

Implementation and Challenges of Multicultural Education in Schools

Sopiah

Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia

E-mail: sopiah@uingusdur.ac.id

Abstract

Indonesia, as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic nation, is one of the causes of frequent misunderstandings, brawls, and even clashes and horizontal conflicts within the community. This is one reason why multicultural education is crucial as part of the school curriculum. Schools are crucial environments for students, and many aspects of the school environment influence their behavior and lives, especially as students are relatively adolescents. Multicultural education is positioned as character development for students, equipping them to socialize, communicate, and interact effectively in all aspects of life in the era of globalization. The implementation of multicultural education is urgently needed as part of character education, but it certainly faces several challenges. A lack of understanding of multicultural education, negative stigma and prejudice, an unintegrated curriculum, and limited resources are some of the challenges facing multicultural education. Several efforts can be made to address these challenges, including outreach and education, developing an inclusive approach to the curriculum, improving teacher competency, and using technology positively. With these efforts, multicultural education can truly be implemented in schools.

Keywords: challenges, education, multicultural,

Introduction

Indonesia is a country characterized by extraordinary diversity of tribes, ethnicities, languages, and cultures. The 2020 Population Census (SP 2020) recorded more than 1,200 ethnicities in Indonesia, and 694 regional languages spread from Sabang to Merauke. Ethnic and linguistic diversity is undoubtedly a national treasure beyond measure. According to Tilaar (2012), intercultural struggles create opportunities for conflict when there is a lack of mutual understanding and respect. The process of minimizing conflict requires educational efforts with a multicultural perspective to empower a diverse and heterogeneous society. Education is positioned not only as a means of transferring knowledge, but also as an arena for the formation of national character that fosters understanding, tolerance, and appreciation for cultural, religious, and ethnic differences.

Many countries are composed and formed from diversity, each nation has a historical background or reason in developing multicultural education (Isnarni, 2014: 7). Historical reasons will color how multicultural education is implemented. In Indonesia, multicultural education is a necessity, the management of diversity and all positive and negative potentials is

carried out so that differences are not a threat or problem, but rather become a source or positive driving force for development and common good as a nation and citizens. (Scholaria vol 2 no 1, 2012: 116) Indonesia as a country with a multi-tribal, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society is one of the causes of frequent misunderstandings, brawls, even clashes and horizontal conflicts in society, this is one reason for the importance of multicultural education as part of the educational curriculum in schools. Schools are an important environment for students, many things from the school environment will influence the behavior and lives of students, especially the age of students is relatively in the adolescent age range. Multicultural education is positioned as character education for students, equipping them to socialize, communicate, and interact in all aspects of life in the era of globalization

Methods

This research is a literature review using various written sources, including books, research results, and journal articles. A qualitative approach was used, with data collection in the form of documentation. Data analysis techniques included reading, reviewing, critiquing, analyzing, and synthesizing theories and scientific findings from books and other literature, then drawing conclusions. The research stages began with a literature search, literature review, data analysis, and report preparation. This research aims to understand a phenomenon from various perspectives and answer the research questions through a literature review.

Results

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is an approach to education that emphasizes appreciation, respect, and understanding of differences, cultural, ethnic, tribal, and religious diversity. Multicultural education is a method of school-wide change for students that firmly rejects all forms of racism and discrimination in schools and society and recognizes pluralism (Adhani, 2014). Multicultural-based education serves as a shield to safeguard the integration of a diverse society amidst the onslaught of foreign ideologies in this digital era (Danurrahman, et al., 2021). Multicultural education is a learning approach that emphasizes appreciation, respect, and understanding of cultural, ethnic, tribal, and religious diversity.

The purpose of multicultural education is to create an inclusive and fair learning environment, prepare students to live in a diverse society and be able to develop an attitude of tolerance and respect for differences, help understand themselves in a pluralistic society, strengthen the character of students to be resilient in facing challenges, train students to have a positive attitude towards differences and fortify students from losing their cultural roots as Indonesians. Multicultural education also aims to provide guidance to students about the value of unity and respect for differences, so that students easily accept existing cultural diversity (Suryana and Rusdiana, 2015). With multicultural education, students in schools are expected to develop the ability to see life from various cultural perspectives, eliminate prejudice from stereotypes against different groups, utilize diversity as a strength, build social responsibility, global and holistic human awareness.

