of networking with experts in their field of disciplines, which enhance their multicultural understanding, as described by the following participants:

We encourage students to be on committees and organizers of international events such as seminars and conferences so that they have skills and get involved in English situations. We mix some local students and international students to be multicultural committee. I am convinced that through different kinds of exposure they can pick up the language, learn how to communicate with others in international forums simultaneously. (P6)

Through such a forum, students could discuss and share their ideas with other participants from other countries. One of the participants in this study highlight that:

The annual activity such international conferences required students to participate. They gain knowledge not only by organizing it but also by meeting different kinds of people so that they can start establishing networking with the writers and authors in their field of studies. (P7)

Consequently, students can meet different people from different backgrounds, which enhances their multicultural capacity and competencies.

The in-country multicultural engagement activities are seen as pivotal supporting occasions to engage learners in intellectual debate on the one hand and engage those involved in bilingual programs to expose themselves more to the international language so that they can improve their English language proficiency. However, if they do not take advantage of the opportunities given to them, such in-country formal engagement activity will hardly affect their language proficiency.

Overseas Multicultural Engagement Activities

²This study identified three categories of overseas multicultural engagement activities: short-term, mid-term, and long-term international engagement activities. Short-term overseas multi-cultural engagement is the activities overseas within a very short period, which takes between one to four weeks. ²Examples of short-term overseas formal engagement are seminars, conferences, short courses, short training, short workshops, and summer courses. Nearly all participants of this study argue that even though it is short exposure, it is crucial to get them exposed to the international learning atmosphere or overseas culture, as is indicated by the following participants:

These programs can be short courses, summer courses, student exchange, and double degree programs. They have to feel or experience in a multicultural international learning atmosphere. This makes the international class program different compared to regular ones. This international exposure is designed as part of the programs offered in this course. (P8)

Such activities aim to improve students' self-confidence in mastering both foreign language and skills for intercultural survival in a multiethnic and multicultural environment. Students can build their self-confidence through diverse ranges of multicultural activities: "The activities such as summer multicultural course or short course the students for presenting their papers or case study" (P9). Once their self-confidence is high, they can pick up new things easily and effectively in a new multicultural environment. To be successful in this activity, the willingness of "partner universities overseas help students to maximize their exposure to multiculturalism and foreign language" (P10).

The mid-term international multicultural engagement activities are the events that are conducted overseas that take between one to three ²months. Examples of short-term overseas formal engagement activities are community service programs and internship programs. All participants in this study argue that it is essential exposure to comprehend international workplace settings, to get them exposed to an ²international working atmosphere, and to use English in a real working environment. One participant in this research describes the importance of such multicultural engagement activities as follows:

The mid-term international intercultural exposure activity is student-exchange programs, this has been done with many universities not only with English speaking universities but also in European Universities where English is not their first language. This makes them more familiar with the diverse culture. (P11)

The mid-term intercultural engagement occurs within the Associations of Southeast Nations (ASEAN), the countries are located in South East Asia. One participant highlights this intercultural engagement: "In the last two years, this faculty has an agreement with some institutions in Malaysia and Singapore. With this, the students can experience internship

programs in ASEAN countries. This is offered to anyone who wants direct multicultural experience” (P12). In addition, students can involve in multicultural community programs that occur in the ASEAN communities. The other participant in this study comments:

The students in these programs can take community service overseas. Our focus in the few years to come is to have students perform their community service engagement not only domestically but also in foreign countries, which at least in ASEAN countries. (P1)

This indicates that the mid-term multicultural engagement activities focus not only on other European countries but also neighboring ASEAN countries. Consequently, students can learn and develop their multicultural competence comprehensively.

The last type is the long-term overseas multicultural engagement activities, which are the events, conducted overseas within a mid-term period that takes place over three months. The examples of long-term overseas multicultural engagement activities are six months to one year of study abroad and obtaining double degree programs. Within a long period of exposure to English speaking universities with multicultural background students, it will assist students to establish a person to person networking and friendship, make their English much more natural and become an academic life-changing experience, as delineated by the following participants: “The long-term programs are to study one year at a partner overseas university or gain double degree programs, at the moment the obvious partner that is Flinders University Australia where students can undertake double degree programs there” (P2).

