
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Need for a Comprehensive Approach: Integrating Multiculturalism and National Identity in Indonesian Education

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| ABSTRACT

The recent awareness of multicultural reality, diversity, and national pluralism, including ethnicity, religion, culture, economic status, and politics, requires sensitivity. Multicultural education is considered an appropriate way to instill the ability of society to live in diversity. The core of multiculturalism is the willingness to accept other groups equally as a unit without considering cultural, ethnic, gender, language, or religious differences. Multiculturalism refers to cultural plurality and a certain way of responding to pluralism. Therefore, multiculturalism is not a pragmatic political doctrine but a way of life. The character of a nation is a characteristic and attitude of a nation reflected in the behavior and personality of its citizens. The nation's character can be influenced by something given and also willed for the progress of the nation and the country. Therefore, the national character depends heavily on the political will of the government or ruler of a country built in accordance with the vision of a country. There are three main pillars of the Indonesian national identity that must not be eroded in any way, namely, Indonesia as a nationality, a proclaimed state, and a territory bound by the slogan "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika". The shared goal of realizing democracy requires an appreciation of cultural diversity and a synergistic approach to managing diversity. If managed properly, conflicts that often afflict Indonesia and its people can be minimized through the ability to manage existing diversity.

| KEYWORDS

Multiculturalism, diversity, national identity, cultural plurality, education

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1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a massive awareness that sensitivity towards multicultural, diverse, and pluralistic realities is needed, including in ethnicity, religion, culture, economic status, and politics. (Anwar, 2021; Hifza et al., 2020; Kholil et al., 2022; Miftah, 2016). Multicultural education is considered one appropriate way to instill the ability of society to live in diversity. The core of multiculturalism is the willingness to accept other groups equally as a unit without considering cultural, ethnic, gender, language, or religious differences. (Gardner et al., 2008; Salili & Hoosain, 2006). Multiculturalism refers to cultural plurality and a certain way of responding to pluralism. Therefore, multiculturalism is not a pragmatic political doctrine but a way of life.

The character of a nation is a characteristic and attitude of a nation reflected in the behavior and personality of its citizens. This attitude can be influenced by something given (already existing) or willed (strived for) for the progress of the nation and the country. (Adnan et al., 2021; Bahri et al., 2022). Therefore, the national character heavily depends on the political will of the government or ruler of a country built in accordance with the vision of the nation. History has shown that the founding fathers have laid the foundation and basis of the nation's character and identity, which is crucial to be developed and transformed for all Indonesian citizens.

There are three main pillars of Indonesia's national identity that cannot be eroded in any way (Adibah, 2014; Aprilianto & Arif, 2019; Sulianti, 2018), namely: first, Indonesia as a nation. This has been achieved since the Youth Pledge of 1928, which affirmed

that Indonesia is one nation, one homeland, and one language. Thus, the Indonesian nation is not a certain group but all citizens who inhabit the entire Indonesian homeland. Second, Indonesia is a country that was proclaimed on August 17, 1945. This means that Indonesian people declared themselves living in one country, namely the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Therefore, there cannot be any other country within the NKRI. Third, Indonesia is a unity of territory, meaning that the Indonesian people who have become a nation reside in a unified territory, namely unitary Indonesia, that includes land, sea, air, and natural resources. Thus, various ethnic groups, cultures, and religions have been bound by the motto of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika", which is a normative representation that becomes a reference in managing diversity so that this multicultural Indonesia becomes a national strength. (Baihaqi, 2021; Nashohah, 2021).

The common goal of realizing democracy demands is an appreciation for cultural diversity, thus requiring synergistic management of diversity. If managed properly, cultural, religious, and ethnic differences can bring both problems and solutions for consolidating democracy. Conflicts that often occur in our country and among our people can be minimized through the ability to manage existing diversity. (Banks & Banks, 2019).

