



Basic Concepts and Background of Multicultural Education

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ABSTRACT

The widespread diversity in Indonesia creates challenges in maintaining social harmony and strengthening unity, thus requiring educational efforts to instill values of tolerance and appreciation of differences. Therefore, education plays a crucial role as a medium in shaping an inclusive and harmonious society within this diversity. This study aims to explore in greater depth the principles and implementation of multicultural education within the context of modern education. This article employs a qualitative research method with a literature review approach and content analysis to gather and interpret relevant references on multicultural education. The study finds two main results: first, that multicultural education is understood as a deliberately planned and implemented process to provide equitable educational services to all students, aiming to develop understanding, appreciation, and evaluation that respects individual differences without discrimination. Second, the emergence of multicultural education is inevitably influenced by the impact of World War II, which affected social change in Western countries, along with the increasing diversity of ethnicity and culture in society. It is also influenced by political, social, economic, and intellectual factors that develop over time. These findings indicate that multicultural education is not only about understanding diversity but also about creating inclusive and fair spaces within the global education system. The contribution of this research is to strengthen the role of multicultural education in Indonesia, both as a pedagogical approach and as a foundation for formulating inclusive and equitable education policies.

Keywords: Concepts, Educational, Multicultural, Background, Fair.

ABSTRAK

Keberagaman yang meluas di Indonesia menciptakan tantangan dalam menjaga harmoni sosial dan memperkuat persatuan, sehingga diperlukan upaya pendidikan untuk menanamkan nilai-nilai toleransi dan penghargaan terhadap perbedaan. Dengan demikian, pendidikan berperan penting sebagai medium dalam membentuk karakter masyarakat yang inklusif dan harmonis dalam keberagaman tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji lebih dalam mengenai prinsip-prinsip dan penerapan pendidikan multikultural dalam konteks pendidikan modern. Artikel ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif pendekatan studi pustaka dengan analisis konten untuk mengumpulkan dan menginterpretasi referensi relevan tentang pendidikan multikultural. Penelitian ini menemukan dua temuan utama: pertama, pendidikan multikultural dipahami sebagai sebuah proses yang sengaja direncanakan dan dilaksanakan untuk memberikan pelayanan pendidikan yang adil kepada semua siswa, dengan tujuan untuk mengembangkan pemahaman, penghargaan, dan penilaian yang menghargai perbedaan individu tanpa diskriminasi. Kedua, latar belakang munculnya pendidikan multikultural tidak terlepas dari dampak Perang Dunia Kedua, yang mempengaruhi perubahan sosial di negara-negara Barat, serta meningkatnya keberagaman etnis dan budaya di masyarakat. Selain itu juga dipengaruhi oleh faktor-faktor politik, sosial, ekonomi, dan intelektual yang berkembang seiring waktu. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa pendidikan multikultural bukan hanya tentang pemahaman tentang keragaman, tetapi juga tentang menciptakan ruang yang inklusif dan adil dalam sistem pendidikan global.

Kontribusi penelitian untuk memperkuat peran pendidikan multikultural di Indonesia, baik sebagai pendekatan pedagogis maupun sebagai landasan dalam perumusan kebijakan pendidikan yang inklusif dan berkeadilan.

Kata Kunci: Konsep, Multikultural, Pendidikan, Latar, Berkeadilan.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a pluralistic country, as evidenced by its diversity not only in terms of ethnicity, religion, and culture, but also in other aspects. Indonesian society is diverse in terms of religion, language, culture, gender, and beyond. Being an archipelagic nation with such pluralism, Indonesia naturally experiences high social dynamics, increasing the likelihood of both social conflicts and those framed in religious terms. Indonesia is widely recognized as a nation of diversity. This plurality is reflected in various aspects of social life, including ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender, and social status. As an archipelagic country with thousands of islands stretching from Sabang to Merauke, Indonesia is home to hundreds of ethnic groups, each with its own unique traditions and cultural heritage. This reality places Indonesia among the most multicultural nations in the world, rich in local values and cultural legacies (Sanusi et al., 2024).

