

Multicultural Education as a Strategy to Strengthen Tolerance and National Character: The Role of Policy, Implementation, and The Challenges of Digital Globalization

**Sherly Lisfitriani¹, Nanda Jaka Putra Pratama¹, Derna Wati¹, Silvi Yulia Tantri¹,
Asniti Karni¹, Dayun Riyadi¹**

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia

Corresponding author e-mail: sherlylisfitriani23@gmail.com

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Abstract: Multicultural education has a strategic role in shaping the character of a nation that is tolerant, inclusive, and able to live in harmony in the midst of the diversity that exists in Indonesia. This research aims to analyze how multicultural education can be optimized through three main aspects: the role of policies and curriculum, implementation practices in boarding schools, and the challenges of digital technology globalization. This research method uses a literature study approach, data is collected through books, journal articles, policy documents, and academic publication data. Data was analyzed using content analysis techniques by examining various scientific sources relevant to education policies, multicultural implementation models, and digital social dynamics in society. The results of the study show that national policies and curricula play an important role as a foundation for integrating multicultural values, while schools and Islamic boarding schools are the main focus in getting used to the values of tolerance and learning practices. However, the era of digital globalization has created new challenges that can threaten the formation of a tolerant character of students. Therefore, strengthening multicultural education needs to be accompanied by critical digital literacy and collaboration between institutions to be able to create an educational ecosystem that is adaptive to the times. This research emphasizes that multicultural education that is integrated with educational policies, practices, and digital literacy is an effective strategy in strengthening the nation's character in the global and digital era.

Keywords: Challenges of Digital Globalization, Multicultural Education, Tolerance and National Character

Introduction

Indonesia is a country rich in diversity, encompassing ethnicity, culture, language, race, and religion. This diversity can serve as both a strength and a challenge in building a harmonious national life (Nurcahyono, 2018). However, if not managed wisely through an education system responsive to multicultural realities, diversity also has the potential to trigger social conflict (Sanur & Dermawan, 2023).

Education plays a strategic role in shaping citizens who can coexist peacefully amid different backgrounds. Unfortunately, phenomena such as intolerance, identity exclusivism, and the erosion of national values indicate that education has not fully succeeded in instilling strong and inclusive character values (Afifah et al., 2021). Therefore, this study emphasizes the need for more contextual multicultural education practices, supported by teachers who exemplify tolerance and inclusiveness, as well as social environments that encourage acceptance of differences. In addition, curriculum, policy is needed as a foundation for integrating values, ensuring that multicultural education is not merely theoretical discourse but a tangible strategy for building a tolerant, inclusive, and resilient national character.

National policies and curricula serve as the main foundation for integrating multicultural values into learning practices, enabling the systematic achievement of character competencies and tolerance (Wahyudin & Subkha, 2024). With coherent policies and curricula, education can produce not only academically accomplished students but also individuals of character who are able to live harmoniously in a pluralistic society.

Multicultural education emerges as a relevant approach to address these challenges. By fostering respect for diversity, students are encouraged to understand the importance of tolerance, empathy, and solidarity in communal life (Dewi & Mardiana, 2023). This approach is not limited to cognitive aspects but also encompasses affective and social dimensions, teaching human values in depth.

In practice, multicultural education can be implemented through inclusive curricula, participatory learning methods, and school environments that embrace diversity. Teachers, as the primary facilitators of learning, play a crucial role in nurturing students' multicultural attitudes. School can integrate multicultural into materials, teaching strategies, and inclusive school culture. Meanwhile, boarding school contribute by strengthening morals, promoting religious moderation, and fostering socio-religious practices that encourage tolerance (Fadhilah, 2025; Susanto & Abadi, 2016).

