

School Efforts to Implement Multicultural Education in Medan City

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the efforts made by schools in implementing multicultural education in the city of Medan. The research employs qualitative methods, chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the schools' efforts in applying multicultural education. The study was conducted in the city of Medan, taking into account that the multicultural nature of Medan's society is a unique local advantage. Additionally, Medan is viewed as a miniature representation of Indonesia's multicultural society, and the study also seeks to fulfill the goals and mandates set forth in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. The results of this study reveal various efforts made by schools to implement multicultural education. The conclusion is that these efforts are carried out through classroom teaching as well as extracurricular school programs.

Keywords: School Efforts, Multicultural Education, Implementation of Multicultural Education.

1. Introduction

Multicultural education has gained significant attention as an approach to fostering mutual understanding and respect in culturally diverse societies. Indonesia, with its vast array of ethnicities, religions, and cultural traditions, exemplifies the critical need for such an approach. The national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), reflects the ideal of a harmonious coexistence among diverse groups. However, persistent challenges, such as intergroup conflicts, ethnic discrimination, and intolerance, underscore the necessity of integrating multicultural values into the educational system. As Wahyuandari (2014) and Trisna (2017) assert, education serves as a vital platform for promoting social harmony by shaping young minds to appreciate and respect diversity.

The concept of multicultural education extends beyond mere awareness of cultural differences. As noted by Hanum (2012), Arifin (2009), and Nadziroh (2014), multicultural education seeks to instill an understanding of how cultural diversity influences human behavior, attitudes, and norms. This understanding encompasses the variations in customs, traditions, habits, and societal norms that define different cultural groups. Such an approach aims to prepare students to navigate a pluralistic society with sensitivity and respect.

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of multicultural education is particularly relevant in cities like Medan, where cultural diversity is a prominent feature. Medan's population includes various ethnic groups such as Batak, Javanese, Chinese, Minangkabau, and Malay, each contributing to the city's rich cultural mosaic. However, this diversity also presents challenges, including social segregation and ethnic tensions. Schools, as microcosms of society, often reflect these dynamics, making them critical sites for implementing multicultural education. The absence of deliberate efforts to incorporate multicultural values into the educational system risks perpetuating stereotypes and biases among students, further exacerbating societal divisions (Setiyawan & Maulida, 2024).

Recognizing the challenges posed by cultural diversity, several schools in Medan have initiated programs aimed at integrating multicultural values into their educational practices. The Yayasan Perguruan Sultan Iskandar Muda (YPSIM), for example, has adopted a comprehensive approach to multicultural education, creating an egalitarian learning environment where students of different religious and ethnic backgrounds can interact and learn together. This includes providing houses of worship for various religions within the school premises and conducting joint classes for students of different faiths (Budiono, 2021). Similarly, Harapan Mandiri Private Elementary School employs a structured strategy to instill multicultural values through planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision (Jainab et al., 2023).

These schools serve as exemplary models for how multicultural education can be implemented effectively. Their initiatives align with the framework proposed by Banks (2015), who emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that integrates multicultural values into both the formal and hidden curricula. This involves ensuring equitable treatment for students from diverse backgrounds, employing integrative evaluation methods, and equipping teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to deliver effective multicultural education.

The urgency of implementing multicultural education in Indonesia is amplified by the increasing prevalence of intolerance and intergroup conflicts. Reports of religious and ethnic discrimination highlight the risks of failing to address these issues in educational settings. Moreover, globalization and technological advancements have intensified cross-cultural interactions, necessitating a stronger emphasis on multicultural education to prepare students for a globalized world.

Studies by Suparlan (2003), Sangadji (2016), and Jalwis (2019) highlight the gaps in the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia. While policies mandating the inclusion of multicultural values in school curricula exist, their application is often inconsistent and superficial. In many cases, multicultural education is limited to extracurricular activities rather than being

integrated into the core curriculum. This limited approach fails to achieve the broader goals of fostering understanding and respect for diversity.

In Medan, the urgency is particularly evident due to the city's demographic composition. The presence of multiple ethnic and religious groups creates a fertile ground for both social cohesion and conflict. Schools play a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of young individuals, making them critical spaces for promoting multicultural values. The experiences of institutions like YPSIM and Harapan Mandiri highlight the potential of multicultural education to foster harmony and understanding among students from diverse backgrounds.