However, such diversity does not automatically guarantee social harmony. On the contrary, the high level of social dynamics often gives rise to potential conflicts, both horizontal tensions between communities and conflicts based on religion, culture, or political interests. In this context, understanding and applying multicultural values becomes essential in building a collective awareness of the importance of living harmoniously within diversity. Multiculturalism, as both a social concept and ideology, plays a crucial role in shaping a nation that is tolerant, inclusive, and grounded in humanistic values. (Tafsir et al., 2020) emphasizes that multiculturalism serves as a foundation for recognizing, accepting, and respecting differences among individuals and cultural groups. Therefore, multiculturalism should not be viewed merely as a sociological idea, but also as a fundamental pillar in nation-building and in strengthening a national identity rooted in diversity (Jortveit & Daush, 2025).

The importance of implementing multicultural values in national and civic life is also supported by various studies. (Fatimah et al., 2021) explain that understanding differences, promoting tolerance among people, and respecting individual and group rights are key factors in establishing social peace. This concept is referred to as multicultural education, which aims not only to foster awareness of diversity but also to instill values of peace from an early age. Similarly, (Santi, 2016) argues that multicultural education is a process of developing individual potential in order to create individuals who respect diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, culture, and race. As such, multicultural education serves as a platform for promoting anti-discrimination attitudes and embedding values of virtue in both social and spiritual life.

Furthermore, outlines the scope of multicultural education, which includes: promoting cultural diversity, advocating respect for human rights and others who are different, supporting the right of each individual to live according to their own way of life, and emphasizing the importance of equality and power-sharing in the face of social status

differences (Pöllmann, n.d.). This shows that multicultural education addresses not only cognitive aspects but also the affective and moral dimensions of shaping civic character (Nurhayati et al., 2022)

Based on this background, it can be concluded that multiculturalism and multicultural education are essential pillars in maintaining unity and social harmony within Indonesia's diverse society. Therefore, strengthening multicultural awareness must continue to be developed, especially through education as a strategic medium for shaping a generation that is tolerant, inclusive, and committed to unity within diversity (Mašát, 2025).

Previous research conducted by (Gofur et al., 2022) emphasized the importance of integrating multicultural values into the Indonesian national education system. It was emphasized that education must reflect the cultural and religious diversity that exists in Indonesian society. This study also highlights the need for a curriculum that reflects the principles of equality and respect for plurality. In line with research conducted by (Jalwis & Habibi, 2019) explaining the urgency of integrating multicultural values into the education curriculum as a response to the reality of multicultural Indonesian society. The three main ideas raised are equality, the concept of diversity, and integration within the framework of collective identity. This study uses a phenomenological approach to understand the reality of multicultural education.

Research written by (Albina & Afiva, 2024) that the importance of multicultural education in the context of a diverse modern society. The main focus is on promoting equality, tolerance, and mutual respect between groups with different ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. This study also explores how multicultural education can reduce discrimination and strengthen social integration. Then (Oktia et al., 2023) stated that multicultural education aims to instill an attitude of sympathy, appreciation, empathy, and respect for diversity, as well as provide equal opportunities to all students regardless of background. And finally according to (Widiatmaka et al., 2022) that multicultural education is very important to be given to Indonesian society, especially youth, through formal education to form a tolerant character and respect for differences.

The difference between this study and previous studies is that the results of the study can be used to improve the education curriculum to be more inclusive and reflect cultural diversity and by understanding effective multicultural education practices, this study is also expected to help increase tolerance and social harmony in multicultural societies so that it has the potential to provide significant contributions to the development of more effective and contextual multicultural education in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a library research method, namely by reviewing and analyzing various sources of literature that are relevant to the research topic. The data collected is in the form of conceptual and theoretical information sourced from scientific books, academic journals, articles, previous research results, and official documents related to multicultural education. The focus of data search includes the basic concept of multicultural education, the values contained therein, implementation in the context of education in Indonesia, and the challenges and urgency in building an inclusive and tolerant society. The data analysis

technique used is content analysis, which is carried out by identifying, categorizing, and interpreting the contents of various sources to find patterns, themes, and relationships between relevant concepts. Through this approach, researchers can formulate a theoretical synthesis and provide an in-depth understanding of the issues being studied (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Basic Concepts of Multicultural Education

Education, in essence, is a transformative process aimed at changing the attitudes and behaviors of individuals or groups in an effort to nurture and mature them intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Syah defines education as a process through which individuals undergo changes in behavior and attitude, facilitated through structured learning and training activities (Syah, 2001). Etymologically, the word “education” (*pendidikan*) comes from the Arabic word *tarbiyah*, derived from *rabba*, which means to educate, nurture, or raise. In a broader context, education is a conscious and deliberate effort to develop human potential holistically both physically and spiritually so that individuals can apply social and religious values in cultural and community life (Sholihah & Nurhayati, 2022).

