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PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OF ENGLISH TEACHER IN PLURICULTURAL CLASSROOM

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Abstract: This study investigated cultural and pedagogical tension experienced by English teachers in pluricultural BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing)* and strategies to cope with those tensions. The study applied the qualitative research design using the close-ended questionnaire, open-ended questionnaire and interview. The findings showed English teachers experienced the cultural differences, communication barriers, pedagogical challenges and emotional pressures. To cope the tensions, English teachers conducted the adaptive communication and professional attitude and cultural sensitivity. The study concluded that the cultural and pedagogical tensions could be the suitable opportunities for professional development in pluricultural language classroom. The future researcher could apply a larger number of participants who has different language background in other educational settings and explore in depth through the direct classroom oberservation and narrative inquery method for getting deeper of participants' experiences. Also, the next researcher could employ another theory to explore deeper of professional development of English teachers.
Keywords**:** Cultural tension; pedagogical tension; prorfessional growth; pluricultural classroom; English teachers

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English teachers are not only involved in teaching English but also participate in BIPA (Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing) classrooms, where they introduce the Indonesian language and culture to international learners. In this context, English functions as a communication tool and pedagogical bridge to deliver learning materials and cultural understanding (Hidayah et al., 2024; Singer, 2025). English has become an international language and a bridge connecting people from different cultural, linguistic, educational, and social backgrounds (Ratri et al., 2024). Therefore, English teachers need to adapt to the diversity and complexity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds in pluricultural classrooms of the BIPA context.

A pluricultural classroom refers to a learning environment where students from different linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds interact meaningfully through cultures (Galante, 2025). Therefore, teachers need to develop cultural awareness, communication skills, intercultural sensitivity, and identity negotiation skills to support the effectiveness of the teaching process (Karanikola & Panagiotopoulos, 2025). Those competencies are crucial for teachers to maintain the diverse pedagogical objectives of cultural environments, expectations, and learning needs.

However, teaching in pluricultural classrooms remains a challenge. According to Xu and Tao (2025), teachers frequently encounter cultural and pedagogical tensions from different aspects in a pluricultural classroom. Furthermore, English teachers often develop various strategies, such as adaptation techniques, to maintain effective interaction and communication with students from different cultural backgrounds (Saad & Almefleh, 2023). Through these adaptive experiences, teachers could continuously develop their professional identity.

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Professional identity refers how teachers' experiences, reflections, and social interactions shape the understanding of professional roles (Beijaard et al., 2023). On the other hand, teaching in pluricultural classrooms significantly influences how teachers understand their roles, responsibilities, communication practices, and classroom management approaches. Therefore, pluricultural classrooms could provide the essential space for examining how teachers construct their professional identity when facing pedagogical and cultural tensions.

There are several previous studies that focused on multicultural education and teachers' identity. First, Varlik (2024) conducted comparative studies between Türkiye and the United States of America that revealed a significant training gap where the education teacher program mostly only shared and gave theoretical knowledge about multiculturalism. Second, Mubarokah (2024) explored the narrative experiences of Indonesian English teachers who negotiated their professional legitimacy and identity within the framework of global English. Third, Moonthiya (2024) shared framework to understand Language Teacher Identity (LTI) by examining the connections between tensions and identity in-service teachers in Australia. Next, Asteria et al. (2026) studied how English teachers have used comparative translanguaging as a strategy to solve the gaps between the culture and the Indonesian norm in BIPA. Then, Nigar and Kostogriz (2024) studied how the relatedness of professional growth of multilingual teachers in Australia was deeply tied to participants' emotions in real experience, such as in their navigating doubt, empathy, and determination.

The studies from Varlik (2024); Mubarokah (2024); Moonthiya (2024); Asteria et al. (2026); Nigar and Kostogriz (2024) have limited attention in examining and exploring professional development, teacher identity, and educational context separately for teachers who have an English educational background and teach in a BIPA classroom context, which is the pluricultural classroom environment. Therefore, this research investigated how English teachers who have been trained in English language education experience and cope with cultural and pedagogical tensions in developing their professional identity, particularly by focusing on the English teachers in Indonesia who teach in the pluricultural BIPA classroom context, this research serves a more comprehensive understanding of how intercultural teaching experiences shape the teachers' professional identity.