At the same time, globalization and the rise of the information society present both opportunities and threats. Digital technology enables cross-cultural access but also accelerates the spread of disinformation, hate speech, and polarization, which can undermine tolerance if not accompanied by critical education (Jongen, 2018). Thus, strengthening multicultural education today must include digital literacy and the development of critical thinking skills, enabling students to evaluate information and interact responsibly in technology-dominated digital spaces (Nugroho & Nasionalita, 2020). Moreover, digital technology can serve as an innovative strategy to expand the reach of multicultural education. Online learning platforms, social media, and educational applications can be utilized to introduce diversity values to younger generations in interactive and contextual ways. Technology also facilitates cross-

cultural exchanges, allow students to learn directly from diverse practices across regions and religious (Latifah, 2024).

Finally, continuous evaluation of multicultural education implementation is essential. Such evaluation should assess not only cognitive aspect but also students' attitudes and behaviors in daily life. A comprehensive evaluation mechanism ensures that weaknesses are promptly addressed and good practices reinforced. This will guarantee that multicultural education truly functions as a means of shaping an inclusive, tolerant, and globally competitive national character.

Based on the background above, the paper examines multicultural education as a strategy to strengthen tolerance and national character through three main aspects: (1) the role of policies and curriculum, (2) implementation practices in schools and Islamic boarding schools, and (3) the challenges and opportunities posed by digital globalization. The purpose of this research is to formulate recommendations for educational policies and practices that are contextual and guided by digital literacy, thereby strengthening tolerance and supporting national character development.

B. Methods

This study employs a literature review method, a research approach that focuses on searching, collecting, and analyzing written sources relevant to the research topic. The use of this method is considered appropriate and necessary to strengthen the manuscript, as the object of study involves social and educational phenomena widely documented in books, scientific journals, academic articles, and research reports. A literature review enables researchers to gain a comprehensive scientific understanding of the dynamics of multicultural education in Indonesia, particularly its role as a means of strengthening tolerance and national character, without conducting direct field observations (Sugiyono, 2023).

The analytical framework applied in this study refers to the theory of multicultural education developed by James A. Banks, who identifies five key dimensions: Content integration, the knowledge construction process, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and the empowerment of school culture (Banks, 2019). These dimensions serve as guidelines for examining literature and educational practices in Indonesia, particularly in assessing how schools, teachers, and government policies contribute to instilling tolerance and shaping national character. By employing Bank's theory, this study not only describes the phenomenon of multicultural education but also analyzes its function as a means of social transformation that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusivity.

The research process was conducted through several systematic stages. First, sources were identified by selecting relevant primary and secondary literature, including books on the history of Islamic education, scientific journals, academic articles, and

scholarly works discussing the integration of multicultural values in education. Selection criteria included scientific quality, author credibility, and relevance to the research focus. Second, data collection was carried out through careful reading, note-taking, and extraction of key information related to multicultural education, the role of schools, government policies, and learning practices that emphasize tolerance, empathy, and solidarity. Third, content analysis was employed as the main technique, focusing on interpreting the meaning of texts and documents. Data were categorized into themes such as the concept of multicultural education, the role of schools in fostering tolerance, government support for multicultural education, and its implications for national character formation.

The analysis was conducted in depth to identify developmental patterns, differences in educational orientations, and historical factors influencing changes across different periods. This technique was chosen because it allows researchers to uncover the meaning embedded in text and provide interpretations aligned with historical and social contexts ((Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., & Saldana, 2020). To strengthen the validity of findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing information from different author and types of literature. This technique enhances credibility and accuracy by verifying data through multiple perspectives. Validity was further reinforced by prioritizing credible and up-to date scientific sources, ensuring that the overall analysis is an academically reliable. Through this systematic and rigorous literature review, the study produces a comprehensive understanding of the role of multicultural education in strengthening tolerance and national character. It also provides a strong scientific foundation for analyzing the transformation of multicultural education within Indonesia's social and national context.

C. Results and Discussion

The Role of Policies and Curriculum in Strengthening Multicultural Education

The results of this research through a literature study show that multicultural education in Indonesia can develop as a form of reaction to the reality of a pluralistic society. They are of the view that cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity is not only a social fact, but also a challenge that must be addressed through the education system. Education in this context is positioned as an infrastructure means of strengthening tolerance and national character through the integration of values of togetherness, appreciation of diversity, and habituation of inclusive attitudes in boarding schools (Maulana et al., 2024).

