

Contextual Multicultural Education: Exploring Local Values in Multiethnic Societies

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the implementation of multicultural education based on local values in the multiethnic community of Kayu Aro. Kayu Aro is home to various ethnic groups, including Kerinci, Javanese, Minangkabau, and Batak, who have long coexisted in shared social, cultural, and economic spaces. Although this diversity has given rise to harmonious social practices such as interethnic cooperation, tolerance toward cultural traditions, and the use of Javanese as a lingua franca, these values have not yet been systematically integrated into the formal educational process. As a result, lessons on diversity in schools often remain abstract and detached from the students' lived experiences. This research adopts a mixed methods approach, with concurrent triangulation design. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations, while quantitative data were obtained through student surveys measuring their understanding of multicultural values. The findings show that local values possess strong potential to serve as a foundation for multicultural education, particularly in fostering students' awareness of the importance of coexistence in a plural society. However, the absence of structured efforts to incorporate these local narratives into school curricula and teaching strategies remains a significant barrier. This study recommends the integration of local values into school practices as a contextualized and culturally responsive approach to multicultural education one that is equitable, experience-based, and rooted in the social realities of students.

Keywords: Multicultural Education, Local Values, Multiethnic Society, Contextual Learning

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji implementasi pendidikan multikultural berbasis nilai-nilai lokal dalam komunitas multi-etnis Kayu Aro. Kayu Aro merupakan wilayah yang dihuni oleh beragam kelompok etnik, termasuk Kerinci, Jawa, Minangkabau, dan Batak, yang telah lama hidup berdampingan dalam ruang sosial, budaya, dan ekonomi yang sama. Meskipun keragaman ini telah melahirkan praktik sosial yang harmonis seperti kerja sama antar-etnis, toleransi terhadap tradisi budaya, serta penggunaan bahasa Jawa sebagai lingua franca, nilai-nilai tersebut belum terintegrasi secara sistematis ke dalam proses pendidikan formal. Akibatnya, pembelajaran tentang keberagaman di sekolah seringkali bersifat abstrak dan terlepas dari pengalaman nyata peserta didik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan metode campuran (mixed methods) dengan desain triangulasi konkuren. Data kualitatif dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi lapangan,

sedangkan data kuantitatif diperoleh melalui survei siswa yang mengukur pemahaman mereka terhadap nilai-nilai multikultural. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai lokal memiliki potensi kuat untuk dijadikan landasan pendidikan multikultural, khususnya dalam menumbuhkan kesadaran siswa tentang pentingnya hidup berdampingan dalam masyarakat plural. Namun demikian, ketiadaan upaya yang terstruktur untuk mengintegrasikan narasi lokal ke dalam kurikulum sekolah dan strategi pembelajaran masih menjadi hambatan signifikan. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan integrasi nilai-nilai lokal ke dalam praktik sekolah sebagai pendekatan pendidikan multikultural yang kontekstual dan responsif budaya—pendekatan yang berkeadilan, berbasis pengalaman, serta berakar pada realitas sosial peserta didik.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Multikultural, Nilai Lokal, Masyarakat Multi-etnis, Pembelajaran Kontekstual

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as a nation rich in ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity (Ayatanoi, 2024; Nazila Syifa Thohiroh, 2024). This diversity serves not only as a defining identity but also as a major challenge in building a harmonious collective life. In practice, Indonesia's plural society continues to be marked by prejudice, discrimination, and social exclusion both in everyday interactions and within the realm of education (Hesti, Kurniansyah, & Zulfadli Rizki, 2022). Evidence indicates that discrimination against ethnic minorities in Indonesia manifests in various forms, including unequal treatment, negative stereotyping, and social exclusion within educational institutions and daily life (Setiawan, Buana, & Tanjung, 2023). Research reveals that Papuan students in Surabaya have experienced discrimination in the form of accusations accompanied by racial insults, which in turn triggered conflict (Ghozali & Liana, n.d.). Moreover, several reports continue to highlight similar issues. Discrimination in Indonesia also takes the form of restricted access for minority religious groups to worship facilities, further intensifying intolerance and interreligious conflict in many regions (Salsabila, 2024).

