



Multicultural Curriculum as a Strategy for Strengthening Intercultural Literacy in Responding to Global Challenges

R. Madhakomala¹, Lutfia Syafrudin², Sultan Fadhly Abdullah³

¹Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia, madhakomala@unj.ac.id

²Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia, lutfiasss.ls@gmail.com

³Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia, sultanfadhlyy@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: sultanfadhlyy@gmail.com³

Abstract: Globalization demands an education system that is adaptive to diversity and socio-cultural challenges. Multicultural curriculum is an important strategy in strengthening intercultural literacy and forming tolerant characters in a pluralistic society. This article analyzes the role of multicultural curriculum in responding to global challenges through a literature review of national and international scientific journals (2020-2025). The results show that the integration of multicultural values in the curriculum can improve cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and students' readiness to face the global era. However, its implementation still faces obstacles such as the dominance of majority values, limited teacher competence, and policies that are not fully inclusive. Systematic policies and strategies are needed to ensure equitable and diversity-responsive education.

Keyword: Multicultural Curriculum, Intercultural Literacy, Diversity

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and advancements in information technology have significantly transformed the educational landscape across various countries, including Indonesia. In an era characterized by global interconnectedness and cultural exchange, education is increasingly expected not only to serve as a medium for knowledge transmission but also as a space for character formation that is inclusive and responsive to diversity (Soe'aidy, 2024). Phenomena such as the homogenization of values, social inequality, and rising intolerance pose real challenges that 21st-century education must confront.

As a strategic response to these challenges, the concept of a multicultural curriculum has emerged as a crucial approach to fostering cross-cultural understanding and strengthening social engagement. This curriculum emphasizes the importance of values such as tolerance, respect for differences, and social justice, while encouraging students to actively participate in diverse social contexts (Gofur et al., 2022). A multicultural curriculum encompasses not only culturally diverse content but also pedagogical approaches that create space for dialogue among individuals from different backgrounds.

In the context of Indonesia a nation known for its vast ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity the need for multicultural education is even more pressing. Educational practices that disregard diversity risk fostering social exclusion and widening intergroup disparities. Therefore, integrating multicultural values into national curricula, such as the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, is essential for building a fair and inclusive educational ecosystem (Wardani et al., 2024). However, the implementation of a multicultural curriculum in Indonesia faces several challenges. Obstacles such as the dominance of majority cultural values, limited teacher training, and resistance to curriculum reform continue to hinder progress. These issues underscore the need for strategic planning and institutional capacity building to ensure that multicultural values are not merely theoretical ideals, but are embedded in daily educational practices.

This article aims to examine in depth the role of a multicultural curriculum in addressing global challenges through the strengthening of intercultural literacy. The analysis is based on a literature review of recent national and international scholarly journals relevant to the Indonesian context. Through this approach, the article seeks to provide both conceptual and practical contributions to the development of a curriculum that is more adaptive to global dynamics and the complexities of multicultural societies.

Practically, this study offers broad benefits for various stakeholders. For educators, it serves as a reference for integrating multicultural values into the teaching and learning process, thereby fostering an inclusive classroom environment that respects diversity. For policymakers, the study provides an academic foundation for formulating education policies that are more responsive to diversity and social justice. For educational institutions, the findings can be used as a guideline in designing curricula and school programs that instill values of tolerance, empathy, and cultural awareness in students. Additionally, for researchers and academics, this study can serve as a starting point for conducting further, more contextual and in-depth research on similar topics.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method using a literature review approach. A literature review involves collecting data from various sources such as textbooks, journals, scholarly articles, and literature analyses relevant to the research topic. The analysis process is carried out by organizing the collected materials based on their level of relevance, starting from the most relevant to the moderately relevant. Alternatively, references may be arranged chronologically, beginning with the most recent publications and moving to older ones. The abstract of each reference is read first to assess the alignment of the topic with the research focus. Key points that are deemed relevant are then noted to support the analysis. To avoid plagiarism, the researcher is required to record all sources of information in detail and include them in the bibliography, particularly when the information is derived from the ideas or findings of others. All citations and notes are organized systematically to ensure they can be easily accessed for future reference.