To understand this process, this study adopts Korthagen's Onion Model (2004), which consists of six layers: environment, behavior, competencies, beliefs, identity, and mission. The Onion Model was chosen because it explains how the external teaching experiences impact the teachers' internal ability, beliefs, competencies, and professional mission during the professional development process (García-Lázaro, I., & Reyes-de-Cózar, S., 2025). This single analytical framework provides comprehensive insight and perspective on how understanding the cultural

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and pedagogical tension influences the teachers' coping strategies and professional identity development in the pluricultural BIPA classrooms.

METHOD

This study used the qualitative research design to explore the teachers' experiences, perceptions, and reflections on the pluricultural classroom experiences. In addition, the use of this data analysis design involves presenting, interpreting, and validating the findings (Creswell, 2018). There were five teachers who taught in a pluricultural classroom with different teaching experiences. There is a Table 1 to present the participants' demographic information.

Table 1. *The research participants demographic information*

Participant (P)	Age	Teaching experience	Classroom diversity
P1	51 above	> 10 years	> 5 nationalities
P2	40 - 50	< 5 years	> 5 nationalities
P3	21 - 30	< 2 years	< 5 nationalities
P4	31 - 40	> 10 years	< 5 nationalities
P5	21 - 30	< 2 years	> 5 nationalities

The participants were selected because of their teaching experience with international students. In addition, this study applied the triangulation method by conducting the close-ended questionnaire, open-ended questionnaire, and interview. First, there is a closed-ended questionnaire by using a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) for investigating the teachers' opinions about cultural and pedagogical tensions. Second, an open-ended questionnaire that explored the cultural tension experiences, reflection and coping, and professional identity development. Third, the interview session was applied to elaborate on and clarify the responses to the questionnaires.

The researchers applied descriptive statistics to summarize numerical data in a close-ended questionnaire. Meanwhile, the open-ended questionnaire and interview session were analyzed using the thematic analysis design. The responses were initially coded relating to the research indicators, namely cultural tension experiences, reflection and coping, and professional identity development. The themes were created based on research indicators for guiding the interview session and organizing the findings from the closed-ended questionnaire, open-ended questionnaire, and the interview to answer the research questions thoroughly.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The cultural and pedagogical tension experienced by English teachers in pluricultural classrooms

The data findings shows that teachers experienced some forms of cultural and the pedagogical tension in pluricultural language classrooms.

Theme 1: Cultural Differences and Communication Barries

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Theme 1 explores how the cultural diversity and the communication barriers are the sources of cultural and pedagogical tension in a pluricultural classroom. The close-ended questionnaire demonstrated cultural challenges are in mean of 3.2 and emotional labor is in mean of 3.4), whereas the teaching disruption demonstrated a low level (M = 2.4). On the other hand, in open-ended questionnaire elaboration, teachers experienced several challenges connected to cultural differences and classroom communication.

> [*Of course, culture. As a teachers allow to express that unfamiliar with their culture. We should ask and apology that there are some differences.] – P1*
> [*When I explain about some Indonesian customs-the historical values, I have to explain it without the interference of personal insights.] - P2*

The findings demonstrate that teachers experienced the uncertainty due to communication styles, different cultures, and English ability. P1 emphasized how important acknowledging limited cultural knowledge and presenting humility when miscommunication occurred. In contrast, P2 mentioned the need for maintaining neutrality by not showing personal judgment when discussing the sensitive topic. The responses indicate the power of humility and cultural neutrality to manage the cultural tension.

> [*I am only an Infromation carrier, ya. So, stay neutral. I do not want to add my personal opinion because, I think, the history and culture could create the tension in our classroom] – P1*
> [S*tudents at the beginner level are sometimes not fluent in English, so I have to think hard about how the materials can be understood. Also, differences in language use relating to the culture] – P2*

The interview findings have further explanations about negotiation in pedagogical adaptation and cultural neutrality. P1 mentioned how to maintain neutrality when discussing the sensitive issues about Indonesian history that link to students' origin country, while P2 mentioned the struggle in adjusting the material instruction for students with different cultural backgrounds and English proficiency. The findings indicate that the instructional and cultural sensitivities could create the tension in the classroom. Those findings are connected to the close-ended questionnaire that showed the cultural challenges (M=3.2) and emotional labor (M=3.4); then the teaching disruption showed low (M=2.4). Overall, the cultural tension, challenges, and communication barriers that teachers faced and negotiated in classroom interaction and teaching practice are linked to the environment in Korthagen's onion model layers, which emphasize the impact and influence of the external factors on teachers' professional experiences, such as the lack of unfamiliar culture, students' English proficiency, and historical values from different countries, as the tension

emerged from the students' diverse, pluricultural classroom environment that teachers need to consider.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Emotional and Pedagogical Tension