In fact, education should serve as a strategic space for shaping the character of a generation capable of living harmoniously within a multicultural society (Ayatanoi, 2024; Nugraha, 2020). Therefore, an educational approach is needed that not only introduces diversity in a normative manner but also cultivates critical awareness and provides real-life experiences in fostering inclusive social relations. This is where the importance of multicultural education lies as a learning paradigm that goes beyond symbolic recognition of differences and instead promotes socially just transformation.

Multicultural education encompasses the integration of the experiences and histories of diverse groups into both teaching materials and instructional strategies (Rustam Ibrahim, 2013). Studies emphasize that multicultural education must be grounded in the principles of social justice and the empowerment of students to critically engage with an increasingly plural world (Herlina, Yusnita, Sutrisno, Unengsih, & Rosyadi, 2022). However, formal education in Indonesia still tends to overlook local contexts and students' lived experiences in their everyday lives (Hesti et al., 2022). The instructional content is

often too abstract and detached from reality, making it difficult for students to relate their learning to the social conditions they encounter. In contrast, the contextual learning approach demonstrates that learning becomes more effective when it is connected to students' experiences and social environments, including the local values embedded in their communities (Budiman, Samani, Rusijono, Setyawan, & Nurdyansyah, 2020).

Kayu Aro District, located in Kerinci Regency, Jambi Province, represents a concrete example of a multiethnic community engaged in daily social interactions. The population consists of various ethnic groups such as Kerinci, Javanese, Minangkabau, and Batak, who coexist harmoniously in agricultural, religious, and social activities. Amidst this diversity, social values such as interethnic cooperation (*gotong royong*), tolerance toward customary differences, and the use of the Javanese language as a lingua franca among groups have emerged. These values constitute a rich cultural resource that can be utilized as learning material within multicultural education. Unfortunately, such values have not been sufficiently incorporated into school learning, creating a gap between students' lived experiences and their formal education. Schools have yet to fully function as spaces for dialogue between local cultures and the national education process.

Based on this background, this study aims to explore and analyze the potential of local values in Kayu Aro as a source for strengthening multicultural education. It seeks to examine how social values embedded in the life of multiethnic communities can be integrated into the educational process whether through curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, or instructional strategies. Furthermore, this study investigates students' perceptions and understandings of the diversity surrounding them, as well as the implications of such awareness for creating more contextual and inclusive learning. The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for formulating locally grounded multicultural education strategies that move beyond normative recognition, addressing the real needs of learners and their social environments, and ultimately fostering a generation that is tolerant, just, and conscious of the meaning of coexistence amid diversity.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach with a concurrent triangulation design, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods simultaneously to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the implementation of local values as the foundation of multicultural education in the multiethnic community of Kayu Aro. This approach allows the researcher to examine social phenomena contextually while verifying qualitative findings through quantitative data (Creswell JW, 2018). The qualitative approach is used to explore in depth the social values embedded in community practices, such as interethnic cooperation (*gotong royong*), customary tolerance, and patterns of social interaction among different ethnic groups. Data were collected through field observations and in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, teachers, and residents from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The qualitative data aim to capture the socio-cultural context of the Kayu Aro community, which serves as the foundation for developing locally grounded multicultural education.

Meanwhile, the quantitative approach was employed to complement the qualitative findings through the distribution of questionnaires using purposive sampling to 20 students who were relevant to the research objectives. The questionnaire was designed to measure students' understanding of multicultural values such as tolerance, equality, and attitudes toward diversity. The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns in students' understanding and experiences within their social lives. The results from this quantitative approach provide an overview of the extent to which multicultural values have been internalized within the realm of formal education.

Data collection techniques in this study included participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaire-based surveys. Observations were conducted on community activities such as collective work (kerja bakti) and interethnic religious events. Interviews were carried out to gain a more contextual understanding of the ongoing social dynamics, while surveys were distributed to students as respondents to assess their attitudes and comprehension of multicultural values.

