

USING A MULTICULTURAL APPROACH IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM TO INCREASE SOCIAL AWARENESS AND INTERCULTURAL TOLERANCE

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Abstract

This research aims to examine in depth how a multicultural approach in the school curriculum contributes to increasing students' social awareness and intercultural tolerance. The method used is a literature review by analyzing various scientific sources such as journal articles, books, theses and relevant educational policy documents. The results of the study show that the integration of multicultural values in curriculum design, learning practices, and the active role of teachers can encourage a broader understanding of cultural diversity, strengthen social empathy, and form tolerant attitudes in the school environment. Strategies such as the use of cultural narratives, interreligious dialogue, and contextual learning have proven effective in cultivating students' social sensitivity. However, challenges such as lack of teacher training, limited inclusive teaching materials, and resistance from the external environment are obstacles in implementing multicultural education as a whole. Thus, multicultural education has a strategic role in building a more inclusive and harmonious society, and needs to be systematically integrated into educational policies and practices at all levels.

Keywords: Multicultural Education, School Curriculum, Social Awareness, Intercultural Tolerance

INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization has brought society to wider and more intense interactions between cultures. Every individual is now required to have the ability to understand and adapt to various background differences (PARK & KIM, 2023). In this context, social awareness and intercultural tolerance are important values that need to be built from an early age. Social awareness includes the ability to understand other people's conditions and respond empathetically. Tolerance, on the other hand, is the basis for maintaining harmony in diverse life together. Without these values, existing differences have the potential to become a source of conflict.

Schools as part of a multicultural society have a strategic role in instilling togetherness values. The school environment is often the first place

for children to experience real diversity (Seli et al., 2023). In it, students come from various ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This diversity must be managed well so that it becomes a strength, not an obstacle. If not managed wisely, schools can become the birthplace of stereotypes, discrimination and conflict between individuals. Therefore, education needs to address the challenges of cultural diversity systematically.

One of the main challenges in dealing with diversity in schools is a lack of understanding of the importance of inclusive values. Teachers and educational staff often do not receive adequate training to deal with heterogeneous classroom dynamics. On the other hand, uniform and rigid curricula often ignore the local cultural context of students (Ritonga, 2023). This results in students feeling unrepresented or unappreciated in the learning process. If this condition is left unchecked, the potential for social conflict in schools will become even greater. So a responsive approach to cultural diversity is needed.

Multicultural education exists as an answer to the challenges of diversity. This approach emphasizes the importance of respecting differences and strengthening the values of justice, equality and empathy. With multicultural education, students are encouraged to not only get to know their own culture, but also the cultures of other people. The learning process is directed towards being more open to different perspectives and respecting the uniqueness of each individual. A multicultural curriculum not only conveys subject matter, but also shapes social attitudes and character. This is an important foundation for harmonious living together (Agarwal, 2024).

In its implementation, multicultural education must be integrated into all aspects of the curriculum, from material content to learning methods. Teachers must be able to create a learning atmosphere that is inclusive, fair and enjoyable for all students. In addition, the use of media and learning resources that reflect diversity is also an important part of this process. Schools also need to develop extracurricular activities that support positive cross-cultural interactions. Through this approach, students not only become academically intelligent, but also socially mature. Education is also a means of forming a tolerant and caring person (Okagbue et al., 2022).

Research shows that students who study in multicultural environments tend to have higher levels of empathy and social awareness. They are better able to understand other people's points of view and are less easily trapped in prejudice. Human values such as solidarity, respect for differences, and social awareness grow through contextual learning experiences (Im, 2022). This

proves that multicultural education has a real impact in shaping student character. Not only is this attitude useful in school life, it is also an important provision in social life. Therefore, it is important for schools to adopt this approach seriously.

However, the challenges in implementing multicultural education are still quite large, both from the aspects of policy, human resources and practical understanding. Lack of teacher training, limited relevant teaching materials, and cultural resistance in the school environment are obstacles that must be overcome. Not all parties understand that multicultural education is not just additional material, but is an approach that touches all dimensions of education (Hasyda et al., 2023). Commitment is needed from all elements of the school to create a multicultural learning culture. Without strong policy support, this effort will be difficult to produce optimal results. Therefore, inclusive curriculum reform is urgently needed.

Seeing the importance of multicultural education in forming social awareness and intercultural tolerance, this literature review is relevant to carry out. This research will explore how a multicultural approach has been implemented in the school curriculum and its impact on students. Through analysis of various previous studies, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of this approach. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of education policy. Multicultural education not only educates, but also humanizes. Thus, this approach is an urgent need in today's education system.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a literature review approach as the main type of research. The literature review was chosen because it can provide an in-depth understanding of the concepts, practices and influence of a multicultural approach in the school curriculum based on previous studies. Data sources in this research include scientific journal articles, academic books, theses or dissertations, and relevant educational policy documents, especially those discussing the topics of multicultural education, curriculum, and social awareness and intercultural tolerance. Source selection was carried out purposively, with a focus on literature published in the last 10 years and considered scientifically credible. The number of primary sources used in this study ranges from 10 to 20 publications. This literature is taken from academic

databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Springer, and national education portals.