Implementation of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education in schools can be implemented through various aspects, such as curriculum integration and the learning process, guidance, student activities, project learning, and other activities. These implementations are as follows:

1. Curriculum integration. Curriculum integration is achieved by incorporating various cultural perspectives and ethnic groups into the school curriculum. Learning materials must reflect the diversity of students.
2. Knowledge construction. Through knowledge construction, students are helped to understand how knowledge is influenced by cultural values and how prejudice can shape their perspectives.
3. Prejudice reduction. Reducing negative prejudice teaches students to identify and reduce prejudice against racial, ethnic, religious, and other cultural groups through positive interactions and understanding.
4. Learning methods that support equality. Learning is carried out by adapting learning methods to accommodate the learning needs of various cultural backgrounds, genders, races, and social classes and can create a fair and equitable learning environment.
5. Empowering school culture and social structures. Empowering school culture is expected to create an inclusive school climate where the cultures and backgrounds of all students are valued and provide opportunities for all students to participate in learning.

The implementation of multicultural education in schools can be divided into two parts: within the learning process (subjects) and outside of learning, with the following mapping:

1. Within the learning process

Implementation within the learning process includes a diverse, non-singular curriculum that encompasses multiple perspectives; through the integration of cultural materials into the curriculum, involving students in the introduction of foreign language subjects at school, participation in activities that introduce diversity, and culturally sensitive learning that respects students' backgrounds. This can also be done through designing infographics about the civil rights movement, role-playing, telling stories about family traditions, using problem-based learning methods, project-based learning, group learning approaches, managing the classroom as a simulation of real-life diversity, and the teacher's role as a facilitator.

2. Beyond the learning process

Multicultural education in schools can also be implemented through extracurricular activities and culturally sensitive learning that respects students' backgrounds. This can also be done through designing infographics about the civil rights movement, cultural observations, student exchanges, cultural introductions, cultural weeks and cultural performances, celebrations of national and religious holidays, visual displays of ethnic groups, traditional clothing, and so on.

In principle, whether carried out within the learning process or outside of it, all activities uphold the eradication of discriminatory views based on race, ethnicity, culture, and religion and require all students to have equal learning opportunities. According to Darmadi in the book by Sopiah and Aan Fadia An Nuur (2024: 138), schools are responsible for the education of students. They play a role in teaching good habits and character, education for life in society, training skills and developing intelligence, and teaching ethics, religion, and aesthetics.

Challenges of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is crucial to implement effectively. Multicultural education in schools faces various challenges both within and outside the school. Some of these challenges include:

1. Socioeconomic disparities, which create unequal access to quality education in various regions, especially in remote areas, and can sometimes reinforce prejudice and discrimination within certain communities.
2. Low awareness, as many people are unaware of the multicultural nature of their society and nation and do not yet understand the importance of multicultural education.
3. Lack of support for educational infrastructure. Ideally, multicultural education should be implemented in all schools. Limited infrastructure and incomplete provision create disparities in access and impact the quality of education between schools.
4. Intergroup conflict. Many horizontal conflicts occur due to differences in ethnicity, religion, race, and social class, indicating that not all communities have an optimal acceptance of differences.
5. Lack of teacher understanding of students' local cultures. Teachers' lack of familiarity with local culture and the culture of their students will make it difficult to integrate multicultural education into the learning process.
6. Spread of radical content through social media. Radical content is usually spread on social media without adequate education, thus triggering conflict and weakening multicultural values in society, especially among school and university students.

Efforts to Address Challenges

Multicultural education in schools can be implemented using various approaches and methods, both within and outside the learning process. Implementing multicultural education in schools presents many challenges, both internal and external. Several efforts to address the challenges of multicultural education in schools include the following:

1. Socialization and education to increase public knowledge and awareness of cultural diversity, human rights, and the importance of multicultural education.
2. Developing an inclusive approach in the curriculum, emphasizing respect for diversity, cooperative learning, and anti-discrimination.
3. Improving teacher competency through training, workshops, seminars, and technical guidance on multiculturalism and multicultural classroom management.
4. Positive use of technology to disseminate educational content about multiculturalism and counter or minimize hate speech and radicalism through social media.

Discussion

Implementation of Multicultural Education in Schools

In the KBBI (Indonesian Dictionary), education is defined as the process of changing the attitudes and behavior of an individual or group to mature through teaching and training. Meanwhile, multiculturalism is defined as a phenomenon in an individual or society characterized by the habit of using more than one culture. Therefore, multicultural education is defined as an educational process that respects cultural diversity, emphasizing democratic values to develop cultural pluralism. (KBBI, 2011).

According to James Banks (2019), multicultural education is education for everyone, education that includes all students regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, culture, or social strata. This education aims to provide equal opportunities for all. Multicultural education has five dimensions: material integration, knowledge construction, fair pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowerment of school culture. Meanwhile, Paulo Freire emphasized that education must be relevant to social and cultural realities, creating an educated and equal society, not just a society dominated by a social class. This multicultural education is a response to the diversity of the school population and must create an equal society. Andersen and Cusher define multicultural education as education about cultural diversity. Blum states that multicultural education is education based on appreciation, respect, and togetherness in a pluralistic community, including understanding, appreciation, and appreciation of one's own culture as well as curiosity about the cultures of others.