The development of multicultural education can be influenced by government policies, especially through the curriculum and the existence of religious moderation programs that can emphasize the importance of inclusiveness and tolerance in the life of the nation. This policy is not only oriented towards strengthening the cognitive aspects of students, but also emphasizes character formation that can respect cultural,

religious, linguistic, and ethnic diversity. The implementation of the independent curriculum can provide space for school institutions and teachers to integrate multicultural values into extracurricular subjects and activities, so that students are accustomed to interacting with a plural and democratic atmosphere. This is in line with research conducted by (Nurcahyono, 2018), shows that multicultural education in Indonesia can develop through three phases: the colonial period with seagrass, the new order period with melting pot, and also in the reform period with the emphasis on pluralism. This synchronous and diachronic analysis can confirm that this multicultural education is not a new phenomenon, but rather a result obtained from the nation's long journey in responding to social diversity.

In addition, the development of multicultural values is also seen in aspects of religious tolerance, and disciplinary characters such as justice, empathy, solidarity, and openness to global culture. Through multicultural education, students are encouraged to understand that existing diversity is a reality that must be appreciated and cannot be avoided. A disciplined attitude based on fairness and empathy can shape a generation that is able to place itself proportionately in heterogeneous social interactions. In addition, government encouragement of teachers and schools through training and funding can make multicultural education more integrated into the national education system. These findings are in line with research that states that multicultural education strategies in primary schools are able to strengthen tolerance attitudes from an early age (Hidayat & Nuraini, 2025).

Furthermore, to strengthen tolerance, it is necessary to implement multicultural education learning in schools, this education can start from elementary school education so that teachers can cultivate and habituate a deeper tolerance attitude to students. To foster an attitude of tolerance as can be done through the learning methods used. The application of methods can certainly emphasize cross-cultural interaction, so that students can get used to appreciating and respecting differences that exist from an early age (Dewi & Mardiana, 2023). This research confirms that multicultural education can be one of the most effective strategies to reduce discrimination and intolerance in the school environment. Therefore, it is necessary to form a national character.

The formation of national character must be carried out systematically and continuously through multicultural education. Education is not enough if it only conveys cognitive knowledge about diversity. Therefore, this multicultural education is of course also directed to be able to internalize values such as justice, solidarity, and empathy in the daily lives of students. These values also need to be instilled through a consistent curriculum, learning methods, and extracurricular activities, so that students can get used to manifesting their inclusive attitude and social interaction (Widjanarko et al., 2025). This research explains that social differences in Indonesia, both in terms of ethnicity, religion, and culture, can only be managed peacefully through education that emphasizes harmony and respect for existing diversity. Thus,

diversity is not only a moral dialogue, but can also be the foundation of a stronger national character. This multicultural education can also be seen as one of the national policy instruments that can form a generation of a nation that is democratic, tolerant, foreign-powered, and maintains unity and unity. In addition, after doing and striving to build character in students, it is also necessary to strengthen the character itself. This is confirmed by research conducted by (Usmawati et al., 2025), which emphasizes that multicultural education has a very important role in strengthening the character of Pancasila students, namely a generation that is not only globally competitive but also can hold firmly to national values.

Multicultural education can be seen as one of the bridges that can connect the reality of the diversity of society in Indonesia with the hope of forming tolerant, inclusive, and democratic citizens. Through the school curriculum that emphasizes the value of tolerance, respect for differences, and democratic attitudes, students can be trained to get used to living in plural situations (Usmawati et al., 2025) and be able to interact healthily with various cultural, religious, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, if students cannot get used to living with plural situations and are unable to interact healthily with existing diversity, then it is possible that there will be a social conflict that can cause division. Therefore, with this urgency, multicultural education can be a strategy that can unite the community. This is in line with research conducted by (Mappaenre et al., 2023), this study highlights that the urgency that occurs in multicultural education in Indonesia is not only limited to academic dialogue, but also as a real need to maintain social stability in the midst of a very diverse society. This research sees that ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity is a gift that should be able to enrich the nation's identity. However, if this diversity is not managed wisely, it can potentially become a source of conflict and division. Therefore, multicultural education can be seen as one of the national policy instruments that must be systematically designed in order to establish a collective awareness related to the importance of tolerance and social harmony.