In analyzing data, this research uses thematic analysis and narrative synthesis techniques. Thematic analysis was carried out to identify patterns, main themes and subthemes that emerged from various literature sources. Narrative synthesis is used to combine and compare findings from various studies in a descriptive and structured manner. This approach allows researchers to reveal how a multicultural approach is implemented in the curriculum, as well as its impact on students' social awareness and tolerance. Thus, it is hoped that the results of the study can provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of education that is more inclusive and responsive to cultural diversity. As stated by Snyder (Snyder, 2019), a systematic literature review is not only useful for summarizing research results, but also for identifying knowledge gaps and future research directions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Multicultural Approaches in School Curriculum Design and Implementation

Education in Indonesia is in the context of a society that is very diverse ethnically, linguistically, religiously and culturally. Therefore, the national curriculum has a responsibility to reflect the values of diversity. In the Independent Curriculum, for example, there is room for educational units to develop local content and learning activities based on the socio-cultural context of students (Mncube, 2024). This shows that structurally, there is an opportunity for a multicultural approach to be implemented. However, the extent to which this diversity is truly accommodated in practice remains a challenge. A deeper understanding of how the curriculum can actively instill multicultural values is needed.

Local curricula have great potential to express unique regional cultural identities. In some areas, schools have developed local content such as regional languages, traditional dances, or local history as part of learning. This is a concrete form of a contextual multicultural approach. Through local content, students can recognize and appreciate their own cultural roots while learning to respect other cultures. Unfortunately, in a number of regions, the implementation of local content is still symbolic and less integrative with the values of tolerance and diversity. There needs to be systematic guidance and evaluation so that local content does not just become an administrative patch in the curriculum (Zou & Zhou, 2022).

A multicultural approach is not only related to curriculum content, but also regarding learning strategies and methods. At the basic education level, for example, learning based on folklore from various regions can be a means of introducing different cultural and moral values. At the secondary level, discussions across socio-cultural issues can be used to build students' critical awareness of the reality of diversity. In higher education, multicultural approaches are often integrated through special courses such as Multicultural Education, Cultural Studies, or Pancasila. Different levels of education require strategies that are appropriate to students' age and cognitive development. This shows that multicultural implementation must be adapted to each educational context (Boulden & Goodman-Scott, 2023).

One concrete example of the integration of multicultural values in schools is through cross-cultural projects that involve collaboration between students from different backgrounds. Activities such as “Culture Days”, student exchanges between regions, or local cultural exhibitions can build direct experience in understanding diversity. In some schools, collaborative learning practices and project-based assignments are also used to explore the values of diversity. This kind of learning model can increase empathy, cooperation and social awareness among students. However, not all schools have sufficient capacity or support to implement this approach optimally (Lee, 2024). Therefore, support from school principals and pro-multicultural policies are needed.

Teachers play a central role in implementing multicultural values in the learning process. Teachers are not only presenters of material, but also as models in building inclusive and fair attitudes. In diverse classes, teachers must be able to create a space that is safe, open, and respectful of differences (Park & Chang, 2023). This requires teachers to have multicultural pedagogical competence which includes cultural sensitivity, communication skills, and understanding of students' social dynamics. Teachers also need to be able to handle bias, stereotypes and discrimination that may arise in interactions between students. Thus, teachers are key actors in realizing education that is responsive to diversity.

Unfortunately, there are still many teachers who have not received special training in multicultural education. Pre-service education and teacher training often do not equip them with the skills to deal with diversity critically and constructively. As a result, responses to differences in the classroom still depend on each teacher's personal experiences and attitudes. In fact, multicultural education is not just a sympathetic attitude, but must be based

on knowledge, strategies and appropriate pedagogical approaches. To overcome this, it is necessary to carry out continuous professional training that focuses on inclusive learning approaches. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for future teacher education reform (Wu & Zhao, 2024).

Apart from teacher competency, the overall school climate also determines the success of a multicultural approach. Schools that promote the values of democracy, openness and justice will find it easier to implement the principles of multicultural education. Therefore, apart from the curriculum and teachers, internal school policies must also support the creation of an inclusive culture (Katshuna, 2023). For example, through regulations that uphold equality, anti-discrimination policies, and respect for students' cultural expressions. The involvement of all school members, teachers, students, parents and staff in building this culture is very important. Multicultural education will not be successful if it is only the teacher's responsibility.

