



Implementation of Multicultural Education as a Means of Forming Characters of Tolerance and Mutual Respect

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - Multicultural education is an important issue, especially in Indonesia, which has a diversity of cultures, religions, and ethnic groups. In education, efforts to instill tolerance and mutual respect are relevant in maintaining social harmony and preventing conflicts due to differences. This study aims to analyze the implementation of multicultural education as a means to build the character of tolerance and mutual respect among high school students.

Methodology - This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. Data was collected in several senior high schools in the Wera sub-district using interview, observation, and documentation methods. Subject informants in data collection consisted of principals, teachers, and students.

Findings - The results of this study show that implementing multicultural education in high schools can shape the character of tolerance and mutual respect among students. Multicultural education can be implemented in various ways, such as through group discussions, watching movies about differences in Indonesia, and using technology. Multicultural education positively influences high school students' understanding of tolerance and mutual respect for differences in the school environment and society.

Significance - This research makes an important contribution to the world of education, especially in the application of multicultural education as a strategy to build tolerance and mutual respect among students. The findings can serve as a reference for educators, school principals, and educational policymakers in developing a more inclusive curriculum or learning program to instill character in students. This research can also inspire further research on innovative learning methods based on multicultural education at various levels of education.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is diverse, consisting of various tribes, races, languages, religions, and cultures that are very broad. With more than 300 ethnic groups and more than 700 regional languages, Indonesia faces a significant challenge in maintaining social harmony (Sembiring & Ndona, 2024). Indonesian society is known as a multicultural society because it has various religious and cultural backgrounds. Multiculturalism is a priceless asset of the nation that must be maintained and developed as a great potential (Dewi, 2020; Winata, 2020). However, if this diversity is not managed and developed correctly, it can lead to conflict among the people and threaten national unity. Multicultural education is expected to be important in forming the younger generation to respect differences and tolerance (Indriana & Marsudi, 2020; Syahputra, 2020). This concept teaches students about diversity and integrates the values of brotherhood, tolerance, respect for differences, and strengthening national unity. Amid the threat of social conflict and tension between groups, multicultural education is key to creating a generation with tolerance and respect for differences.

In recent years, the education curriculum in Indonesia has begun to incorporate multicultural values more explicitly. Prasetiawati (2017) stated that since the implementation of the 2013 curriculum, pluralism and tolerance have been emphasized and integrated into various subjects, such as Pancasila and Citizenship Education PPKn and History. Furthermore, Anggo et al. (2023) highlighted that this policy is an important step in ensuring that every student gains a broad understanding of the diversity that exists in Indonesia. This teaching is done through textbooks and extracurricular activities that aim to introduce local cultures to students. However, much remains to ensure that multicultural education is implemented evenly and effectively throughout Indonesia (Rosada et al., 2019).

Although the curriculum has provided space for multicultural education, its implementation in the field still faces many challenges. In some schools, especially those located in homogeneous areas, the values of diversity have not been fully integrated into the learning process. Simanungkalit et al. (2024) stated that homogeneous conditions can result in students lacking direct experience interacting with other cultures and diversities. In addition to homogeneous conditions, problems also arise from limited resources and teacher training, which makes teachers less able to effectively teach multiculturalism (Sarnita & Titi Andaryani, 2023; Yusuf & Wahyuni, 2024). A teacher acts as a class manager, designing and creating an inclusive, safe, and conducive learning environment for student development (Umam & Ferianto, 2023). Conditions like this ultimately result in students in these schools losing the opportunity to learn to appreciate differences from an early age.

According to Baihaqi (2021), multicultural education is an approach to education that aims to instill respect for cultural, ethnic, religious, and social background diversity in society. This education encourages understanding, appreciation, and positive interaction between different groups and instills the values of equality, justice, and tolerance. (Pratama et al., 2023). Understanding basic concepts such as multiculturalism, inclusive education, and tolerance is important for strengthening the conceptual understanding of multicultural education.