The data analysis in this study was conducted simultaneously for both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic analysis technique by categorizing field findings into themes such as interethnic cooperation (gotong royong), cultural tolerance, and symbols of interethnic communication. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, such as calculating the mean scores of students' understanding of multicultural values. The synergy between these two types of data enabled the researcher not only to understand how local values are manifested within the community but also to identify the extent to which these values have been internalized within the educational sphere. This integrative approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social practices and the role of multicultural education in a culturally diverse area such as Kayu Aro.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Local Values in the Multiethnic Community of Kayu Aro and Their Relevance to Multicultural Education

The multiethnic community of Kayu Aro possesses a wealth of social values that can serve as a vital source for multicultural education. Practices such as interethnic cooperation (gotong royong), tolerance toward cultural differences, and social interactions in agricultural and religious activities demonstrate that the community has naturally internalized the values of coexistence. An interview with an informant from the Minangkabau ethnic group, M (33 years old, interview, March 5, 2025), revealed a strong sense of collectivism within agricultural activities. He stated, "In the fields, we often help other villagers regardless of where they come from. What matters is mutual assistance, because everyone needs help." This finding illustrates that gotong royong has become a social norm that transcends ethnic boundaries. Meanwhile, an informant from the Javanese ethnic group, S (46 years old, interview, March 5, 2025), explained that during

religious gatherings such as pengajian desa (village Qur'anic recitations), "those who help prepare are not always Muslims; sometimes our non-Muslim neighbors also join, especially when it comes to cooking or cleaning." This statement demonstrates how the values of cooperation and tolerance are deeply embedded in everyday social practices, even amid diverse cultural backgrounds.

These values represent a tangible manifestation of what James A. Banks refers to as content integration in multicultural education, which involves incorporating the cultural experiences and histories of diverse groups into the learning process (Ayatanoi, 2024). Multicultural education is not merely about recognizing diversity but must also encompass curriculum transformation and pedagogical practices that promote social justice (Ma'arif, 2019; Taat Wulandari, 2020). In this context, the local values found in Kayu Aro such as interethnic cooperation, respect for different customary traditions, and the use of a shared language serve as essential assets for fostering students who not only understand diversity but are also capable of living and working effectively within a plural society.

However, these local values have not been widely utilized as learning materials in schools, resulting in educational practices that remain abstract and lack contextual grounding. This situation is reflected in the questionnaire responses from students, which explored their perceptions of social values present in their surroundings.

Comparison of Student's Conceptual Understanding of Social Values

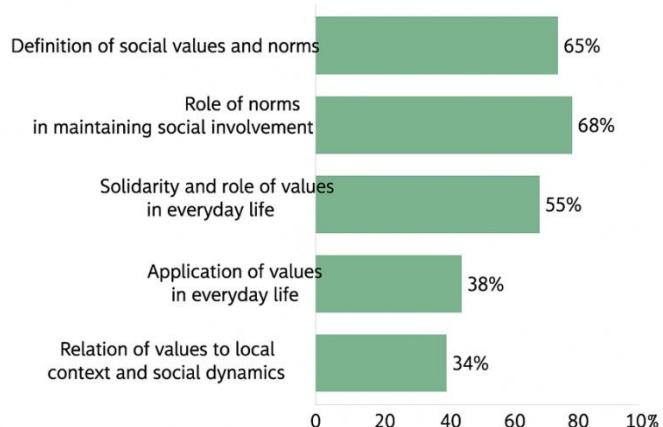


Figure 1. Comparison of Students' Conceptual Understanding and Value Application
Source: Primary Data

The survey results indicate that students' understanding of basic social values such as empathy, norms, and solidarity is relatively good. Most students were able to correctly answer questions related to the definition of social values and the role of norms in maintaining social harmony. However, only a small proportion were able to meaningfully relate these values to real-life practices. This finding suggests that although students' cognitive understanding of social values is at a moderate level, the internalization of these values within social contexts remains suboptimal. Such evidence reinforces the earlier finding that schools have not yet systematically incorporated local narratives as part of the learning process.

Community leaders have also recognized the importance of integrating local values into education. As expressed by a traditional leader:

"From the old days, we were taught to help one another, no matter who it was. But nowadays, children often learn examples from outside. Schools should also use stories from here so that children can preserve these values."

This statement reflects the community's expectation that schools should serve as an extension of cultural continuity rather than as institutions detached from their surrounding social realities.

Theoretically, this aligns with Tilaar's perspective that education in Indonesia must be built upon the diversity of local cultures to create a democratic system rooted in the people (Riyanti & Novitasari, 2021). The local values that flourish within multiethnic communities such as Kayu Aro should be understood as an epistemological foundation for developing curricula and instructional strategies (Bezerra & Coutinho, 2024). In this sense, schools should no longer function merely as centers for the transmission of universal knowledge, but also as cultural dialogic spaces that promote inclusive social transformation (Latif, 2020).