According to Nieto (Nieto, 1992), it is important to test how culture can influence learning and achievement in school. Each individual is raised in their own cultural environment, which may make them different in terms of their way of thinking, interests, behavior, language, and academic ability. These differences, if not managed properly, can become psychological and sociological barriers in the school community and can often lead to conflict and discriminatory practices in schools by school administrators, teachers, or students.

Therefore, the school culture is very important in responding to diversity, as school members may have narrow or broad views in dealing with differences. A multicultural education approach is very important in shaping attitudes of mutual acceptance and appreciation of differences, which will not develop automatically. The younger generation (students) must be trained and made aware of the importance of respecting others and other cultures through the education system.

2. Literature Review

Multicultural education must be integrated into the learning process in the classroom, where a teacher is not only required to teach the subject matter they are assigned but also to instill values of multicultural education such as democracy, humanism, gender justice, the ability to disagree, and cultural pluralism. (Banks, 2008).

The multicultural educational psychology approach emphasizes the development of greater self-understanding, a more positive self-concept, and pride in personal identity. (Nieto, 2017) Consequently, students can feel good about themselves by being open and receptive in interacting with others and respecting their culture and identity. Multicultural education also provides multicultural competence so that children are expected to accept and understand cultural differences that impact usage, folkways, mores, and customs.

Mistakes in transforming values, aspirations, and etiquettes from a particular culture often lead to excessive primordialism of ethnicity, religion, and class. Therefore, through multicultural education from an early age, students can have empathy and tolerance towards others regardless of their social status, religion, and academic abilities. The multicultural education approach signifies a process of educating how to live by respecting, being sincere, and tolerant towards cultural diversity so that it can form positive attitudes and good behavior in the younger generation. (Nieto, 1992)

At the basic, multiculturalism consists of three elements, namely culture, diversity, and specific actions in responding to such diversity. The concept of "ism" indicates a normative doctrine that is expected to be applied by all societies with diverse cultures. (R'boul, 2021; Zuriah, 2014). The implementation of multicultural ideas has been carried out through political policies, including education policies.

The educational environment has many factors and variables, such as school culture, school policies, politics, and curriculum formalization. Changes in the educational environment should be focused on creating and maintaining an effective multicultural school environment. The main goal of multicultural education is to change the approach to learning so that it provides equal opportunities for every child without sacrificing unity. Groups must be peaceful, understanding, and focused on common goals to achieve unity. Lateral thinking, diversity, and uniqueness must be instilled in students so that they can accept differences as something that enriches them.

According to Banks (Banks, 1996), multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process of education that aims to change the structure of educational institutions so that students from various backgrounds have an equal opportunity to achieve academic success. Differences that must be recognized in multicultural education include ethnic and racial minority populations, religious groups, differences in religion, gender differences, economic conditions, geographic/origin, physical and mental disabilities, age groups, and others.

Multicultural education provides opportunities and choices for students to support and pay attention to one or several cultures, such as value systems, lifestyles, or languages. This approach involves at least three things: ideas and awareness of the importance of cultural diversity, an educational reform movement, and a process. (Bennett, 1986; Ladson-Billings, 2004).

First is the Awareness of the Importance of Cultural Diversity. There is a need to increase awareness that each student has unique characteristics inherent in themselves, such as age, religion, gender, social class, ethnicity, race, or certain cultural characteristics. Multicultural education emphasizes that all students, regardless of their cultural characteristics, should have an equal opportunity to learn in school. (Sismanto et al., 2022) Although differences exist and are a reality, they need to be accepted reasonably and not used to discriminate. Tolerance needs to be nurtured so that each individual can live peacefully together regardless of the differences that exist.

Second is the Education Reform Movement. Certain characteristics of educational institutions may exclude certain groups from receiving the same education. For example, some students with different cultural characteristics may not have the same opportunities to learn in a particular favorite school because of institutional policies that allow only a certain group to meet the rules and pay high fees. (Dwintari, 2018) Multicultural education can take various forms, such as planned fields of study, programs, and practices that respond to the needs, aspirations, and demands of various groups. (Banks, 1997).