This theme directed to the English teachers' emotional pressure, classroom management difficulties, pedagogical adjustments, and professional challenges. The close-ended questionnaire demonstrated the handling conflict (M=3.8) indicates the teacher frequently dealt with the classroom tension and interpersonal challenges. In addition, the emotional resilience (M = 4.0) showed the teachers endeavored to remain emotionally stable. Also, the coping limitation gained a moderate level (M=3.0). Related to the open-ended questionnaire, P1 and P2 mentioned students' different personalities, ages, and learning styles and classroom participants' patterns as emotionally demanding that connects with generation communication style gaps in this era. Whereas P2 demonstrated the suitable learning material and teaching practice for students.

[T*he differences of characters and age among the students and teachers too.] – P1*
[*Finding a suitable topic and learning how to deliver it effectively to the students] – P2*

In addition, the interview data collection connects to the emotional and pedagogical experienced by the teachers.

[*Wanted to cry, there were students from country X, X, X, X. Too mixed. Really struggling because there has already different education backgrounds interaction ways] – P1*
[S*ometime, there are some student who are too curious. Like or not, I have to think how to connect the explanation from their questions to the current learning materials.] -P2*

From the findings, P1 showed the sorrowful feelings because of the heterogeneity in the classroom. There were countries with different backgrounds that made P1 overwhelmed to handle them. Meanwhile, P2 mentioned the level of students' curiosity that was unconnected with material, which made them automatically serve a way to reconnect with the material. It makes teachers need to maintain and handle their professionalism within the diversity in the classroom that, as the external factor, could be a demand for them to control the classroom environment that links to the environment and behavior layers of the Korthagens' Onion Model. The diversity of the classroom environment, including the differences in the students' ages, personalities, and educational backgrounds, made the emotional and pedagogical tension for the teachers. It forced teachers to adjust the classroom management, interaction patterns, and instructional approaches to balance and accommodate all the students' needs in the classroom.

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The Strategies Used by English Teachers to Cope with Cultural and Pedagogical Tensions in Pluricultural Classrooms

Based on the research findings, there are the various strategies to cope with the teachers challenges in the cultural and pedagogical tensions in pluricultural language classroom.

Theme 1: Adaptive communication

The adaptive communication theme refers to the teachers' efforts to adjust their communication styles, classroom interaction, and teaching approaches to overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers. The close-ended questionnaire mentioned the adaptive strength (M = 3.8) and then the coping confidence (M = 4.4), indicating teachers perceived themselves as capable of adjusting their communication and teaching approaches in the pluricultural class setting.

[*By using the body language and clear English to help me to delivers the lesson to support students' understanding] – P1*
[*I often try to position myself as a mere information deliverer.] – P2*

According to findings, P1 elaborated on the use of body language and simple English as a right strategy to transfer the material for the students. Moreover, P2 mentioned that they have to stay a person who has the adaptive communication skill for avoiding the tension or problems that might emerge from conversation between students and teachers. That means they attempted to simplify the language and modify the teaching instructions.

[I have to rack my brain to balance the differences. I use google and body langage as a tool.]– P1
[*If with students, don't be know all of things, don't be unwilling to apologize. And don't be too serious, just joke around and learn how to socialize with them.] – P2*

From interview findings, P1 and P2 mentioned that adaptive communication skills are essential. P1 mentioned that P1 should rack the brain to balance the differences by observing the students' language proficiency and using language tools. Moreover, P1 mentioned how to have the willingness to perceive the uncapability of material mastering, and P2 showed the situation adaptation in the classroom. It means that adaptive communication and teaching flexibility became one of the primary coping strategies used by teachers in the pluricultural language classroom context. These findings are regarding the adaptive communication that is related to the behavior and competencies layer of Korthagen's Onion Model because it applies simple English, body language, clarification strategies, and collaborative learning activities in a pluricultural classroom environment.

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Theme 2: Professional Attitude and Cultural Sensitivity

These research findings refer to teachers' efforts to maintain their professionalism, awareness, and neutrality. The close-ended questionnaire demonstrated the handling of conflict (M = 3.8), which indicates how to resolve the misunderstanding related to the cultural differences. Similarly, the emotional resilience (M = 4.0) indicates how to remain calm and professional then maintain a supportive attitude when facing challenges.