Research on multicultural education in Indonesia has provided valuable insights into its theoretical foundations, implementation, and challenges. Hanum (2012), Arifin (2009), and Nadzirah (2014) emphasize the importance of helping students understand how cultural diversity shapes human behavior and societal norms. Banks (2015) advocates for a comprehensive approach to multicultural education that includes equitable treatment of students, integrative evaluation methods, and teacher training. Building upon existing research, this study aims to explore the implementation of multicultural education in Medan schools, focusing on identifying best practices, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. By analyzing the experiences of institutions such as YPSIM and Harapan Mandiri, this research seeks to provide insights into how multicultural education can be effectively integrated into school curricula and practices. Furthermore, the study aims to assess the impact of these initiatives on students' attitudes and behaviors toward diversity and propose actionable recommendations to address barriers to implementation.

In doing so, this research contributes to the broader discourse on multicultural education in Indonesia, offering practical solutions for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. By examining the successes and challenges of multicultural education in Medan, this study aims to inform the development of more effective programs that can serve as models for schools across the country.

2. Research Methods

This research was conducted in Medan City. The selection of this location was based on the fact that Medan is one of the cities with a high degree of multiculturalism and is considered a multicultural microcosm of Indonesia. The educational focus of the study was on the basic education level, specifically junior high schools, due to the fact that coordination and supervision of basic education are under the jurisdiction of district or city governments, and because junior high school represents the highest level within basic education. The data for this research are divided into two categories: primary and secondary data. Primary data was directly collected from informants by the researchers, whereas secondary data was sourced from existing materials. Primary data was gathered through observations, in-depth interviews, documentation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The data analysis method employed is the interactive model of data analysis by Miles & Huberman, which

involves three concurrent stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

3. Results and Discussion

Based on interviews with informants from various schools in Medan, the implementation of multicultural education has shown notable successes, challenges, and opportunities for further development. These findings provide insights into strategies employed, perceptions of stakeholders, and barriers encountered in integrating multicultural education in Medan. Schools in Medan have adopted various methods to incorporate multicultural education into their teaching and learning practices. Informants highlighted that integrating multicultural education into subjects such as Social Studies and Civics is a primary strategy. Teachers have implemented inclusive and differentiated teaching practices, aligned with the principles of the independent curriculum. Inclusivity in teaching is demonstrated through recognizing and incorporating students' diverse cultural identities, including their traditions, values, and customs. Differentiated learning practices, on the other hand, involve tailoring instructional methods to meet the diverse needs of individual students, allowing for a more personalized learning experience.

In addition to formal curricula, several schools have developed extracurricular activities to support multicultural education. These include multicultural discussion groups, seminars on social issues, sports, and academic clubs that engage students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, some schools have adopted rotating seating arrangements in classrooms to encourage interaction among students of different cultural backgrounds. These efforts aim to create an inclusive learning environment and foster intercultural understanding. The implementation of multicultural education in Medan has yielded significant positive outcomes, particularly in enhancing students' awareness of and tolerance toward cultural diversity. Informants reported that students have become more open to differences and exhibit a better understanding of the importance of tolerance. Daily interactions among students from diverse cultural backgrounds have contributed to reducing prejudices and discriminatory behavior. For instance, one informant noted that students now demonstrate greater respect during classroom discussions and group activities.

Extracurricular activities, such as seminars on social issues, have provided students with opportunities to delve deeper into societal challenges. These activities not only enhance students' social awareness but also encourage them to actively participate in promoting justice and inclusivity within their school communities and beyond. Despite these positive outcomes, the implementation of multicultural education in Medan faces several challenges. Informants identified a lack of understanding and awareness among some teachers and students regarding the importance of multicultural education as a major barrier. Many teachers expressed a lack of confidence in teaching multicultural values due to insufficient training and resources. For instance, one informant pointed out that not all teachers possess the necessary expertise to effectively integrate multicultural values into their teaching materials.

Resource and facility limitations also pose significant obstacles. Informants reported that some schools lack access to relevant teaching materials and supportive learning environments. For example, inadequate budgets often hinder schools from organizing extracurricular activities aimed at promoting multicultural values. Teachers and students generally hold positive perceptions of multicultural education. Most teachers view it as a vital component in fostering social harmony within society. However, some teachers perceive multicultural education as requiring additional time and effort, particularly in lesson planning and adapting teaching methods. On the other hand, students generally welcome activities that introduce them to other cultures, finding them engaging and relevant to their daily lives.

Collaboration between schools, the government, and local communities plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of multicultural education. Informants highlighted that community involvement in school programs, such as inviting cultural leaders or religious figures to speak, enriches students' learning experiences and reinforces multicultural values. The government, particularly the Department of Education, also plays an important role by providing policy guidelines and teacher training programs. However, this collaboration requires improvement. Some informants noted that government support is often sporadic and inconsistent. Moreover, community involvement tends to be limited to ceremonial events, providing little substantive impact on students' learning.