Third is the Educational Process. Multicultural education is an ongoing process, and its goal will never be fully achieved. The goal of multicultural education is to improve overall achievement, not just to increase test scores. Therefore, multicultural education involves all aspects of education and is a continuous process to achieve desired goals. (Islam, 2017).

Education is an idea that must be achieved through hard struggle, just as freedom and justice are. Although hard efforts have been made to eliminate racial, gender, and discrimination against people with disabilities, these problems still exist. If prejudice and discrimination are reduced in one group, they are usually directed at another group or take on another form. Therefore, the goal of education should be to continually increase educational equity for all students.

Currently, the concept of multicultural education has evolved from its initial conception in the 1960s. (Grant & Sleeter, 2011; Moore, 2009; Rosyad, 2020). There are many different concepts of multicultural education, but there are a number of shared ideas that form the basis of understanding multicultural education. These ideas include preparing students for full participation in intercultural society, preparing teachers to facilitate effective learning for students, school participation in eliminating all forms of indifference, student-centered education that considers the aspirations and experiences of students, and the importance of reviewing all educational practices by educators, activists, and others including learning theory, teaching approach, evaluation, school psychology and counseling, educational materials, and textbooks.

3. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design. This approach is suitable as it aims to understand the experiences and perceptions of individuals and groups related to the research topic. Data collection was conducted through document analysis. Relevant documents such as government policies, curriculum guidelines, and academic literature were analyzed to identify how multiculturalism and national identity are currently being integrated into Indonesian education. Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data collected, with the identification of patterns, themes, and concepts that emerged from the data, which were organized into meaningful categories.

The data collected from the literature review and fieldwork was analyzed using a qualitative approach. This involved identifying themes and patterns in the data, as well as drawing connections and conclusions based on the findings. The analysis was guided by the research questions and objectives of the study and was conducted in a rigorous and systematic manner.

4. Results and Discussion

The implementation of multicultural education in the classroom can be done through the four approaches mentioned above. These four approaches can be integrated into the curriculum and applied in actual teaching situations in all subjects. It is easier to implement them in subjects related to socio-cultural aspects (Bahri, 2020; Nursikin & Nugroho, 2021; Raihani, 2012). The contribution approach can be used as a foundation to move on to the next stage that is more intellectually challenging, such as the transformation and social action approach. In this case, the approach used needs to be adjusted to the level of education and the age of the students.

The implementation of the contribution approach in the classroom for kindergarten and lower elementary school students (grades I, II, III) can be done by introducing various forms of traditional houses and clothing from different ethnic groups, inviting students to taste different foods from various regions alternately, listening to songs from other regions, showing different ways of dressing from ethnic groups or other countries, introducing heroes from various regions in and outside the country, showing different places and ways of worship, asking students from different ethnic groups to tell about wedding ceremonies in their extended families, introducing some important vocabulary originating from different ethnic groups or countries (races). (Fauzan & Rohmadi, 2021; Hartono, 2011; Muali, 2017) For example: matur nuwun (Javanese), muliate (Batak), Thank You (English), Kamsia (Chinese),

and so on, as well as introducing different terms for men and women, for example: upik (Padang), ujang (Sundanese), Koko (Chinese), and so on.

At this stage, the substance of multicultural education is to instill in students the understanding that humans who live around them, in different places and in the world, are very diverse. Actually, all their values are the same, such as homes, food, songs, clothing, figures, worship, marriage, the meaning of words, and so on. Thus, students begin to understand that there are different ways, but the meaning and value are the same. (Najmina, 2018; Winataputra, 2008) Therefore, they can learn to accept differences with a pleasant feeling process. Finally, students feel that being different is not a problem but a gift. (Sudargini & Purwanto, 2020)