Multiculturalism recognizes that a country or society is diverse and plural, and that this diversity is accepted. Community cohesion is characterized by a combination of different forms of difference so that we can live together. Planned coexistence is expected to overcome the impact of social phenomena such as conflicts that still occur in society (Ruswandi et al., 2022).

Education is also considered a lifelong necessity that continues until death. This is consistent with the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW: “*Uṭlūbul ‘ilma minal mabdi ilal lahdi*” (seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave), which emphasizes that the pursuit of knowledge is a continuous process. In modern terms, state that education plays a critical role in improving human quality across various life dimensions economically, socially, culturally, and spiritually. From a socio-anthropological perspective, human beings are social creatures whose survival and coexistence rely on shared values such as mutual cooperation, empathy, and communal responsibility (Tafsir et al., 2020).

To achieve societal progress and human development, education must be managed systematically, effectively, and efficiently. Ideally, education should not only focus on cognitive development but also encompass affective and psychomotor domains, while instilling the cultural and social values that shape community life. The term multicultural is derived from the Latin roots *multi* meaning “many,” and *cultura* meaning “culture,” “civility,” or “nurture.” Thus, multiculturalism refers to the existence of diverse cultures that serve as guidelines and value systems in human life. According to (Purwasito, 2015) culture is the product of human intellectual activity, consisting of various elements that fulfill everyday needs. In a broader sense, multiculturalism describes a societal condition characterized by differences in religion, race, language, and culture, yet unified within a single social structure.

As an ideology, multiculturalism emphasizes the importance of recognizing diversity and fostering unity by upholding the social, political, and cultural rights of individuals and

groups. Blum as cited in Suryana & Rusdiana (2015) describes multiculturalism as an appreciation for and recognition of other people's cultures. In practice, someone who embraces multiculturalism is open to and accepting of differences, and seeks to establish respectful and harmonious social relationships. In the context of education, the internalization of multicultural values can be achieved through both direct and indirect approaches. Sitaresmi as cited in Hanafy (2015) explains that direct approaches involve modeling positive behaviors and interactions in daily life, while indirect approaches can include storytelling or folktales that carry messages of multicultural values.

Based on these concepts, it is evident that multiculturalism is essential in cultivating respect for diversity, particularly through education. Education serves as a platform to instill mutual respect, tolerance, and appreciation of differences in society and the nation. This aligns with the explanation of Andersen and Cuseher as cited in Ningsih et al. (2022), who state that multicultural education is essentially education about cultural and social diversity where cultural plurality becomes a subject of study and reflection.

James Banks defines multicultural education as a set of beliefs and explanations that recognize and value cultural and ethnic diversity in the form of lifestyles, social experiences, personal identities, and educational opportunities for individuals, groups, and nations. Based on this understanding, multicultural education can be seen as an educational process aimed at developing open-minded individuals who are capable of appreciating and understanding the meaning of diversity across ethnicity, religion, race, and culture. As such, multicultural education serves as a vital bridge in creating a just, tolerant, and civilized society amid the diversity that defines the Indonesian nation (Alhaddad, 2020).

In this era, multicultural education must be supported by adequate technology, such as research conducted by Hysaj et al. (2025). This study explores the purposes and ways in which multicultural undergraduate students use GenAI tools, specifically focusing on plagiarism and academic writing perspectives. The paper provides recommendations for further research in the field of paraphrasing tools with students' academic writing, aiming to promote a greater sense of identity, creativity, critical and analytical thinking, and personalisation. Then (Loader et al., n.d.) said although analysis of the post-primary curriculum reveals a more substantial response to societal change, there remains a need for greater attention to racial equality (in addition to current emphases on 'diversity' and 'inclusion') and to the representation of diverse histories and cultures. But (Cohen, 2024) the study shows how students from this privileged group oppose multiculturalism through pedagogical aspects of teaching. This approach to resistance highlights the role of social positionality in critiquing this field without directly engaging with its core ideas. Therefore, pedagogy is presented as a crucial concept to be considered.