From the various descriptions above, it is clear that a multicultural approach in curriculum design and implementation is not an instant thing. It requires ongoing commitment, planning, training and evaluation. A curriculum that is open to diversity will form students who are more empathetic, tolerant, and aware of the importance of living side by side with differences. The roles of teachers, schools and educational policies must work synergistically to ensure these values are truly grounded. A multicultural approach is not only an educational strategy, but also part of building national character. Therefore, its integration in the education system is a strategic step in responding to the dynamics of a global society that continues to develop.

The Impact of a Multicultural Approach on Students' Social Awareness

Various studies show that a multicultural approach in the school curriculum contributes positively to the development of students' social empathy (Sahudi & Ma'arif, 2024). Research by Banks (2009) confirms that structured multicultural education is able to form an attitude of mutual understanding and acceptance of differences between students. Through exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, students are trained to see the world from other people's perspectives (Ivenicki, 2022). This broadens their social horizons and fosters a sense of empathy towards different groups. Learning that involves case studies, personal narratives, and open discussions has proven effective in building students' emotional and social connections to issues of justice and equality. This is proof that multicultural values in the

curriculum are not just a complement, but have a real impact on students' social character.

A curriculum that adopts a multicultural approach also encourages an increase in students' ability to understand social issues more broadly. When students are introduced to the realities of inequality, discrimination, and human rights in a multicultural context, they become more sensitive to the social dynamics around them. This kind of learning process not only increases cognitive knowledge, but also forms critical awareness. Students are encouraged not to take social reality for granted, but to question it and seek solutions to injustice. They learn that diversity is not only a social fact, but also an arena of struggle for justice and recognition. Education has also become a tool for social transformation, not just the delivery of academic content (Ibrahim, 2022).

A study conducted by Sleeter and Grant (2007) shows that students who take part in multicultural-based learning programs tend to have higher social self-confidence and a greater desire to be involved in community activities. They are not only more tolerant of differences, but also feel a sense of social responsibility (Wu & Zhao, 2024). This can be seen from the increasing participation of students in volunteer activities, social advocacy, and cross-group collaboration. Inclusive education creates a space for dialogue that triggers students' active involvement in public issues. Thus, multicultural education is able to instill the value of caring which is realized in real action. Social awareness is no longer an abstract concept, but rather part of a student's identity.

Students' ability to respond to social issues also increases along with the implementation of a sustainable multicultural approach. They become more critical in responding to information, more reflective in taking a stand, and more active in voicing their opinions constructively. In this context, students not only understand cultural diversity on the surface, but also explore the socio-political dimensions of these differences. They learn that differences are often closely related to power relations and unequal social structures (Flinders, 2023). Therefore, the tolerant attitude they develop is also accompanied by a deep understanding of the rights, dignity and justice for all. This is a form of complete social awareness.

Collaborative activities designed in a multicultural atmosphere have proven effective in fostering students' social awareness. When students from different cultural backgrounds work together on one project, they learn to listen, respect, and adapt. Projects such as creating tolerance campaign

media, writing life stories of local figures, or cross-school social activities allow them to interact in real contexts. This experience forms social skills that cannot be obtained from conventional learning (ERCAN & ÇUBUKÇU, 2023). In addition, cross-cultural collaboration strengthens the values of solidarity and a sense of mutual need. From this interaction, awareness of the importance of social cohesion in diversity grows naturally.

Apart from projects, group discussions and social simulations are also effective in strengthening students' social sensitivity. In the simulation, students are invited to enter certain roles to understand other people's perspectives, for example their role as minorities or as victims of discrimination. This kind of affective experience accelerates students' emotional understanding of complex social realities. When they "feel" the condition themselves, their sense of empathy and concern grows stronger (Zhao et al., 2022). This approach integrates cognitive and affective aspects in social learning. Therefore, it is important for teachers to design activities that allow direct emotional and social engagement.

However, the success of a multicultural approach in forming social awareness is highly dependent on consistency and systemic support. If multicultural education is only implemented as a temporary or ceremonial project, its impact will be minimal. Social awareness cannot be formed in a short time, but must go through a continuous and reflective learning process (Fatimah & Wahyuni, 2023). Therefore, multicultural education must be a core part of the school's vision and mission. The curriculum, teachers, extracurricular activities, and communication between school members must reflect the values of diversity and social justice. In this way, schools truly become spaces for the growth of authentic social awareness.

Overall, a multicultural approach has been proven to be able to encourage the growth of deeper social awareness in students. They not only learn to be passively tolerant, but also active in building fair and inclusive social relations. Education becomes more than just an academic means—it becomes a vehicle for character and moral transformation. In a society that continues to change and is full of social challenges, this awareness is an important provision for the younger generation. Therefore, the integration of multicultural values in the school curriculum is not just an option, but a necessity. Investment in multicultural education is an investment in the future of a more peaceful and respectful society.