RESULT

In 2022, Masdar Limbong, Firmansyah, and Fauzi Fahmi published an article titled "*Integrasi Kurikulum Pendidikan Berbasis Multikultural*" ("The Integration of a Multicultural-Based Education Curriculum"). This study aimed to describe the concept of developing a multicultural-based curriculum in educational institutions. The research employed a library research method with a descriptive-analytical approach, examining various sources such as scholarly journals, books, and educational documents. The findings indicate that a multicultural-based curriculum plays a vital role in fostering mutual respect, tolerance, and recognition of students' cultural differences. It is viewed as a strategic

instrument for nurturing an inclusive and democratic national character within a pluralistic society.

Furthermore, the article "*Konsep Kurikulum dan Kurikulum Pendidikan Islam*" ("Curriculum Concepts and Islamic Education Curriculum") by Yudi Candra Hermawan, Wikanti Iffah Juliani, and Hendro Widodo, published in 2020, seeks to elaborate on the general concept of curriculum and its connection to Islamic educational values. This study also utilized a library research method with a descriptive qualitative approach, analyzing various educational laws, curriculum theories, and principles within Islamic education. The findings reveal that the Islamic education curriculum encompasses not only intellectual aspects but also spiritual and moral dimensions. It is designed to align with human nature, offering a comprehensive, flexible framework that balances worldly and spiritual goals through an integrative educational approach.

Another relevant article is "*Konsep Dasar Pendidikan Multikultural*" ("The Basic Concept of Multicultural Education"), written by Muhammad Abdul Gofur, Muhamad Fahmi Ridho Auliya, and Mukh Nursikin in 2022. This study aimed to examine the foundational approaches to multicultural education and how they are implemented in elementary school settings. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the researchers conducted observations and interviews with teachers and students at a primary school in Banyubiru. The results demonstrate that multicultural education is highly effective in reducing discrimination and fostering awareness of cultural diversity. The approach is implemented through thematic learning, inclusive classroom activities, and the reinforcement of diversity values, drawing on James Banks' model of contributions, additive, transformative, and social action approaches.

The article "*Implementasi Pendidikan Multikultural dan Relevansinya dengan Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar*" ("The Implementation of Multicultural Education and Its Relevance to the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools") by Indah Kusuma Wardani, Aviandri Cahya Nugroho, Bambang Sumardjoko, and Endang Fauzi Ati, published in 2024, explores how multicultural education is practiced at SDN Nglorog 3 and its alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum. This qualitative descriptive study collected data through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings show that multicultural education is not delivered as a standalone subject, but rather integrated into various learning activities, such as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), differentiated learning models, and extracurricular programs. The study concludes that the school's approach aligns with the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes character development, inclusivity, and local contextualization.

Lastly, the article "*Pentingnya Literasi Budaya dalam Pendidikan Anak SD*" ("The Importance of Cultural Literacy in Primary Education") by Iskandar, Dewi, and Hayat, published in 2024, addresses the urgency of cultural literacy in elementary education amidst the challenges of globalization and low national literacy rates. The research, conducted through a literature review method analyzing various academic sources from Google Scholar, concludes that cultural literacy education at the primary level is essential for shaping children's deep understanding of cultural diversity. Key success factors for implementation include teacher training, curriculum integration, and active involvement from parents and the school community. Cross-sector collaboration and supportive education policies are also critical in creating an inclusive and responsive learning environment.

The five reviewed articles highlight the critical role of multicultural education and cultural literacy in shaping students into inclusive, tolerant, and nationally conscious individuals within a diverse society. Curricula that integrate multicultural values aim not only to foster understanding of cultural diversity but also to instill moral and spiritual principles, as reflected in Islamic education frameworks. This approach has proven effective in reducing discrimination, strengthening national identity, and cultivating a generation capable of

coexisting peacefully in a heterogeneous social environment. The implementation of multicultural education is also aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes character development, differentiated learning, and local contextualization. Moreover, the importance of cultural literacy at the primary level is emphasized as a foundation for developing global awareness and cultural empathy from an early age. The success of multicultural education is strongly supported by curriculum integration, teacher training, parental and community involvement, as well as responsive and inclusive educational policies.