Multiculturalism is a view that recognizes and values cultural diversity in a society. Guilherme and Dietz (2015) explain that multiculturalism emphasizes that cultural differences are not obstacles but have the potential to enrich life together. In the context of education, multiculturalism demands the development of a curriculum that reflects and respects the diverse cultural identities of students. Then, tolerance in multicultural education means respecting and accepting differences in beliefs, customs, and culture. According to Verkuyten (Ashoumi & Yusuf, 2024), tolerance is an attitude to respect, appreciate, and accept diversity among individuals or groups regarding beliefs, views, and beliefs. In addition, in implementing multicultural education, the basic concept of inclusive education is important for every element to realize. Hajisoteriou and Sorkos (2023) explain that inclusive education is an educational approach that ensures that all learners, regardless of cultural background, ability, or special needs, receive equal learning opportunities (Maguvhe, 2023). Inclusive education offers adapting teaching methods for students with special needs and involving all students in group learning activities without discrimination.

The theory of social constructivism can be used to contextualize inclusive education in multicultural education. Vygotsky (Ashoumi & Yusuf, 2024) argues that learning occurs in different social and cultural contexts, which is an important foundation in multicultural education. This theory is an important foundation because it teaches that cultural diversity in the learning space can be a valuable source of learning. Students from different cultural backgrounds bring unique perspectives that can enrich discussions, increase understanding, and foster mutual respect.

Multicultural education is expected to help reduce the potential for conflict in society, which is often caused by ethnic and religious differences. By introducing students to tolerance and mutual respect, multicultural education can build a harmonious atmosphere for peaceful coexistence in the school environment and society (Asror, 2022; Hasanah & Nurqori'ah, 2022). Students are invited to understand that differences do not need to be a source of conflict but rather a potential strength for living in a diverse country (Nafi'ah, 2020; Harun et al., 2022). Instilling these multicultural values is very important, especially in areas with a history of conflict caused by cultural differences.

The role of teachers in teaching multicultural education is significant. Teachers are responsible for creating an inclusive learning environment as facilitators and models for students. Teachers must be able to teach material about cultural diversity fairly and equitably without letting their interests influence their teaching. Goddess (2020) argues that students who receive instruction on cultural differences in their entirety can behave tolerantly and respectfully regardless of their heterogeneous religious and cultural backgrounds. Teachers must also be able to facilitate discussions that respect differences of opinion in the classroom. Several studies, such as those conducted by The Untamed (2021), showed that teacher quality greatly influences the success of multicultural education in religious-based schools.

Previous research shows that multicultural education positively impacts the character of tolerance and mutual respect among students. The research conducted by Asror (2022) shows that students who learn multicultural values in Islamic boarding schools can develop attitudes of tolerance and respect for different students by prioritizing intercultural interaction and teaching universal values. They can better adapt to friends from different backgrounds and show tremendous respect for other cultures. Nurhasanah (2021) in his research, it is explained that the application of multicultural education in Islamic Religious Education learning at SDN 037 Sabang Bandung has succeeded in forming tolerant student characters through the application of inclusive, humanist, tolerance, cooperation, democratic, and ukhuwah values. Integrating multicultural values in the teaching and learning process creates a comfortable and conducive atmosphere and increases tolerance and harmony between religious communities in the school environment. Susilo et al. (2024) showed that multicultural education influences students' personality development by shaping tolerance, respect, and inclusiveness attitudes. Mukarom et al. (2024) The research results explain that a multicultural approach can strengthen attitudes of tolerance, reduce prejudice, and increase student cooperation. Another study by Maulana et al. (2024) showed that instilling multicultural values in students can shape students' national character.

In addition, multicultural education is also able to strengthen students' national identity without having to set aside their local identity. This education teaches students to love Indonesia as a country rich in cultural diversity. Students are also encouraged to continue to appreciate their cultural roots. Multicultural education does not force students to abandon their local identity; rather, it enriches them with the understanding that Indonesia is home to various cultural and religious groups. Sanur and Generous (2023) show that multicultural education plays an important role in shaping the character of the Indonesian nation by increasing understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity and producing a democratic, pluralistic, and humanist generation. Multicultural education helps students to understand and appreciate differences and strengthens a sense of pride in their cultural heritage, thus creating a harmonious and respectful society.