In this case, as explained earlier, cultural literacy can be one of the important aspects that must be strengthened. Cultural literacy is not only about getting to know the traditions and habits of other communities, but also can teach students to be able to respect and appreciate existing differences as a form of part of living together. With cultural literacy, students can foster empathy, openness, and the ability to interact healthily with groups with different backgrounds. In addition, inclusive learning methods are also the main focus. Learning should be designed for all students regardless of their social, religious, or ethnic background, this is so that they feel valued and involved so that they get a decent education. This inclusive learning method can also be realized through cross-cultural discussions, heterogeneous group work, and extracurricular activities that can foster an attitude of solidarity and togetherness.

Furthermore, this study also highlights the importance of strengthening national identity. A strong identity can make the relationship closer despite differences. So, students will not only feel part of a small group, but will also feel that they are part of the Indonesian nation as a whole. Related to this, multicultural education functions as a means that can instill inclusive national values, so that the younger generation is able to grow with the awareness that existing diversity is not a threat but can be a strength. Thus, multicultural education must be positioned as a national strategic policy. Through cultural literacy, inclusive learning methods, and strengthening national identity, education can be the foundation in preventing social conflicts while forming a tolerant, democratic, and harmonious society.

The Practice of Multicultural Education in Schools and Islamic Boarding Schools

Results Furthermore, this literature research proves that the practice of multicultural education is not only theoretical, but can also be applied in students' daily lives. Schools and Islamic boarding schools can be social laboratories where the values of togetherness and inclusivity can be instilled consistently. Through the habit of an inclusive attitude, students are trained to accept differences as part of a shared life. This is in line with the findings made by (Muhammad et al., 2022), which emphasizes that boarding school not only function as religious educational institutions, but also as social spaces that can foster multicultural values in real form. With different cultural backgrounds, languages, and traditions, it will create intense and continuous interactions. This interaction will foster a culture of tolerance, where students will be accustomed to accepting differences as ordinary things, and can build a strong attitude of manners and solidarity in living together, thus, this research shows that boarding school have a real contribution in maintaining diversity while strengthening the character of the nation. Boarding school is not only limited to traditional educational institutions, but also as a center that can form multicultural values that are able to create a tolerant, inclusive, and foreign generation.

In addition, the success of multicultural education also depends heavily on the role of teachers as facilitators and also as agents of change. Teachers who can consistently integrate multicultural values in learning will be able to create a democratic classroom atmosphere, where students will get used to thinking, respect differences, and build solidarity both across religions and cultures. Collaboration between schools and communities in cultural-based activities, such as interfaith dialogue, and art festivals, will be able to foster a collective awareness of the importance of tolerance and togetherness (Dewi & Mardiana, 2023).

Teachers as the main actors in the success of multicultural education not only function as a delivery of subject matter, but also as facilitators who can guide students to understand and appreciate the cultural, religious and ethnic diversity that exists in Indonesia. By providing students with knowledge about History, culture, and the

contributions of various ethnic groups. With that, teachers help students to realize that diversity is an integral part of the nation's identity.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes that teachers have a responsibility to the morals of students by instilling the values of tolerance, justice, and solidarity in the learning process. Teachers play a role in building students' positive self-concepts. By providing free space for each student to express their respective cultural identity, teachers can help students feel valued and accepted. This positive self-concept is important so that students are able to interact with various backgrounds without feeling threatened or inferior. Multicultural education that is well facilitated by teachers will be able to give birth to a generation that is confident, open, and ready to face the reality of a pluralistic society.