The implementation of additive education for upper-grade elementary school students (grades IV, V, VI) and junior high school can be done in various ways, such as completing the library with folk story books from different regions and other countries, creating multicultural education modules as supplements for other subjects, playing CDs about life in rural and urban areas from different regions and countries, asking students to have correspondence/email/Facebook friends or friends with students from different regions, countries, or backgrounds, teachers telling their knowledge and experience about materials from different regions or countries, and integrating multicultural values into every subject matter. (Adhani, 2014; Dwintari, 2018; Robiah, 2015)

Through these methods, students' knowledge will become wider, and their interest in cultural diversity can motivate them to seek more information by reading, browsing the internet, visiting, asking those who know, and so on. This will help students become inclusive, accepting of differences, tolerant, and respectful of others. With a broad knowledge of cultural diversity, life, friendship, and knowledge, students will also be able to easily interact with new or complex environments.

In the social action phase, students are asked to directly apply the concepts, issues, or problems given to them. The aim of this approach is to educate students to be able to carry out social critique, make decisions, and implement better alternative plans. (Agustian, 2019; Baidhaw, 2005; Munawaroh, 2020) In other words, students understand the problem at hand, analyze the weaknesses and strengths, and provide alternative solutions by implementing the planned solutions.

More appropriately done in higher education, social action can be carried out both in classroom activities or in student organizations. These include examining policies that are considered ineffective, inhumane, unfair, discriminatory, and biased in terms of gender, protesting and demonstrating to those responsible for injustice, providing real support to those who are harmed, creating networks between regions and countries for various current issues, engaging in activities between regions and nations for mutual progress regardless of different backgrounds, building friendships without limitations based on any differences, having the ability to do the best for people of different cultures, religions, and races, and being able to assume that we are all part of the human race without discrimination based on cultural background, country, or religion. (Abduh et al., 2022; Hakim et al., 2022; Supriatin & Nasution, 2017)

The main purpose of this approach is to prepare students to have knowledge, values, and skills in taking action and playing an active role in social change, both regionally, nationally, and globally. (Arsyillah & Muhid, 2020; Nurgiansah, 2022; Sielvyana et al., 2021; Yaumi, 2016) In this approach, teachers/professors act as agents of social change who promote democratic, humane, and student empowerment values.

Multicultural education is an effort to introduce cultural diversity and uphold the values of equality in the midst of a diverse society. In its implementation, the role and ability of teachers are very important. (Achadah, 2020; Afifah et al., 2021; Nanggala, 2020) Therefore, there are several guidelines that can help teachers in implementing multicultural education in the classroom. First, teachers must be sensitive to racial attitudes, behaviors, stereotypes, prejudice, labeling, and statements made about other ethnic groups. Avoid statements such as Chinese people are stingy, Javanese people are obedient; lower-class students are difficult to progress, and so on. Second, teachers need to broaden their knowledge about the lives of communities with different ethnic, religious, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This is very important so that teachers can be more effective in using a multicultural approach. Third, ensure that the classroom portrays a positive image of diversity by using real activities such as bulletin boards, posters, calendars that show racial, gender, religious, and socioeconomic differences so that students become accustomed to seeing them. Fourth, teachers must be sensitive to the racial attitudes and behavior of students and must guide and convince them to accept differences as normal and a blessing that enriches human culture. Fifth, use books, films, videos, CDs, and recordings to supplement textbooks in order to enrich students' knowledge about cultural diversity that exists in society both in the homeland and the world. Sixth, create a sharing atmosphere for students by giving them the opportunity to tell their personal experiences about their own culture and other cultures they know. Lastly, use cooperative learning techniques and group work to enhance social integration in the classroom and in the school, and be aware if exclusive groups occur.

5. Conclusion

Multicultural education in Indonesia is still not widely known by the majority of teachers. Therefore, continuous socialization about multicultural education is very important, either through seminars, training, workshops, brainstorming, or the provision of supporting books. Indonesia, which has a very diverse society, is very suitable to be managed with a multicultural values approach

so that interactions and integrations can be established peacefully, thus forming attitudes of togetherness, tolerance, humanism, and democracy in accordance with the ideals of the Pancasila state.

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