The Influence of Multicultural Education on Intercultural Tolerance in Schools

Multicultural education has been proven to have a significant impact in increasing attitudes of intercultural tolerance in the school environment (Nightengale-Lee, 2023). Various studies, such as those conducted by Gollnick and Chinn (2017), show that students who are exposed to an inclusive and multicultural curriculum show a greater tendency to appreciate differences and establish positive relationships with friends from different cultural backgrounds. This attitude of tolerance is not only limited to racial or ethnic aspects, but also extends to differences in religion, language and social status (Zangori, 2023). Through learning that emphasizes shared human values, students become more open to other perspectives. Multicultural education encourages them to view differences not as threats, but as shared wealth. This is an important foundation for the realization of social harmony in schools.

One effective approach in multicultural education to build tolerance is the use of cultural narratives. Narratives, whether in the form of folk tales, life stories of inspirational figures, or students' real experiences, open up space for empathy and deep understanding of the realities of other cultures. Through narratives, students not only get to know cultures from outside, but also learn about the struggles, values and identities of other groups. Cultural narratives help dismantle stereotypes and build emotional connections between students (Ambarini, 2024). In this context, teachers play an important role in selecting and presenting narratives that represent diversity in a fair and inspiring manner. The use of narrative is a humanistic way to bridge differences and foster tolerance naturally.

Apart from narrative, interreligious and intercultural dialogue is also an important strategy in forming a tolerant attitude. Schools that initiate open dialogue spaces between students from different backgrounds can facilitate understanding and mutual understanding. Dialogue is not just about talking, but also listening actively and respecting other views. Through structured dialogue, students are trained to express opinions without judgment and accept criticism openly. This forms a democratic culture in social interaction. In practice, dialogue can be facilitated through class activities, discussion forums, or meetings between school communities (Lee, 2024). With this approach, students get used to dealing with differences in a healthy and constructive way.

Contextual learning that links diversity issues to students' real lives is also very effective in building tolerance. For example, discussions about discrimination, human rights, or local social conflicts in social studies or Civics lessons can open students' critical awareness. When learning is linked to everyday experiences, students more easily understand the importance of tolerance in real life. Teachers can invite students to analyze the news, write reflections, or work on projects that highlight the importance of living together despite differences (Sulistiono et al., 2022). This strategy not only makes learning more relevant, but also makes tolerance a living practice, not just an academic concept.

Even though multicultural education has a positive impact on tolerance, its implementation in schools still faces a number of challenges. One of them is the low awareness of some educators about the importance of multicultural education. Many teachers have not been trained to manage culturally and religiously heterogeneous classes reflectively and fairly (Assaf, 2023). Apart from that, there are still schools that consider diversity as something that is sensitive or even has the potential to cause conflict, so multicultural approaches are avoided. The lack of inclusive and representative teaching materials is also an obstacle. This means that learning is often biased towards the majority culture and does not open up enough space for diversity of views.

Another challenge is resistance from the social environment outside school. In some cases, schools' efforts to build tolerance collide with the exclusive values instilled in the family or community. For example, when students are invited to dialogue about other religions, but experience pressure from an intolerant environment, the internalization of the values of tolerance will be hampered (Nazaruddin et al., 2023). Therefore, multicultural education requires the support of a wider ecosystem, including family and community. Schools cannot work alone; Synergy with parents and local communities needs to be built so that messages of tolerance can resonate more strongly and consistently.

Overall, multicultural education is proven to have a strategic role in building intercultural tolerance in schools. Through an inclusive curriculum, use of cultural narratives, open dialogue, and contextual learning, students learn to accept differences as part of social reality that must be respected. However, the effectiveness of this education is greatly influenced by teacher readiness, school policies, and adequate social support. For this reason, a joint commitment is needed to thoroughly integrate the values of tolerance in all

aspects of education. In this way, schools can become safe and inclusive spaces where all students feel valued, accepted, and trained to live peacefully in diversity.

CONCLUSION

The results of the literature review show that a multicultural approach in the school curriculum has a significant impact on increasing social awareness and attitudes of intercultural tolerance in students. A curriculum that accommodates cultural diversity through material design, learning strategies, and the active role of teachers has been proven to be able to foster social empathy, critical thinking skills, and sensitivity to issues of injustice and discrimination. Learning activities such as cultural narratives, cross-cultural discussions, collaborative projects, and interfaith dialogue create reflective and contextual learning experiences for students. Thus, multicultural education not only increases students' understanding of diversity, but also forms an inclusive social character.

The contribution of multicultural education in forming social awareness and tolerance can be seen from students' ability to understand differences positively, respond to conflict peacefully, and build fair social relations in a pluralistic society. In the long term, the integration of multicultural values in the curriculum is an important strategy in preparing young people who are adaptive, open and have social responsibility in the era of globalization. Therefore, multicultural education is not only relevant pedagogically, but also strategic in the context of building a more harmonious and civilized society.

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