DISCUSSION

Concept of Multicultural Curriculum

The multicultural curriculum is rooted in the idea that education should reflect and embrace the cultural diversity present in society. According to Langgulong and Arifin (in Hermawan et al., 2020), curriculum is a comprehensive plan of learning experiences—encompassing cultural, social, artistic, and physical elements—designed to holistically shape learners' character and behavior. Multiculturalism itself is a theological and philosophical approach that rejects discrimination and encourages the acceptance of differences as a natural part of human life (Gofur et al., 2022; Mudzhar in Hadijaya et al., 2024). It emphasizes understanding, respect, and appreciation for various cultural, religious, and social backgrounds.

When applied to curriculum development, multiculturalism becomes a foundation for creating inclusive educational content that promotes equality and mutual respect. It supports diverse perspectives in teaching materials, addresses different learning styles, and fosters critical reflection on social justice issues. As Paul C. Gorski (in Futaqi, 2022) outlines, a multicultural curriculum is characterized by inclusive delivery, unbiased content, critical perspectives, social responsibility, civic engagement, and meaningful assessment. It seeks not only to transmit knowledge but to prepare students to become empathetic, open-minded, and active citizens.

This approach is essential in pluralistic societies like Indonesia, where curriculum development must reflect local values while promoting unity in diversity. Through thematic learning, cooperative methods, and student-centered activities, multicultural education encourages all learners to share, listen, and appreciate their own identities and those of others. Ultimately, it helps build a tolerant, ethical, and socially aware generation.

Challenges of Integrating Multicultural Curriculum in the Indonesian Education System

Integrating multicultural values into Indonesia's education system presents multiple challenges. One major issue is designing a curriculum that authentically represents the cultural richness of all students. A homogeneous or culturally dominant curriculum risks marginalizing students from minority backgrounds. Therefore, curriculum planners must ensure that materials reflect varied traditions, languages, and histories. Teacher preparedness is another critical factor. Many educators lack specific training in multicultural pedagogy. To teach inclusively, teachers must understand cultural diversity, manage classroom dynamics sensitively, and foster environments free from prejudice. They also need strategies for conflict resolution and for promoting empathy among students with different social norms and cultural expressions.

Moreover, implicit biases and cultural stereotypes continue to shape perceptions and behavior in schools. Both teachers and students need ongoing awareness and reflection to overcome unconscious prejudices. In diverse classrooms, schools must also ensure equal access to resources, provide additional support to disadvantaged students, and recognize the

different starting points of learners from varied cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Successfully integrating multicultural education requires commitment at all levels policy makers, school leaders, teachers, parents, and communities. Only through collaborative efforts can schools create inclusive, respectful, and empowering learning spaces for all.

Connection between Multicultural Curriculum and Intercultural Literacy

Intercultural literacy emerges as a vital educational competency in response to globalization. It goes beyond basic reading and writing to include the ability to understand, interpret, and interact with cultural symbols, practices, and perspectives. As Malawi (in Iskandar et al., 2023) and Saftri & Ramadhan (in Putri & Nurhasanah, 2023) explain, cultural literacy involves awareness of languages, traditions, social norms, and daily practices passed down through generations. It also includes the capacity for empathy, cross-cultural communication, and collaboration in diverse environments. The multicultural curriculum provides a framework for developing this literacy. By exposing students to diverse cultural content, teaching them to reflect critically on their own and others' values, and encouraging respectful dialogue, schools foster intercultural competence. This competence helps learners navigate multicultural realities with openness, understanding, and adaptability. Moreover, multicultural and citizenship education together empower students to engage in society responsibly. Through activities that promote discussion, self-expression, and perspective-sharing, students become more tolerant, aware of global challenges, and prepared for life in increasingly diverse communities. In this context, intercultural literacy is not an additional skill it is essential for thriving in the 21st century.