> [*Act professional but aware with the situasion during teaching and learning process.] – P1*
> [*Make sure to always say sorry if violate the certain students' culture. Do not be embarrassed to say that you are guilty.] – P2*

The P1 mentioned that sustainability in maintaining the professional is the good way to handle the class. Instead of using "always stay professional," P1 maintained that P1 needs to balance and still consider the classroom condition among the students. On the other hand, P2 emphasized humility by acknowledging the personal limitation and asking for an apology as a strategy to control the interaction.

> *[I always think that I am an information deliverer, never add my personal insight. Always anticipate, self-awareness, and relieved. Ya, realize it. It's only a part of history] – P1*
> *[Teachers should not come to class with prejudice] – P2*

Based on the interview result, P1 still considers the presence in the classroom by maintaining self-awareness and constantly anticipating the situation that might dampen the mood. Moreover, P2 said that as a teacher, one should not come to the class with a prejudiced side against the students. The findings indicate the power of neutrality, self-awareness, and respect for students' cultural diversity served as the important coping strategies in managing the culturally sensitive situation. The researchers concluded that the professional attitude and cultural sensitivity connect to competencies and belief layers of Korthagen's onion model. Teachers demonstrated the professional competencies in their ability to maintain neutrality, respect the cultural differences, apologize when misunderstandings occurred, and avoid the prejudicial attitudes toward students.

Theme 3: Self-reflection and Professional Growth

The self-reflection and professional growth direct the reflection and continuous processes in their teaching competence and intercultural awareness. Based on the close-ended questionnaire, reflecting learning (M = 4.4) indicated the development of instructional strategies. The identity formation (M = 4.0) showed the pluricultural classrooms strengthened the teachers' responsibility and professional identity. In contrast, belief transformation (M =

1.8), identity reflection (M = 1.8), and professional development (M = 2.0) showed the teachers experienced a reflective teaching process about identity, transformation, and motivation for the professional development.

> [*Yes, because the higher the level of challenge and difficulty, the more varied strategies are applied and used so more attentions are given to find the right solution.] – P1*
> [*I could improve my classroom management skills. I also learned to understand and appreciate different cultures.] – P2*

Moreover, in the open-ended questionnaire, P1 mentioned the obstacles that need to be faced by students' different learning styles. Therefore, P1 reflected on the strategies that could take students' attention and focused. Meanwhile, P2 demonstrated how the well-management skills are usable in understanding and appreciating the differences. They shaped the understanding of tension as a part of growth and lifelong process.

> *[It can help my professionalsm because encountered different situations and students, yeah, because students' character from various countries and cultures.] – P1*
> [*Teaching and learning are the long and tough process because we need to study. Teachers are also learners.] – P2*

Based on the interview session, P1 and P2 mentioned the challenges in the real classroom helped them to reflect and rethink themselves as teachers, which could increase their confidence to grow together with students. P1 and P1 mentioned how the reflection process could build their strong identity as educators and culture ambassadors that helped P1 and P2 find their mission to do their job. The findings suggest self-reflection and continuous learning could contribute significantly to teachers' professional growth and adaptation that is linked to the belief, identity, and mission layers from the Onion Layers by Korthagen. Teachers developed their stronger beliefs about lifelong learning, intercultural awareness, and professional improvement. The finding showed those experiences enhance professional identity as educators who continuously learn and study from students and diverse teaching situations.

CONCLUSION

This study result showed that English teachers experienced various cultural and pedagogical tensions when teaching in a pluricultural classroom. The close-ended questionnaire demonstrated that the cultural challenges (M = 3.2) are at a moderate level and emotional labor (M = 3.4) is at a moderate level, while the teaching disruption (M = 2.4) is relatively at a low level. Moreover, the open-ended questionnaire and interview showed the cultural differences, diverse student characteristics, communication barriers, language proficiency, cultural values, educational

background, historical sensitivity, and classroom expectations are the main tension sources that often made the emotional and pedagogical challenges for teachers.

In addition, the study findings revealed English strategies to cope with the cultural and pedagogical tensions in a pluricultural classroom. The close-ended questionnaire demonstrated the Coping Confidence (M = 4.4), Adaptive Strength (M = 3.8), Handling Conflict (M = 3.8), Emotional Resilience (M = 4.0), Reflective Learning (M = 4.4), Identity Formation (M = 1.8), and Professional Transformation (M = 2.0), indicating the positive beliefs, strong commitment to professional growth, and stake in professional identity. Moreover, the open-ended questionnaire and interview showed adaptive communication, professional attitude and cultural sensitivity, and self-reflection and professional growth as the coping strategies that support effective teaching and classroom management and develop English teachers' professional development and identity growth.

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