A Civic Education teacher at one of the senior high schools in Kayu Aro expressed a similar view during an interview:

"I often relate lessons about values and social norms to our village life. For example, when discussing tolerance, I ask students to share their experiences of working together with people from different ethnic groups. The students understand more quickly because they have experienced it firsthand."

This finding is consistent with the principle of experiential learning in multicultural education, which emphasizes learning that originates from students' own experiences and environments (Djamaruddin, Lasan, & Atmoko, 2018). However, in practice, teachers also report that not all students are able to critically apply these values within their social contexts. Some students still tend to interact primarily within their own ethnic groups or feel uncomfortable when working in cross-cultural teams. A Civic Education teacher noted that, "Sometimes they understand it in class, but outside they still hang out only with friends from the same village or ethnic background. Perhaps it's because they have grown up that way."

The teacher's statement, on the other hand, indicates that the implementation of multicultural learning still faces challenges in the affective and practical domains. This condition is partly due to limited teacher training and the lack of reflective social spaces that could guide students to step outside their comfort zones. In this context, locality-based multicultural education plays a strategic role not only in strengthening social cohesion but also in enriching the learning process through contextual relevance and students' lived experiences (Khomsinnudin, Pangeran, Tamyiz, Wulandari, & Firdaus, 2024). Mastery of multicultural concepts is essential for students to interact adaptively and constructively with their social environment, both with individuals from similar and different ethnic backgrounds.

The mastery of multicultural concepts such as tolerance, empathy, and cooperation (*gotong royong*) is not only vital for social life but also serves as a valuable pedagogical resource. These values contribute to the development of social character, critical awareness of diversity, and the formation of collective consciousness regarding the importance of diversity as a social strength. Therefore, the integration of local values into education is not merely a methodological option but an epistemological and cultural imperative in building a just, peaceful, and civilized society. In this regard, locality-based multicultural education can serve as a foundation for establishing a harmonious social order oriented toward humanity.

Discussion

Students' Level of Understanding of Social and Multicultural Values

The evaluation results of students' understanding revealed three main tendencies in their responses to questions related to social values and multiculturalism.

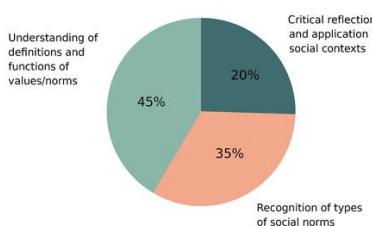


Figure 2. Students' Understanding Tendencies

Source: Primary Data

In terms of cognitive knowledge regarding the definitions of values and social norms, students demonstrated a fairly good level of understanding. The average score for questions measuring conceptual mastery reached 14 out of 30, indicating that most students were able to recognize the function of values as behavioral guidelines and the importance of norms in maintaining social order. They were also able to distinguish between different types of social norms, such as norms of propriety, legal norms, and religious norms. Nevertheless, this understanding tends to remain at the level of rote learning and has not yet reached deeper analytical or critical reflection. In Bloom's taxonomy, this corresponds to the comprehension stage and has not yet progressed to the levels of application or synthesis, which should be the main target of value-based learning (Mauliana Wayudi, Suwatno, 2020).

However, when students were asked to relate their understanding of values to their social experiences, their responses revealed certain limitations. The answers were generally generic and did not refer to concrete realities around them such as inter-village cooperation (*gotong royong*) or the celebration of interethnic festivals. The disconnection between conceptual knowledge and lived experience indicates a weakness in the contextual learning approaches implemented in schools. According to the experiential learning approach, as emphasized by John Dewey and later reinforced by Paulo Freire, the educational process should establish a close relationship between theory and students'

daily experiences, ensuring that the values learned do not remain as abstract discourse but become a living awareness (Sesfao, 2020).

A similar pattern was observed in the questions measuring students' attitudes toward diversity and tolerance. Although most students reported being accustomed to living alongside individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, only a few were able to articulate the importance of building cross-cultural communication or fostering mutual understanding. Some students, for instance, admitted that during group activities they still tended to choose peers from their own ethnic community. This finding indicates that their tolerance remains passive and has not yet reached the level of intercultural engagement. According to Nieto (1992), this reflects a form of surface multiculturalism a superficial acknowledgment of diversity that has not yet evolved into social transformation through active and equitable intergroup relations (Firdaus, 2023).