Although various studies have proven that multicultural education can form a character of tolerance and mutual respect, some gaps still need further exploration. Previous studies showed the effectiveness of multicultural education in shaping the character of tolerance and respect in schools and pesantren. However, these studies have not yet examined how strategies for implementing multicultural education can be adapted to different social and cultural contexts. In addition, little research still reviews the role of teachers

and the most effective learning methods in instilling multicultural values at various levels of education. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by examining the application of multicultural education in forming characters of tolerance and mutual respect in students, focusing on learning methods, the role of teachers, and school environmental factors.

Based on the explanation of the problems and previous research above, this study focuses on analyzing the implementation of multicultural education to form a character of tolerance and mutual respect among senior high school students. In addition, this study also seeks to identify challenges in implementing multicultural education in schools, especially in schools that have integrated multicultural education into the curriculum, and analyze the influence of multicultural education on forming a character of tolerance and mutual respect among students. With this study, multicultural education can be a solution to forming an attitude of tolerance and mutual respect among students towards differences both in the school environment and in society, as well as understanding the role of teachers in creating an inclusive learning environment. This study is expected to be a recommendation to strengthen multicultural education in schools through cooperation from various parties. This research can contribute to multicultural education in Indonesia because the heterogeneous conditions of society create harmony in national and state life.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used is a descriptive qualitative method. According to Rukin (2019), descriptive research is research conducted to describe or provide an overview of phenomena or symptoms that are happening when the research is conducted without giving special treatment to the research object. This research was conducted in several senior high schools in Wera District, Bima Regency. The selection of Kecamatan Wera as the research location is based on the socio-cultural diversity of the local community, which consists of various ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and customs. This diversity is a relevant context to examine the application of multicultural education in shaping the character of tolerance and mutual respect amid differences.

The research subjects who acted as informants in this study included teachers, principals, and students. Researchers took three teachers from history, Pancasila citizenship education (PPKn), and moral creed. This selection is because these subjects contain material about diversity, tolerance, and respect for differences. Then, three school principals from various schools in the Wera Sub-district are selected because they design and implement educational policies that support tolerance and character building. Finally, 15 students were taken from each school, five each. The selection of students considered cultural and social backgrounds to gain insight into how multicultural education can shape their character of tolerance that is understood and applied in everyday life. Data were collected through observation of the learning process in the classroom and school environment, interviews with principals, teachers, and students, and documentation conducted by the researcher.

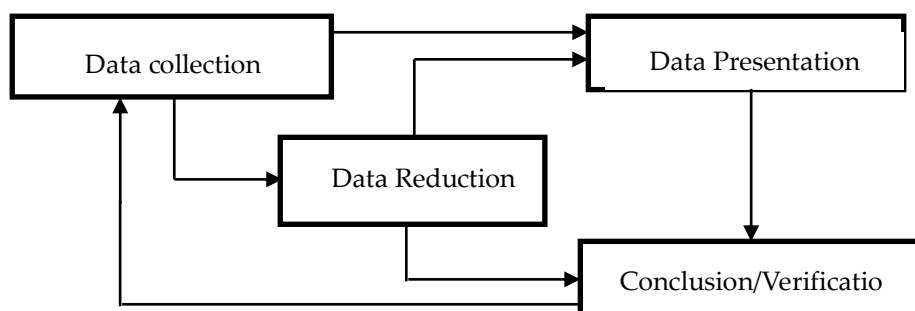


Figure 1: Miles and Huberman's Stages of Qualitative Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman model. The Miles and Huberman data analysis model was selected for this study because the researcher realizes this model's superiority in systematically and deeply processing qualitative data. Sugiyono (2018) consists of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and Verification (conclusion).

First, the researcher collected data through literature study, interviews, and observations. Literature study to find the problems to be studied. At this stage, researchers conducted a literature study to understand previous research's concepts, theories, and results related to multicultural education, tolerance, character, and mutual respect. This study aims to formulate research problems and enrich the theoretical framework used in data analysis. Then, researchers collected data by conducting interviews with subjects and informants. The researcher interviewed research informants: teachers, principals, and students in the Wera sub-district. The interviews were semi-structured to obtain in-depth information about the experience, understanding, and implementation of multicultural education in schools. The interview questions focused on teaching methods, the application of tolerance values, and the challenges and successes faced. Finally, researchers collected data from field observations. Observations were made directly in the school environment to observe social interactions between students and learning activities related to implementing multicultural education. This observation aims to adjust the interview data and get an overview of the character of tolerance and mutual respect applied in the school environment.