Global Challenges in Education

Education systems today are deeply influenced by globalization and rapid technological change. Schools must now prepare students not only for national development but also for global competition. This has led to the emergence of bilingual schools, international programs, and curricula that incorporate global perspectives. As Safira et al. (in Soe'aiddy, 2024) describe, global education transcends geographic boundaries. International institutions can operate across countries, and domestic schools adopt global standards. Entrisnasari & Khuriyah (in Soe'aiddy, 2024) note that this process includes curriculum internationalization, multilingual instruction, and partnerships with foreign educational providers.

The demand for quality education has never been higher. Schools must meet expectations for producing graduates who are innovative, ethical, and adaptable. According to Sonia (in Hariyanti et al., 2023), ensuring quality involves improving all components—inputs, processes, and outputs. Institutions must provide access, equity, and relevance in all aspects of learning to compete globally and respond to the needs of both local and international communities. Thus, education must balance local identity with global readiness, preparing students to participate in and shape an interconnected world.

The Role of Multicultural Curriculum in Addressing Global Challenges

In a globalized world marked by rapid cultural exchange and social transformation, education must confront issues such as cultural conflict, inequality, and intolerance. The multicultural curriculum serves as a strategic response to these challenges. By embedding diversity and justice into every subject, it fosters mutual understanding, respect, and ethical awareness among students. Huda & Mubin (2025) emphasize that multicultural education equips students to live harmoniously in diverse societies. In Indonesia, multicultural values are integrated into subjects like Civics, which promote unity and tolerance. However, three major challenges persist: cultural hegemony in dominant narratives, regional disparities in

curriculum implementation, and a lack of teacher competency in managing multicultural classrooms.

Internationally, similar approaches are used to promote intercultural competencies and global citizenship. Yet, Indonesia's unique context—shaped by its colonial history, religious plurality, and vast ethnic diversity—requires localized curriculum adaptations. These include language inclusivity, balanced cultural themes, and religiously sensitive content. In essence, the multicultural curriculum is more than an educational tool—it is a pathway to creating just, democratic, and inclusive societies. It supports learners in becoming global citizens who are grounded in local values yet prepared for international engagement.

CONCLUSION

In the face of accelerating globalization and the growing complexity of socio-cultural dynamics, the integration of a multicultural curriculum has emerged as a vital strategy for enhancing intercultural literacy and fostering inclusive educational environments. The literature reviewed in this study underscores the critical role of multicultural education in cultivating tolerance, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding among students competencies that are essential for active and responsible global citizenship. Multicultural curricula do more than reflect cultural diversity in content; they embody pedagogical practices that encourage active student engagement, critical thinking, and the recognition of multiple cultural perspectives. This pedagogical orientation contributes significantly to reducing prejudice, preventing cultural marginalization, and promoting a democratic civic identity rooted in mutual respect and equity.

Despite its potential, the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia continues to face structural and practical challenges. Among these are the dominance of majority cultural narratives in curriculum design, insufficient teacher training in multicultural pedagogy, and the lack of comprehensive policies that ensure inclusivity and representation. Addressing these obstacles demands coordinated efforts at the policy, institutional, and pedagogical levels including the formulation of inclusive curricular frameworks, sustained professional development, and systemic support for diversity-responsive education. Moreover, the strong linkage between multicultural curriculum design and the development of intercultural literacy highlights the importance of equipping students with the ability to critically interpret, appreciate, and engage with diverse cultural forms and expressions. Cultural literacy, as fostered through this curriculum, enables students to navigate complex multicultural settings with sensitivity and adaptability.

In conclusion, the multicultural curriculum should be regarded not only as an educational instrument but also as a vehicle for broader social transformation. By embedding principles of diversity, justice, and inclusion into the core of educational practice, it provides a foundation for constructing a more equitable, cohesive, and culturally responsive educational system in an increasingly interconnected global context.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the national curriculum be developed inclusively, representing the full spectrum of cultural diversity, including minority cultures. Teachers should receive training in multicultural pedagogy to create learning environments that are sensitive to differences. Contextual approaches rooted in local values should also be prioritized to strengthen students' cultural identity. Furthermore, collaboration among the government, schools, communities, and parents is essential to build an inclusive educational ecosystem. Lastly, an evaluation system based on diversity indicators must be established to ensure that the implementation of the multicultural curriculum is both tangible and sustainable.