The implementation of multicultural education as described in various studies emphasizes its critical role in creating inclusive and equitable learning environments. Setyowati et al. (2019) highlighted that integrating multicultural content into curricula, utilizing relevant teaching materials, and employing discussion-based methods effectively enhance students' multicultural competence. This aligns with the findings of Januarti et al. (2019), who stressed the importance of embedding multicultural values across self-development activities, extracurricular programs, and core subjects. These practices provide a strong foundation for inclusive education, allowing students to appreciate cultural diversity while fostering empathy and mutual respect.

Comparatively, studies such as Ramadhan and Usriyah (2021) documented innovative approaches to multicultural education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of online platforms and digital tools enabled educators to sustain the teaching of multicultural values despite restrictions. This is consistent with findings by Menkart et al. (1993), who underscored that effective multicultural education should transcend mere inclusion of cultural content, promoting critical engagement with diverse perspectives and encouraging active participation in addressing social issues. Together, these studies emphasize the dynamic and adaptable nature of multicultural education, which can be tailored to different contexts and challenges.

While the potential benefits of multicultural education are well-documented, its implementation faces significant barriers. Januarti et al. (2019) identified individual attitudes, limited resources, and a lack of institutional support as critical challenges. Similarly, Banks (2015) argued that schools often struggle with aligning multicultural education goals with available resources and teacher capacities. These barriers are particularly evident in regions where training for educators on

multicultural pedagogy is limited, leading to inconsistent application of these principles. On the other hand, supportive school climates and competent teachers act as facilitators for successful implementation. Teacher training programs, as emphasized by Januarti et al. (2019), are instrumental in equipping educators with the skills and confidence needed to integrate multicultural values effectively. Additionally, schools that adopt a Whole School Approach, embedding multicultural values across leadership, curricula, and extracurricular activities, demonstrate higher success rates in fostering inclusivity.

Findings from this study resonate with global research on multicultural education. For instance, studies in Western contexts often highlight the role of multicultural education in addressing systemic inequities (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2015). However, the Indonesian context presents unique challenges, such as balancing cultural pluralism with national unity, as reflected in the country's motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). This dual emphasis distinguishes Indonesian approaches to multicultural education from those in more homogenous societies. Additionally, the integration of multicultural education into Indonesia's independent curriculum parallels global trends toward inclusive education. However, the Indonesian experience is characterized by greater reliance on extracurricular activities and community involvement, reflecting the collectivist nature of its society. This contrasts with more individualistic approaches in Western countries, where multicultural education often focuses on individualized learning and self-reflection.

The findings have significant implications for both policy and practice. First, there is a need for comprehensive teacher training programs that focus on multicultural pedagogy. Such training should not only cover theoretical frameworks but also provide practical strategies for integrating multicultural values into teaching. Policymakers should allocate resources to ensure the availability of teaching materials and support infrastructure that fosters inclusive learning environments. Second, schools should adopt innovative methods, such as leveraging technology to enhance multicultural education, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital tools can provide students with access to diverse cultural perspectives and enable collaborative projects that transcend geographical boundaries. Finally, the success of multicultural education relies on the active involvement of all stakeholders, including the government, educators, parents, and the community. Collaborative efforts can address systemic barriers and ensure the sustainability of multicultural education programs.

While this study provides valuable insights into the implementation of multicultural education, further research is needed to explore its long-term impacts on students' attitudes and behaviors. Comparative studies across different regions in Indonesia can provide a more comprehensive understanding of contextual factors influencing multicultural education. Additionally, research on the role of technology in enhancing multicultural education, particularly in post-pandemic settings, can inform future innovations in this field.

4. Conclusion

Multicultural education is essential for fostering inclusivity, mutual respect, and cultural understanding, particularly in diverse societies like Indonesia. In Medan, where cultural diversity is both a strength and a challenge, the integration of multicultural values into school curricula and extracurricular activities has shown positive outcomes. Students have become more aware of cultural diversity, demonstrating greater tolerance and openness to differences, while inclusive and differentiated teaching practices have enhanced their learning experiences. However, challenges remain, including limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of understanding about multicultural education's importance among some educators and students. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive teacher training, increased investment in teaching materials, and the adoption of innovative approaches, such as leveraging digital tools for multicultural education. Collaborative efforts between schools, government, and communities are crucial to sustaining and scaling these initiatives. By working together, stakeholders can create a supportive ecosystem that nurtures cultural harmony and prepares students to thrive in a diverse world. Further research is needed to evaluate the long-term impacts of multicultural education and explore strategies for its broader implementation across Indonesia.

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