The second is data reduction. Researchers sort, select, and summarize all data collected in written form for analysis. The results of interviews conducted with subjects and informants are written into sentences, and the results of observations will be made in the observation table. This reduction process aims to filter data relevant to the research focus, namely the application of multicultural education in shaping the character of tolerance and mutual respect.

Third, data presentation: From the data made in the form of a script, the researcher presents the data to be processed and analyzed by the themes and objectives of the study. With the presentation of data, researchers find it easier to analyze the final results of the data collected. At this stage, researchers will analyze the relationship between the points of the findings, such as the relationship between learning methods and students' understanding of multicultural education in shaping the character of tolerance and mutual respect.

Finally, Verification (concluding). According to the Miles and Huberman model, Verification is the final stage in data analysis. The concluding qualitative research includes explaining all the subcategories of existing themes. In this last stage, researchers draw conclusions based on patterns and relationships identified regarding multicultural education to shape the character of tolerance and mutual respect. In determining the validity of the research results at this conclusion stage, researchers conducted data re-examination, peer review, and triangulation.

FINDINGS

Multicultural Education as a Pillar of Character Building of Tolerance and Mutual Respect

Multicultural education has long been recognized as one of the important pillars in building a pluralistic nation, especially in a country like Indonesia, which is rich in cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. This education is not just additional material in the curriculum but serves as a basis for building collective awareness that diversity is a wealth that must be preserved (Nafi'ah, 2020; Futaqi, 2023). As found in this study, multicultural education has successfully played an important role in forming students' characters in the three schools that were the subjects of the study.

Based on the results of interviews with the principals, it is clear that each school recognizes the importance of multicultural education as an instrument to strengthen students' sense of nationality. In an interview with the Principal of senior high school (SMA) Negeri 1 Wera, he emphasized that the diversity in his school encourages the importance of respecting differences. Programs such as cultural festivals show how multicultural education can be applied realistically in the field, not just as theoretical discourse. The Principal of SMA Negeri 1 Wera stated that multicultural education at SMA Negeri 1 Wera is implemented through various cross-cultural activities involving students from different backgrounds.

Our school consists of students with different backgrounds. We emphasize the importance of appreciating differences through programs such as cultural festivals, where students showcase their respective cultures.

The principal of Madrasah Aliyah (MA), Nurul Huda Wera, also expressed similar things. MA Nurul Hudaisone is one of the schools that focuses on instilling diverse values through a religious and cultural approach. As the Principal of MA Nurul Huda Wera stated in an interview:

Our multicultural education emphasizes that Islam teaches tolerance and diversity. We integrate religious teachings with national values to make students resilient and tolerant.

In Islam, multicultural values are also very relevant because Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of tolerance and respect for differences. This concept is part of religious education and can be integrated with national values, especially in pluralistic countries like Indonesia (Munir, 2018). Through multicultural education, students are encouraged to recognize and understand the diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions, and outlooks on life. This concept is in line with the principles of Islam, which teach that diversity is the will of Allah as stated in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13: "O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female; then We made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another." This verse shows the importance of recognizing and respecting differences without imposing one's will or beliefs on others. However, the Principal of SMA Negeri 3 Wera also recognizes the challenge of implementing multicultural education. He said,

Although multicultural education is already in the curriculum, some teachers and parents are concerned that students are losing their identity, so schools need more socialization to ensure that diversity does not diminish students' identity.

This emphasis shows that multicultural education teaches tolerance as an abstract or theoretical concept and as an important experience for students, where students can interact with different cultures directly (Spring, 2017). In this way, students know and understand diversity from theory and experience how to live in a pluralistic society.

Methods of Implementing Multicultural Education in Schools

One important aspect of this study's findings is the methods teachers use in implementing multicultural education. Learning methods are approaches used by teachers to implement learning plans (Assilmi & Setiawan, 2022; Pertiwi et al., 2022). Learning methods are designed and used by teachers to implement learning plans effectively. These methods include specific steps, strategies, and techniques to help students understand the material, achieve learning objectives, and increase their involvement and participation in the learning process (Jufri et al., 2023). By choosing the correct method, teachers can create a learning atmosphere that is comfortable, interesting, and appropriate to students' needs.