The Background of the Emergence of Multicultural Education

The emergence of multicultural education cannot be separated from the growing awareness of the importance of recognizing and appreciating cultural, ethnic, religious, and social diversity that increasingly defines global society. According to H. A. R. Tilaar in Suryana & Rusdiana (2015), the concept of multicultural education originated from the development of the idea of interculturalism, which promotes dialogue and mutual understanding between different cultural groups. This awareness gained momentum in

response to international political discrimination, growing pluralism, and increased immigration from developing countries to the United States and Europe, which led to greater cultural complexity in those regions. The 1960s marked a critical turning point with the rise of civil rights movements, particularly those led by African Americans and other ethnic minorities. These movements demanded equal rights and opportunities, including access to fair and inclusive education. Education became one of the key arenas for reform, with the goal of dismantling systemic discrimination and promoting equity and cultural inclusion in schools and universities (Lennert Da Silva & Wieberg Klausen, 2025).

One of the leading figures in the development of multicultural education theory is James A. Banks, an African-American scholar and professor at the University of Washington, Seattle. His seminal work, *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, remains a foundational text in the field. Banks emphasized that education should reflect the diversity of society and be responsive to the needs of students from all cultural backgrounds, ensuring that no group is marginalized or excluded from the learning process. In the Indonesian context, multicultural education emerged alongside the political and social changes brought by the Reformation Era after 1998. This period of democratization opened new spaces for public discourse and highlighted the urgency of addressing social divisions and sectarianism. According to Suryana & Rusdiana (2015) multicultural education in Indonesia was developed as a strategy to counteract narrow primordialism and to foster unity amid diversity.

Multicultural values are also implicitly embedded in Indonesia's National Education System Law (Law No. 20 of 2003). Article 3 of the law states that national education aims to develop students' potential to become faithful, devout, morally upright, healthy, knowledgeable, competent, creative, independent individuals and to shape citizens who are democratic and responsible. The emphasis on creating "democratic and responsible citizens" illustrates a clear commitment to multicultural education, as it highlights the importance of nurturing respect for diversity and active civic engagement (Nurhakim, 2022; Nurhakim et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Article 4 paragraphs (1) and (2) affirm that education should be implemented democratically, fairly, and without discrimination, upholding human rights, religious values, cultural traditions, and national diversity (Asrori et al., 2025). Education is also defined as a systemic, open, and multi-interpretable process, allowing for flexible and diverse approaches that reflect the complex realities of Indonesian society.

Indonesia's historical commitment to multiculturalism is symbolized in its national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* "Unity in Diversity." This principle, enshrined in the constitution since the country's independence on August 17, 1945, affirms that although the Indonesian people come from various ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, they are united as one nation. Thus, multicultural education in Indonesia is not a foreign import but a continuation of the foundational values of the nation itself.

Understanding the origins of multicultural education also requires understanding cultural studies. As Tilaar & Mukhlis (1999) argues, the education system is an integral part of a broader cultural, social, political, and economic system. Education reflects the complexity of society and must be responsive to diversity not as a challenge to be overcome,

but as a resource to enrich learners, build solidarity, and form a just, inclusive, and civilized national identity.

Stages of Multicultural Education

Tilaar & Mukhlis (1999) identifies four important phases in the development of multicultural education in the United States, which serve as a foundation for understanding and implementing multicultural education today. The first phase is segregated education, where separation based on skin color and race occurred. During this period, the dominant culture of white people (WASP: White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant) created a systemic divide between black people and other minority groups, who were treated as inferior. The second phase is education in the *salad bowl* concept, which depicts society as a container that holds different cultural elements without blending them. While living side by side, each group retains its cultural identity. The third phase is the *melting pot*, where cultural assimilation occurs; differences are no longer barriers, but rather sources of strength in building social commitment. The final phase is true multicultural education, a process that emphasizes knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, empowerment of marginalized groups, and a respect for diversity with justice and equality as core principles.