The purpose of multicultural education is to train students to have a positive attitude towards differences, foster self-awareness in a pluralistic society, strengthen character to foster resilience in facing challenges, and fortify students as the younger generation to maintain their adherence to Indonesian cultural roots.

Multicultural education in schools can be implemented through various aspects, such as curriculum integration and learning processes, mentoring, student activities, project learning, and other activities. These implementations are as follows:

1. Curriculum integration. Curriculum integration is achieved by incorporating various cultural perspectives and ethnic groups into the school curriculum. Learning materials must reflect the diversity of students.
2. Knowledge construction. With knowledge construction, students are helped to understand how knowledge is influenced by cultural values and how prejudice can shape their perspectives.
3. Prejudice reduction. Prejudice reduction teaches students to identify and reduce prejudice against other races, ethnicities, religions, and cultural groups through positive interactions and understanding.
4. Learning methods that support equality. Learning is conducted by adapting learning methods to accommodate the learning needs of students from various cultural backgrounds, genders, races, and social classes, and can create a fair and equitable learning environment.
5. Empowering school culture and social structures. Empowering school culture is expected to create an inclusive school climate where the cultures and backgrounds of all students are valued and provide opportunities for all students to participate in learning.

The implementation of multicultural education in schools can be divided into two parts: within the learning process (subjects) and outside of learning, with the following mapping:

In the learning process

Implementation in the learning process includes a diverse curriculum, not a single curriculum, encompassing multiple perspectives. This includes integrating cultural materials into the curriculum, involving students in foreign language instruction at school, participating in activities that introduce diversity, and culturally sensitive learning that respects students' backgrounds. This can also be achieved through role-playing, storytelling about family traditions, the use of problem-based learning methods, project-based learning, group learning

approaches, managing the classroom as a simulation of real-life diversity, and the teacher's role as a facilitator.

Beyond the learning process

Multicultural education in schools can also be implemented through extracurricular activities and culturally sensitive learning that respects students' backgrounds. This can also be done through designing infographics about the civil rights movement, cultural observations, student exchanges, cultural introductions, cultural weeks and cultural performances, celebrations of national and religious holidays, visual displays of ethnic groups, traditional clothing, and so on.

In principle, whether carried out within the learning process or outside of it, all activities uphold the eradication of discriminatory views based on race, ethnicity, culture, and religion and require all students to have equal learning opportunities. According to Darmadi in the book by Sopiah and Aan Fadia An Nuur (2024: 138), Schools are responsible for educating students, schools play a role in teaching good habits and morals, education for life in society, training skills and developing intelligence as well as teaching ethics, religion and aesthetics.

Challenges of Multicultural Education and How to Address Them

Multicultural education is crucial to implement effectively. Multicultural education in schools faces various challenges both internally and externally. Some of these challenges include:

1. Economic and social disparities. Intelligence, and teaching ethics, religion, and aesthetics.
Economic and social disparities create unequal access to quality education in various regions, especially in remote areas, which can sometimes reinforce prejudice and discrimination within certain communities.
2. Low public awareness.
This phenomenon occurs when many people are unaware of the multicultural nature of their society and nation and do not yet understand the importance of multicultural education.
3. Lack of support for educational infrastructure.
Ideally, multicultural education should be implemented in all schools, but limited infrastructure and incomplete provision create gaps in access and impact the quality of education between schools.
4. Intergroup conflict.
Many horizontal conflicts are triggered by differences in ethnicity, religion, race, and class, indicating that not all communities have an optimal acceptance of differences.
5. Teachers' lack of understanding of students' local cultures.
Teachers' lack of familiarity with local culture and the culture of their students will make it difficult to integrate multicultural education into the learning process.
6. Spread of radical content through social media.
Radical content is often spread on social media without adequate education, thus triggering conflict and weakening existing multicultural values in society, especially among school and university students.

Multicultural education in schools can be implemented using various approaches and methods, both within and outside the learning process. Implementing multicultural education

in schools faces many challenges, both internal and external. Several efforts to address the challenges of multicultural education in schools include the following:

1. Socialization and education.

To increase public knowledge and awareness of cultural diversity, human rights, and the importance of multicultural education, socialization and education are necessary. Socialization and education are conducted for teachers, students, the school community, parents, and school stakeholders.