In multicultural education, learning methods play an important role in ensuring that students can understand and apply the values of respect for diversity, tolerance, and social justice (Kusnadi & Wulandari, 2024; Sutarti et al., 2024). The methods must instill an understanding of the importance of cultural, religious, linguistic, and traditional diversity in community life (Mahendra, 2023). Based on interviews with teachers, the approaches they use vary, depending on the needs and socio-cultural conditions of students in each school.

Mr Aliadin, a history teacher at senior high school (SMA) Negeri 3 Wera, uses group discussion to encourage students to collaborate across cultures. By dividing students into heterogeneous groups, the teacher encourages social interaction and opens up space for students to share perspectives from different cultural backgrounds. This method is very effective because students learn about other cultures and are invited to experience firsthand the importance of cooperation and communication in diversity. Mr. Aliadin stated

I use a group discussion approach that involves students from various backgrounds. In the tasks given, they have to work together and share experiences from their respective cultural perspectives. In addition, I sometimes invite students to watch films about tolerance and respecting differences.



Figure 2. Discussion activities in history and Students are watching the film Indonesia is not an Islamic State class at SMA Negeri 3 Wera

In addition to the group discussion method, the Akidah Akhlak teacher at Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Nurul Huda Wera uses a case study approach that focuses on intercultural conflict. Providing case studies on ethnic or religious-based social conflicts, the teacher facilitates students to think critically and find peaceful solutions (Maghfiroh & Sugiarto, 2024; Wazdy & Yahya, 2024). This approach is relevant in a society that sometimes still faces challenges in horizontal conflicts (conflicts between communities). Through this case study, students were taught that although differences can trigger conflict, dialogue, and deep understanding can be a way to create peace. In an interview, Mr. Sujasmin stated:

We want students to understand Akidah Akhlak and apply it. The case studies help them see how Islamic values, such as tolerance and justice, resolve social conflicts.

Another school in Wera District that has integrated multicultural education into the curriculum is Senior High School (SMA) Negeri 1 Wera. As a school that has adequate facilities, SMA Negeri 1 Wera has used technology-based learning media in the learning process. In observations made by researchers, one teacher who teaches Pancasila and Citizenship Education at the school uses documentary films and discussions on diversity issues in Indonesia to introduce cultural diversity. This method is beneficial, especially for students who may not have much direct experience with other cultures outside their environment. Technology allows students to access information and cultural experiences from around Indonesia without leaving the classroom (Durriyah & Zuhdi, 2018; Azhari & Fajri, 2022). In an interview, Mrs Nurhayati explained:

I often use LCD to show documentaries from various regions. This helps students get to know Indonesia's diverse cultures and build a sense of love for the homeland.



Figure 3. Students watching a documentary

The methods of implementing multicultural education from the three schools can be used effectively in forming the character of tolerance and justice in students because this method emphasizes students' direct experience in understanding diversity. With approaches such as group discussions, case studies, and technology, students are invited to think critically, explore different views, and understand the consequences of injustice or intolerance (Acar-Ciftci, 2019; Gorski & Dalton, 2020). This approach provides cognitive knowledge and can build students' emotional and social awareness of the importance of respecting differences. As a result, students can internalize the values of tolerance as part of mutually respectful human interactions while developing a fair attitude that is the basis for decision-making and conflict resolution in real life (Tolera, 2019; Habibulloh, 2024).