These results suggest that students' understanding of social and multicultural values, although not entirely low, remains at a basic level and has not yet been fully developed. The internalization of such values is not strongly reflected in their social behaviors, particularly within the context of everyday diversity. Therefore, multicultural education should not be limited to teaching definitions and universal concepts but must also be designed to cultivate reflective awareness and inclusive attitudes grounded in students' local experiences.

Implications and Integration of Local Multicultural Values in School Education

The previous findings reveal that the multiethnic community of Kayu Aro possesses a rich repository of local values that hold great potential as sources for multicultural education. Practices such as interethnic cooperation (*gotong royong*), tolerance in neighborhood relations, and the use of a shared language in social interactions provide concrete evidence that the community has organically developed a value system aligned with the principles of peaceful coexistence. These values, which have emerged naturally through daily social practices, should not remain detached from formal education. On the contrary, schools should incorporate these local values as an integral part of the learning process, particularly within subjects related to moral education, character building, and social life (Amri, Ganefri, & Hadiyanto, 2021; Astika, Prahita, & Budiati, 2024).

Unfortunately, the survey and interview results indicate that these local values have not yet been systematically integrated into either the curriculum or instructional approaches. Teachers tend to rely heavily on nationally standardized textbooks that employ illustrations drawn from other cultural contexts, making learning experiences feel distant from students' real lives. According to James A. Banks (2009), however, multicultural education should ideally begin with content integration the inclusion of local cultural perspectives within teaching materials. When students encounter values such as *gotong royong* and *musyawarah* reflected in their textbooks and discussed in classroom dialogues, they are more likely to internalize their meanings because the learning process stems from their own lived experiences.

The importance of integrating local values into education has also been emphasized by community leaders and educators in Kayu Aro. A traditional leader explained that, in the past, children learned many values through community life, but formal education spaces today provide little room for local narratives. This observation resonates with Henry Giroux's critique of modern education, which often prioritizes the transfer of knowledge while neglecting students' cultural contexts (Mariani, 2020). According to Giroux, schools should serve as arenas for cultural dialogue spaces where local and universal values intersect to shape critical and socially just consciousness.

Although several teachers have made efforts to relate classroom materials to local conditions, the implementation has not yet reached the level of transformative pedagogy. One teacher mentioned that she often asked students to share their experiences of interethnic coexistence as examples in lessons on social norms. While this represents a positive initial step, students still struggle to critically evaluate those values. A lack of teacher training in applying context-based multicultural approaches remains one of the main challenges (Muqarramah Sulaiman Kurdi, 2023). Within Kolb's (1984) experiential learning framework, local experiences should serve as learning resources to be processed through reflection, conceptualization, and action. This requires teachers to possess strong pedagogical skills in designing learning activities that not only evoke empathy but also foster critical reflection and the courage to act upon those values.

Thus, the integration of locality-based multicultural values not only enriches learning materials but also has broader implications for shaping students' character, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting equitable education. In a multiethnic society such as Kayu Aro, education should not be homogeneous or centralized; rather, it should open space for local wisdom to serve as an epistemological foundation for curriculum development and instructional strategies. This is not merely a symbolic acknowledgment of diversity, but a concrete step toward establishing schools as dynamic, dialogical, and transformative intercultural spaces.

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the multiethnic community of Kayu Aro embodies a wealth of local social values such as interethnic cooperation (gotong royong), cultural tolerance, and the use of language as a social adhesive. These values not only reflect informally sustained social harmony but also hold significant potential as sources for multicultural education. In the educational context, such values can be developed as the foundation for contextual and transformative learning, as emphasized by multicultural education theorists such as Banks, Nieto, and Tilaar. However, the findings also reveal that these local values have not yet been optimally integrated into school curricula. Learning processes remain largely abstract and decontextualized, with limited emphasis on students' lived social experiences. Students' understanding of social and multicultural values is generally adequate but has not yet reached the level of critical reflection or empowered engagement in navigating diversity. These findings highlight a gap between the community's rich local potential and the educational approaches currently practiced in

schools. Integrating local values into multicultural education not only enhances contextual relevance but also strengthens students' character formation as tolerant and inclusive members of society. Such integration can only be achieved if schools consciously build bridges between social realities and classroom learning, making local cultural experiences a primary source for character development and transformative education.

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