Teachers must also be able to be a real example for students in a tolerant and inclusive attitude. The example exemplified by teachers in the form of respecting differences, being fair, and building healthy communication will be a direct example for every student, so that multicultural values are not only taught theoretically, but also shown through the teacher's daily behavior in the classroom and outside the classroom. Thus, it means that teachers can be a link between multicultural theory and real practice in schools, as well as agents of change that can shape students to have a tolerant, inclusive, and national attitude. Without the involvement of teachers, multicultural education will be difficult to implement effectively in the education system. Meanwhile, multicultural education also has an important role in preventing social conflicts that occur both in the school environment and the community (Nasution & Albina, 2024). With learning that can instill the values of togetherness, justice, and appreciation for differences, students are accustomed to resolving differences of opinion through deliberation. Multicultural education has a significant impact on increasing tolerance for diverse students, thereby reducing the potential for intergroup mortality. This means that multicultural education not only shapes individual character, but also functions as a social mechanism that can maintain harmony in a developed society (Oktavia & Torro, 2021).

Furthermore, the research (Lestari & Sa'adah, 2021), emphasizing that multicultural education also has a strategic role in reducing the potential for social conflicts that often arise as a result of intolerance towards existing diversity. They see that a pluralistic Indonesian society needs an educational approach that is not only oriented to cognitive aspects, but also able to form social attitudes that respect differences, multicultural education in this case can be seen as one of the solutions that can instill the value of tolerance, respect for cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, and be able to accustom students to dialogue in a healthy manner in dealing with differences that exists.

Furthermore, social conflicts that occur due to intolerance can be destructive if not handled properly. Multicultural education emerged as a form of preventive

mechanism that can equip students with social skills such as empathy, deliberation, and solidarity. With the habituation of these values, students will get used to resolving differences of opinion through peaceful ways without violence and identity exclusivism. Therefore, the importance of intercultural dialogue that can be part of multicultural education practices. This dialogue not only brings together students from different backgrounds, but also builds a collective awareness in each student that diversity is a reality that must be accepted and maintained. Through dialogue, learners must learn to understand the perspectives of others, reduce prejudices, and strengthen a sense of community. Therefore, multicultural education is not only a learning strategy, but also a process of social transformation. By instilling the value of tolerance, respect for differences, and habituating intercultural dialogue, multicultural education can prevent destructive conflicts while strengthening national unity in the midst of existing diversity.

Based on the results that have been described, the researcher draws the conclusion that the practice of implementing multicultural education is a key element that can form social cohesion, an inclusive school climate, and a tolerant national character. Thus, multiculturalism is not just a learning strategy, but also a process of social transformation that serves to maintain the harmony of diverse societies.

The Challenges of Globalization and Digital Technology in Strengthening Tolerance and National Character

The results of the study also show that multicultural education is greatly influenced by global culture and cannot be separated from the increasingly intensive influence of international culture. Cultural shifts, access to international literature, and the integration of digital technologies are the initial foundations for the development of new multicultural insights in the world of education (Pohan et al., 2024). This process can create a complex, open, and adaptive education with the times. Meanwhile, research conducted by us, provides a broader picture of multicultural education in the digital era can be a strategic means in strengthening national character. This study emphasizes that technological extracurricular activities, such as virtual cultural festivals, online discussions between schools, and cross-regional collaboration through digital platforms, are not just additional activities, but are one of the effective learning media to instill the value of tolerance and togetherness. Through this activity, students will be accustomed to interacting with peers from different cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, so as to create real experiences that can appreciate diversity (Tarik & Iksan, 2025).

On the other hand, digital technology also functions as a catalyst in accelerating the internalization of multicultural values. With the use of digital media, the learning process is no longer limited to physical classrooms, but also extends to virtual spaces that allow cross-school and even cross-country interactions. This can certainly enrich

students' insights related to global diversity while strengthening their local identity. In a sense, learners learn to balance global skills with national cultural roots.