Table 1. Indicators of the Success of Multicultural Education Implementation in Forming Tolerance and Mutual Respect Characters

Aspect	Indicators	Observed Attitudes
Respecting Differences	Students demonstrate good attitudes towards differences and do not discriminate.	Please respect each other's opinions during discussions; no one bullies their friends.
Empathy	Able to understand conditions and willing to help friends from different backgrounds	Helping and offering assistance to friends when in trouble
Active Discussion	Active participation and respect for differences of opinion	Be polite in expressing your opinion, and do not interrupt your friends when they are talking.
Anti-discrimination	Rejecting racist attitudes and supporting tolerance in the school environment	Report unfair actions against students and teachers and participate in anti-discrimination activities.
Polite and courteous	Have a positive attitude in interacting	Use polite language when speaking
Cooperation in Diversity	Able to work in diverse groups	Active in group work regardless of differences

However, although these methods are effective, teachers face challenges in implementing multicultural education. Based on observations and interviews with these schools, several teachers stated that resources that support multicultural learning are still limited. Specific teaching materials on multicultural education are not widely available, so teachers must develop appropriate learning materials (Yuan, 2017). In addition, training for teachers in multicultural education is still minimal, which causes a gap in teacher competence in teaching the values of tolerance and justice to students.

Challenges in Implementing Multicultural Education

Although multicultural education is recognized as an important instrument in forming the character of tolerance and justice, this study also found various challenges faced in its implementation in schools. These challenges come from various parties, including parents, society, and limited resources in schools. One of the most prominent challenges is the negative perception from some parents who are worried that multicultural education can threaten the cultural or religious identity of their children. As stated by the principal of SMAN 1 Wera:

Some parents whose children go to school here are worried that their children will learn too much about other cultures or religions, which could weaken their religious beliefs.

This shows that there is still fear among parents that multicultural education can interfere with the cultural or religious identity that is embraced. Some critics of multicultural education have debated concerns like this. They see multicultural education as emphasizing too many cultural differences that can hinder the process of integration and unity, significantly hindering the formation of students' characters of tolerance

and justice. Arthur M. Schlesinger in Puwanton (2022) argued that multiculturalism's excessive emphasis on ethnic identity could threaten national unity. He called multiculturalism a cult of ethnicity, which he said ignored the vision of the unity of individuals in shaping the character of the nation. Schlesinger argued that education should strengthen social ties and national identity, not divide individuals based on ethnic differences. He feared that if the trend of recognizing differences in cultural identity continued, students would be divided and become more compartmentalized like ethnic groups, which would ultimately weaken the sense of unity among citizens.

However, this criticism can be overcome by implementing multicultural education correctly. The research by Alfindo (2023) shows that good multicultural education not only emphasizes differences but also shows how these differences can be a strength in forming national unity. Multicultural education also teaches the importance of intercultural dialogue; students are allowed to discuss and work together despite their backgrounds (Sleeter, 2018). This challenge shows that multicultural education is not just about how the material is taught in schools but also how schools and communities collaborate to create a comprehensive understanding of diversity.

Several things must be done to ensure that multicultural education continues to run appropriately and does not eliminate students' identities. First, informing parents that multicultural education is not a threat is important. Muhtarom et al. (2020) stated that to face challenges like this, schools need to conduct more intensive socialization with parents to explain that multicultural education does not replace cultural or religious identity but enriches students' insights to be more open and tolerant of differences. Second, the integration of cultural and religious values in the curriculum. Learning can be designed to instill an understanding that diversity does not mean losing identity but rather an opportunity to get to know and respect each other (Asror, 2022; Ramdhan & Arifin, 2025). Finally, support from the community and government is essential. Schools can work with local communities to provide hands-on experiences for students to stay connected to their culture and traditions. The government also has a role in creating policies supporting multicultural education without ignoring national and religious identity.

The Influence of Multicultural Education in Forming the Character of Tolerance and Mutual Respect

Despite facing various challenges, as previously explained. The findings of this study indicate that multicultural education positively influences students' character of tolerance and mutual respect. After receiving multicultural education, interviews with students showed that they felt more open and tolerant of differences. One of the students at SMAN 1 Wera, stated that he felt more comfortable socializing with friends from different backgrounds after learning about the importance of respecting differences:

I used to feel awkward hanging out with friends of different ethnicities or religions, but now I am more open that differences are not something to be avoided. I have learned a lot about respecting and being fair to my friends who have different religious cultures than me."