The overseas multicultural engagement provides unique intercultural experiences for students. One participant in this study adds: “It’s a life-changing experience for them, new taste of food, different culture, demanding academic environment and makes their English more natural” (P3). Students can experience a different culture other than their own and taste a different style of living with a multicultural community. Similarly, other participant comments:

It helps them to make friends and get along with other people from a culture other than their own. Therefore, it is important for students to interact directly with native speakers so that they can assess and feel how far their multicultural taste is and how far their English is. (P4)

The overseas formal engagement activities were crucial to help students to engage, expose, interact, and get involved within an international learning atmosphere. These engagement activities are fundamentally worthy and a life-changing experience. However, the mid and long-term overseas engagement activities cost higher than the short-term ones. As a result, only some students can afford those engagement activities.

Discussion

Multicultural engagement activities provide opportunities for students to acquire intercultural competence, prepare them with global work demands, increase mobility, and internationalize portraits of the university (Grimwood et al., 2015). For both types of multicultural engagement discussed in this study: national and overseas multicultural engagement activities are pre-designed and pre-planned activities. The programs not only offer a variety of supporting multicultural engagement-type activities but also provides immersion for students in the target language.

The strength of overseas multicultural engagement activities is on the mastery of international language and intercultural sensitivity. This engagement promotes the increase of

self-confidence since students must meet the requirements offered by partner universities overseas. The overseas multicultural engagement activities heavily rely on the tight requirements from partner universities. The partner universities in English-speaking countries such as Australia, America, and some parts of Europe, oblige learners to reach their standards of English ability to participate in their multicultural engagement activities. However, the requirement of the English ability depends on the length of stay and the types of activities offered by partner universities. The longer and the more advanced level of the program they intend to enroll and participate in, the higher the English proficiency required by the English-speaking university partners. Therefore, mastering English can also improve their intercultural sensitivity and competencies since all multicultural engagement programs are offered in English.

To participant in international intercultural engagement activities, participants must fulfill requirements such as a statement of interest, curriculum vitae, and a verified copy of their academic transcripts submitted to the partner university. The partner institution, which may take up to four weeks, then assess these requirements, and if they meet all the criteria, the partner institutions issue an offer. Such tough procedures must be undergone by any candidate wishing to get involved in overseas engagement activities. However, if partner institutions do not accept them, the department can offer them other alternative international projects, such as international intercultural engagement activities held by private organizations either in Asia, Australia, or Europe.

All multicultural engagement activities that emerged from this study become contributing factors to support the internationalization of higher education. The acquisition of multicultural competencies (Grimwood et al., 2015; Kapoyannis, 2019) contributes to the key supporting roles in the process of internationalization of higher education. They contribute to creating global mobility (Tamam & Krauss, 2017) much easier, facilitates global partnerships among universities (Morosini et al., 2017; Wit et al., 2015), and increase their awareness and commitment to internationalization (Abduh et al., 2018). Therefore, the multicultural education model and engagement can assist the internationalization of higher education.

For future research, the research on challenges faced by educators and students can be very interesting to explore deeply. In addition, the experiences of students and educators in a new multicultural environment is one of the fascinating topics for researchers and educators. More specifically, the strategies and approaches used by host institutions to establish multicultural mindsets of individuals participating in the engagement activities are part of key themes for further investigation.

Conclusion

From the findings, it appears that two major themes are national multicultural engagement activities and international multicultural engagement activities. Those multicultural engagement actions are essential for building intercultural competencies, increasing the mastery of foreign language, and improving the portraits of higher education to be recognized internationally. We learned that such different types of multicultural engagement activities can support the successful implementation of the internationalization of university programs. Multicultural engagement activities are a set of systemic multicultural engagement actions that are structured and organized for students studying in international class programs. The universities involved in this study have a strong commitment to continuously expose their students and their students to wider local and global communities through curriculum and college programs to build their students to be global citizenship. More importantly, further research needs to look at the positive strategies, challenges, and unavoidable negative images of multiculturalism. Therefore, it is important to conduct comprehensive research on

multiculturalism by investigating challenges, and unpleasant multicultural practices that can occur in different geographical settings.

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