REFERENCES

- Alhaddad, M. R. (2020). Konsep pendidikan multikultural dan pendidikan inklusif. *Jurnal Tarbiyah Islamiyah*, 5(1), 21-30.
- Aulia, R., Fathunnajih, F., Br, B., Mutmainnah, I., Ghazali, A., & Rusmayadi, R. (2024). Multikulturalisme dalam Konsep Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam (Landasan Filsafat Pendidikan Islam). *Asatiza: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 5(1), 34-44.
- Futaqi, S. (2022). Prinsip Pengembangan Kurikulum Berbasis Multikultural. *MIDA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Islam*, 5(2), 149-161.
- Gofur, M. A., Auliya, M. F. R., & Nursikin, M. (2022). Konsep dasar pendidikan multikultural. *Sinar Dunia: Jurnal Riset Sosial Humaniora Dan Ilmu Pendidikan*, 1(4), 143-149.
- Hadijaya, Y., Fahrezi, M., Intan, N., Wasiyem, W., Zakiyah, N., & Azhari, M. T. (2024). Konsep multikulturalisme dan pluralisme dalam pendidikan. *JIIP-Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 7(3), 3101-3108.
- Hariyanti, D. P. D., Fakhruddin, F., Kardoyo, K., & Arbarini, M. (2023, June). Menuju Era Globalisasi Pendidikan: Tantangan dan Harapan Terhadap Mutu Pendidikan di Indonesia. In *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pascasarjana* (Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 222-225).
- Harsyah, Z. (2023). Relevansi konsep pendidikan multikultural dalam perspektif al-quran di era kontemporer. *Social Science Academic*, 1(1), 105-118.
- Hermawan, Y. C., Juliani, W. I., & Widodo, H. (2020). Konsep kurikulum dan kurikulum pendidikan Islam. *Jurnal MUDARRISUNA: Media Kajian Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 10(1), 34-44.
- Huda, M. R. S., & Mubin, N. (2025). Tantangan pendidikan multikultural di Indonesia era globalisasi. *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin MERDEKA*, 2(5), 674-679.
- Iskandar, M. F., Dewi, D. A., & Hayat, R. S. (2024). Pentingnya Literasi Budaya dalam Pendidikan Anak SD: Sebuah Kajian Literatur. *Indo-MathEdu Intellectuals Journal*, 5(1), 785-794.
- Limbong, M., Firmansyah, F., & Fahmi, F. (2022). Integrasi Kurikulum Pendidikan Berbasis Multikultural. *EDU-RILIGIA: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Islam Dan Keagamaan*, 5(4).
- Mujiburrohman, M., & Faqih, M. M. (2024, December). Multicultural education transformation: building solidarity, tolerance and global peace through the global citizenship education (GCED). In *proceeding of international conference on education, society and humanity* (Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 360-379).
- Putri, F. D. C., & Nurhasanah, N. (2023). Implementasi Literasi Budaya dan Kewargaan sebagai Upaya dalam Mengembangkan Berkebhinekaan Global di Sekolah Dasar. *JIM: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Pendidikan Sejarah*, 8(3), 2167-2173.
- Salim, A., & Aprison, W. (2024). Pendidikan Multikultural Berbasis Kearifan Lokal. *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Pendidikan Indonesia*, 3(1), 22-30.
- Soe'aidy, M. D. (2024). Isu-Isu Global Pendidikan: Tantangan Globalisasi dan Modernisasi. *Rayah Al-Islam*, 8(4), 2693-2701.
- Susilawati, E., Saifi, A. F. Z., Komala, E., Komariah, C., & Ruswandi, U. (2024). Pengembangan Kurikulum Pendidikan Multikultural di Indonesia. *JIIP-Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 7(9), 9487-9492.
- Wardani, I. K., Nugroho, A. C., Sumardjoko, B., & Ati, E. F. (2024). Implementasi Pendidikan Multikultural dan Relevansinya dengan Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar. *Didaktika: Jurnal Kependidikan*, 13(2), 2617-2626.