Digital-based multicultural education can also train 21st-century skills, such as cross-cultural communication, virtual collaboration, digital literacy, and the ability to adapt to technological changes. This skill is very relevant to the needs of the young generation living in the midst of globalization. By integrating multicultural values into technology-based activities, students not only become tolerant individuals, but also a generation that is ready to compete at the global level.

Digital technology has a strategic role in strengthening multicultural education, especially in building tolerance among students. This interactive-based learning media can utilize digital technology that allows the creation of a more dynamic learning space, where students from cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds can collaborate directly. This collaboration is not only limited to expanding students' horizons related to diversity, but can also train students to better appreciate differences as part of the learning process.

Digital technology also functions as a link between local values and a global perspective so that students not only learn about other cultures, but can also understand and love their own local culture. This can create a balance between national identity and international skills needed in today's era of globalization. By utilizing interactive learning media, multicultural education can be applied more effectively and more effectively, so that Indonesia's young generation grows up as inclusive, democratic, and rooted in local values.

Furthermore, complexity is born because students are required to be able to integrate local values with a global perspective, thereby creating a balance between national identity and international skills. The openness shown is an attitude that is able to accept cultural differences as part of the learning process, in addition to the adaptation seen from education that is able to adapt to the rapid development of digital technology day by day (Habibi et al. 2023). Thus, multicultural education can be an important instrument in shaping a generation capable of facing global challenges without losing its local cultural roots. This is in line with the findings that multicultural education in the digital era is able to strengthen students' friendships, character and global skills (Pohan et al., 2024).

Based on the description that has been submitted, the researcher highlights that multicultural education in the era of globalization is an environment that can provide a balance between the preservation of local values and the acceleration of global competence, which ultimately has an important role in shaping the character of a resilient, tolerant, and foreign nation.

From the three discussions that have been presented, the researchers' findings are in line with the theoretical framework of the Bank (2019). The dimension of content integration can be seen in the curriculum that is able to create space for local cultural diversity, the process of knowledge construction can be seen in learning that encourages students to understand plural social realities, the pedagogy of equality that can be realized through inclusive learning methods that are tailored to the background of students, the reduction of prejudice is carried out through cross-cultural interaction both in school institutions and Islamic boarding schools, and school culture empowerment as reflected in religious moderation policies and community-based extracurricular activities. Thus, Banks' theory can strengthen the results of this research that multicultural education is not only a learning strategy, but also an instrument of social transformation that can shape the character of a tolerant and democratic nation (Wahyudin & Subkha, 2024).

Overall, the results of this study emphasize that multicultural education in Indonesia is an important foundation in forming a tolerant, democratic, and nationalist society. This can be achieved through government policy support, the role of teachers as agents of change, and community involvement. In addition, multicultural education can also integrate values such as togetherness, justice, empathy, and solidarity into students' lives. And finally, the development of digital technology can enrich multicultural insights and influence local culture, so that education is not only relevant in the local context, but also adaptive to global challenges. Thus, multicultural education can be seen as one of the sustainable strategies that can strengthen the unity of the nation and prepare a generation that is ready to face the dynamics of the modern world.

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that multicultural education in Indonesia has a strategic role in shaping a tolerant, democratic, and national society. This education not only functions as a means of fostering cognitive aspects, but also as an instrument to form an inclusive attitude, dignity towards welfare, and social solidarity. Policy support provided by the government through curriculum programs and religious moderation can strengthen the integration of multicultural values in the national education system. Meanwhile, the role of teachers and schools is also an important agent in instilling the value of tolerance from an early age. In addition, the influence of global culture and the increasing development of technology can make multicultural education more relevant in facing the challenges of the times, so as to be able to prepare a generation that is adaptive, open, and religious. Thus, multicultural education can be expanded as one of the sustainable strategies that can strengthen national unity and maintain social harmony, as well as be able to form the character of a generation that is ready to face the dynamics of the modern world.

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