Orientation of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education has an orientation that adapts to the reality of a pluralistic society. First, the orientation of humanity (humanism), which places humans as the central subject of education, aiming to shape both intellectual and moral character. Second, the orientation of togetherness, emphasizing the importance of cooperative values for achieving multicultural educational ideals in a plural and heterogeneous society. Third, the orientation of proportionality, which refers to treating each individual fairly, considering their capacities and needs. Fourth, the recognition of pluralism and heterogeneity as an inescapable social reality. Fifth, the orientation against hegemony and domination, opposing educational systems that favor certain groups while marginalizing others (Pando et al., n.d.).

Goals of Multicultural Education

The goal of multicultural education is to help students understand diversity in their peers, whether in terms of language, gender, culture, or religion, so that they learn to respect and appreciate each other. According to Suryana, multicultural education assists students in understanding themselves as social beings, enabling them to respect individual and group backgrounds in social life, appreciate cultural diversity and ethnicity, comprehend social, economic, and historical factors, and develop a meaningful self-identity in relation to others (Suryana & Rusdiana, 2015).

Core Values in Multicultural Education

According to Farida Hanum, the core values of multicultural education include democracy, humanism, and pluralism. The value of democracy promotes justice in all aspects of life, including culture, politics, and society. The value of humanism upholds the recognition of the inherent diversity of human beings, encompassing ideology, religion, ethnicity, thought patterns, needs, economic levels, and more. Pluralism, on the other hand, relates to the democratic principle of recognizing and embracing differences, with political, social, and economic implications. In Islam, these values are enshrined in the principles of equality, diversity, and justice. Islam does not endorse doctrines of racism that position one

group as superior over another based on race or ethnicity. This is reflected in the Qur'anic verse QS. Al-Hujurat (49:13):

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

Meaning: "O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may 'get to' know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware."

The interpretation by Ibn Kathir explains that this verse emphasizes human diversity as a means for people to recognize and help one another for the common good, with righteousness and piety being the true measure of nobility in God's eyes.

Dimensions of Multicultural Education

James Banks developed five essential dimensions of multicultural education: (1) *Content Integration* integrating curriculum with diverse cultural backgrounds; (2) *The Knowledge Construction Process* constructing knowledge by involving students' cultural perspectives in lessons; (3) *Prejudice Reduction* reducing prejudice and fostering positive relationships among students from different ethnic backgrounds while promoting democratic attitudes and tolerance; (4) *Equitable Pedagogy* ensuring fairness and equality in teaching methods that cater to students from diverse racial and social backgrounds; and (5) *Empowering School Culture and Social Structure* developing a school culture that empowers students and promotes academic and emotional growth for all, regardless of their background. Furthermore, promoting cross-ethnic and cross-racial participation in activities, such as sports, is an effective way to create an inclusive academic culture (Oktia et al., 2023).

The Urgency of Multicultural Education in Indonesia

In the context of Indonesia, multicultural education is a necessity due to the country's diverse ethnicities, religions, languages, and cultures. This type of education is crucial for several reasons: (a) Indonesia is a multiethnic and multicultural country; (b) the values of pluralism have existed since the pre-independence era; (c) Indonesian society values equality and rejects the dominance of any particular group; (d) violence and fanaticism can be mitigated through education; (e) multicultural education offers hope for peace and social harmony; and (f) humanitarian, environmental, and spiritual values are embedded in multicultural education. Therefore, multicultural education is not just an option but a strategic necessity for the nation's unity and future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that multicultural education is a conscious and planned process aimed at providing services to students, fostering understanding, appreciation, and evaluation without discriminating against individual differences. In the context of education in Indonesia, multiculturalism is crucial for internalizing values of respecting diversity through education, which is reflected in mutual respect and honoring differences in social and national life. The origins of multicultural education can be traced back to the aftermath of World War II, which led to increased diversity in Western countries,

particularly due to immigration and the demand for civil rights. In the Indonesian context, the birth of multicultural education is rooted in the understanding of cultural studies. This means that the education system is an integral part of a broader cultural, social, political, and economic system, which functions cohesively to foster national unity. Furthermore, multicultural education helps nurture individuals who not only embrace their own cultural identities but also respect and appreciate those of others. This process is essential in a pluralistic society like Indonesia, where the harmonious integration of diverse cultures, ethnicities, and religions is critical for maintaining social stability and promoting a sense of belonging among all citizens. Multicultural education, therefore, is not just an educational approach but also a fundamental tool for shaping a more inclusive, tolerant, and democratic society.

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