This positive influence is seen in terms of students' social attitudes and their sense of pride as part of a diverse nation. Students at SMA Negeri 3 Wera believe that multicultural education makes them more appreciative of the differences that exist in Indonesia. Tolerance and mutual respect must be instilled in students because students who are open to the diversity of their nation tend to be more tolerant and respectful of differences in the future (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Husna, 2024). Multicultural education also plays a role in strengthening their national identity without eliminating their cultural or religious identity. In interviews, students at MA Nurul Huda felt that multicultural education helped them understand Islamic teachings on tolerance and respecting differences. Zubaidi (2024), in his research, explains that multicultural education plays an important role in helping individuals understand and internalize Islamic values, especially regarding attitudes of tolerance and respect for differences. In Islam, tolerance and mutual respect are embedded in the central teachings, such as the recommendation to act pretty, respect fellow human beings, and uphold universal brotherhood (Badri, 2024). Thus, multicultural education not only strengthens students' identity but also makes it easier for students to understand their religious identity by emphasizing that religion and diversity can go hand in hand, especially regarding the teachings of tolerance and mutual respect for differences.

Based on observations and interviews conducted in three senior high schools in Wera District, the positive influence of multicultural education is not always easy to apply outside the school environment. Several students admitted they still face challenges applying multicultural values in their social environment. In an environment that is still strong with particular ethnic or religious sentiments, students sometimes find it difficult to apply the attitudes of tolerance and mutual respect they have learned in school (Everett, 2018; Eko & Putranto, 2019). The students' attitudes show that although multicultural education has succeeded in influencing the character of tolerance and mutual respect in schools, social challenges outside of school still affect students' attitudes and behavior.

However, collaborative efforts are needed from various elements to achieve maximum effectiveness in the implementation of multicultural education. The government, schools, and society need to work together to strengthen the implementation of multicultural education. The government must provide more comprehensive teaching materials, while schools must be more active in integrating diverse values into each subject. In addition, teacher training in multicultural teaching must also be improved. This collaboration will help ensure that multicultural education truly functions as a means of forming national character among students, creating a generation that not only values diversity but can also live in diversity harmoniously.

DISCUSSION

Multicultural education consists of two words, namely "education" and "multicultural." Education refers to the learning process that aims to develop the knowledge, skills, and character of individuals (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022). According to Baden and Saparahayuningsih (2021), education is a process that aims to form and develop the attitudes and behavior of individuals or groups through various methods such as teaching, training, and educational actions. While multicultural comes from the word multi, which means diverse, many, various, and cultural comes from the word culture, which means culture (Anwar, 2016). Thus, multicultural education can be interpreted as an educational process that recognizes, respects, and appreciates cultural diversity. Banks (2015) argues that multicultural education is an education system that provides equal opportunities to all students without distinguishing between social background, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, or religion.

Multicultural education began to develop in countries with pluralistic societies, such as the United States, around the 1960s as part of the civil rights movement to respond to discrimination and promote equality (Hidayat, 2022; Afifulloh & Hidayatullah, 2024). Multicultural education aims to reform the school system so that all students can acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse society (Banks, 2015; Wulandari, 2020). This education emphasizes the importance of equal access to education for all groups, including those with different racial, ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds (Anwar, 2022; Khair et al., 2024). Multicultural education will create an attitude of tolerance, mutual respect, and equality among various community groups.

According to Tri Astutik Haryati (Yuliana, 2023), The objectives of multicultural education are divided into three aspects: attitude, knowledge, and learning. In attitude, this education aims to build cultural awareness, increase tolerance, appreciate cultural identity, and develop skills in preventing and resolving conflicts (Huda et al., 2023). In terms of knowledge, the goal is to understand other languages and cultures, analyze cultural behavior, and increase awareness of various cultural perspectives (Banks, 2015a). Meanwhile, learning focuses on reducing stereotypes and misunderstandings, providing intercultural communication strategies, developing interpersonal skills, providing evaluation techniques, and explaining societal cultural dynamics (Noel, 2017).

Multicultural Education as a Pillar of Character Building of Tolerance and Mutual Respect

Multicultural education is central to forming a character of tolerance and mutual respect amidst social diversity. (Albina, 2024). In a multicultural environment, education is aimed at transferring knowledge and building awareness of the importance of respecting differences. (Bakhov et al., 2024; Oubkkou, 2025). By understanding different cultures, religions, and customs, students can develop inclusive attitudes that are the basis of a harmonious social life. The character of tolerance is formed not only through theory but also

through direct interaction between individuals with diverse backgrounds.(Janmaat, 2022; Côté et al., 2015). Therefore, multicultural education must be instilled early so future generations can grow as individuals who value diversity.