2. Develop an inclusive approach in the curriculum.

The school curriculum must emphasize respect for diversity, cooperative learning, and anti-discrimination. The curriculum should not simply add multicultural content, but should also transform students' perspectives into ones that value multiculturalism. Furthermore, the curriculum should accommodate the importance of a differentiated approach to learning, the development of the concept of religious moderation, and education for inclusive children and children with special needs.

3. Improve teacher competency.

Teachers are key figures in learning in schools. To implement multicultural education, teachers need to be equipped and their competencies enhanced, for example through training, workshops, seminars, and technical guidance on multiculturalism and multicultural classroom management. According to the Center for Data and Information Technology (Pusdatin, 2022), only around 32% of teachers feel confident integrating cultural diversity issues into lesson plans (RPP). Therefore, improving teacher competency is crucial.

4. Positive use of technology.

Advances in technology and information influence the use of technology in learning, resulting in improved learning. However, technological advances also provide opportunities to utilize technology to disseminate information and knowledge through social media. Therefore, the use of technology must be directed positively towards disseminating educational content about multiculturalism and countering or minimizing hate speech and radicalism.

Conclusion

The implementation of multicultural education in schools is carried out both within and outside the learning process. This learning process includes a diverse curriculum, not a single curriculum, encompassing multiple perspectives; through the integration of cultural materials into the curriculum, involving students in the introduction of foreign language subjects at school, participation in activities that introduce diversity, and culturally sensitive learning that respects students' backgrounds. This can also be done through role-playing, telling stories about family traditions, using problem-based learning methods, project-based learning, group learning approaches, managing the classroom as a simulation of real-life diversity, and the teacher's role as a facilitator. Multicultural education outside of school can be implemented through extracurricular activities, cultural observations, student exchanges, cultural introductions, cultural weeks and arts and cultural performances, celebrations of national and religious holidays, visual displays of ethnic groups, traditional clothing, and other activities. Challenges to multicultural education include socio-economic disparities, low public awareness of the importance of multicultural education, lack of educational infrastructure, horizontal conflict between groups, teachers' lack of understanding of students' local cultures, and the

spread of radical content through social media. Efforts to address the challenges of multicultural education include outreach and education to increase public knowledge and awareness of cultural diversity, human rights, and the importance of multicultural education, developing an inclusive approach to the curriculum, improving teacher competency, and the positive use of technology.

References

- Abdul Munir Mulkhan, *Nalar Spiritual Pendidikan: solusi Problem Filosofis Pendidikan Islam*, Yogyakarta, 2002,
- Adhani, Y. *Konsep Pendidikan Multikultural sebagai sarana alternatif pencegahan konflik*, *Sosio Didaktika*, 2014 : 112-121
- Azyumardi Azra, *Konflik Baru Antar Peradaban: Globalisasi, Radikalisme dan Pluralitas*, (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada 2015)
- Banks, J.A & Bank, C.A.M, *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, New York: Routledge, 2019
- Damsar, *Pengantar Sosiologi Pendidikan*, Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2011,
- Danuurahman, J. dkk, *Kajian Pendidikan Multikultural di Era Digital*, *Jurnal Kalacakra*, 2012, 8-19
- Isnarmi Moeis, *Pendidikan Multikultural Transformatif, integritas Moral, Dialogis dan Adil*, Padang :UNP Press, 2014
- Kuntowijoyo, *Islam sebagai Ilmu, Epistemologi, Metodologi dan Etika*, Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2006,
- Muchlis M.Hanafi, *Moderasi Islam*, Jakarta: PSQ, 2015
- Pusdatin, *Profil Kompetensi Guru dalam Integrasi Keberagaman Budaya*, Jakarta: Kemendikbudristek, 2022.
- Sopiah dan Aan Fadia An Nuur, *Pengantar Ilmu Pendidikan*, Pekalongan: NEM, 2024
- Sopiah, dkk *Kurikulum berbasis MBKM dan Moderasi Beragama di Perguruan Tinggi Islam*, Pekalongan: NEM, 2025
- Suryana, Y dan Rusdiana, A. *Pendidikan Multikultural Suatu Upaya Penguatan Jati diri Bangsa*, Jakarta: CV Pustaka Setia, 2015
- Tilaar, H.A.R, *Multikulturalisme: Tantangan Global dalam Transformasi Pendidikan Nasional*, Jakarta: Grasindo, 2012
- Toto Suharto, *Islam Moderat untuk Islam Nusantara*, www.iainsurakarta.ac.id, di akses 29 september 2019
- Wasitohadi, *Gagasan dan Desain Pendidikan Multikultural di Indonesia*, dalam *Scholaria* Vol 2 No 1, 2012
- Yusuf Siswantara, *Pendidikan Multikultural: Sebuah Tantangan di Indonesia*, *Majalah Parahiangan*, 2017