Methods of Implementing Multicultural Education in Schools

Various effective methods can be used to implement multicultural education in schools. One of the main methods is integration in the curriculum, where materials on cultural diversity, history, and tolerance values are included in subjects such as civic education, sociology, history, faith, and morals.

In addition, interactive learning methods such as group discussions, case studies, watching documentaries about culture, simulations, and role-playing can improve students' understanding of multicultural values. Inclusive extracurricular activities, such as cultural festivals and student exchanges, can also be a means to introduce students to diversity directly. Schools must also create an environment that supports diversity by encouraging inclusive attitudes and providing space for each individual to express their cultural identity (Samuels, 2014; Istianah et al., 2024). Teachers, as agents of change, must be examples in implementing attitudes of tolerance and mutual respect.

Challenges in Implementing Multicultural Education

Although multicultural education has many benefits, its implementation has some challenges. Imbar and Mesra (2024) explain that the challenges of multicultural education include the lack of understanding and awareness of the importance of multicultural education among teachers and the community. Not all teachers have sufficient understanding of how to teach diversity effectively. In addition, according to Hendyawati et al. (2025), structural barriers in the education system, such as a curriculum that still does not accommodate multicultural values or a lack of diversity-based learning materials, are present. Schools in homogeneous environments can also face difficulties in introducing the concept of diversity directly. Another challenge is the existence of prejudice and stereotypes still strong in society, which can affect how students understand diversity (Lensa et al., 2025). Therefore, support is needed from all parties, including the government, schools, families, and communities, to ensure that multicultural education can be implemented optimally.

The Influence of Multicultural Education in Forming Characters of Tolerance and Mutual Respect

Multicultural education has a significant influence in shaping the character of students. By understanding various cultures, ethnicities, and religions, students can develop an attitude of mutual respect and avoid negative prejudice against other groups (Nakaya, 2018). Multicultural education also helps reduce social conflict by instilling values of peace and togetherness. Students who receive multicultural education tend to have more open and critical thinking, so they are better prepared to live in a diverse society (Handayani et al., 2024; Anzalman et al., 2025). Empathy is also increasingly developing, which contributes to building a harmonious social environment. In the long run, multicultural education will form a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also has an inclusive and tolerant personality. Thus, they can become agents of change that create a more peaceful and harmonious society.

The Importance of This Research for the Future of Education

Research on multicultural education plays a vital role in building a more inclusive and relevant education system. With increasing global interaction and diversity in society, multicultural education is urgently needed so that future generations can adapt to a more complex social environment. This research can help develop more effective learning strategies that instill academic values and build tolerant and inclusive characters. In addition, this research can provide policy recommendations for the government and educational institutions to strengthen the multicultural education system that can be applied at various school levels. In the future, the results of this research will also contribute to reducing social conflicts caused by ignorance or prejudice against other groups. By equipping students with a broad understanding of diversity, they will be better prepared to become fair and wise leaders in facing the challenges of an increasingly complex world.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and findings of the research that have been presented, the implementation of multicultural education in senior high schools has an important role in forming a character of tolerance and mutual respect among students. Students become more open and respect differences both in the school environment and in society. Multicultural education encourages students to understand, accept, and appreciate their environment's diversity of cultures, religions, ethnicities, and social backgrounds. Efforts to integrate multicultural values in the curriculum, interactive learning, and collaboration-based activities allow students to develop an attitude of tolerance and respect for differences. Implementing multicultural education in senior high schools can be done by creating group discussions and case studies and using technology such as watching documentaries. Although multicultural education has a positive influence, the implementation of multicultural education also faces challenges, such as the lack of teacher understanding of the concept of multicultural education, limited relevant learning materials or resources, and the existence of prejudice and discrimination that still exist in society can affect the effectiveness of the implementation of multicultural education. Therefore, in implementing multicultural education among senior high school students to form a character of tolerance and mutual respect for differences, there needs to be a collaborative effort from various parties, such as teachers, schools, and policymakers.

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