

PREVENTING INTOLERANCE FROM AN EARLY AGE: THE ROLE OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN PRESCHOOL

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Abstract: Indonesia is a country with diverse cultures, customs, languages, and religions. This presents a great potential to become a nation rich in inclusive and multicultural values. However, it can often backfire if we fail to cultivate this diversity as a source of pride. It can even become the seed of radicalism or fanaticism among certain groups if it is not nurtured from an early age. Therefore, it is crucial to teach young children about inclusive and multicultural education—the meaning of cultural, customary, linguistic, and even religious diversity within a given context. This article was researched through observations of early childhood education environments, literature studies, and documentation. Through this article, it is hoped that all of us, especially those in early childhood education settings, will understand the importance of inclusive and multicultural education, which must be implemented from an early age to reduce intolerance.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Multicultural, Early Childhood Education, Intolerance from an Early Age.*

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Introduction

Indonesia is a country with a highly complex ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. In this multicultural social context, education plays a crucial role in internalizing the values of tolerance, respect for differences, and developing children's character from an early age. Early childhood education (PAUD) serves not only as a foundation for cognitive, emotional, and social development but also as a platform for instilling the values of togetherness in diversity (Alfiya et al., 2025). Historically, multicultural education is considered to have emerged in America in the 1980s. The emergence of multicultural educational institutions is the result of the thoughts and concrete work of progressive education activists who sought a renewed perspective on education. One figure considered a pioneer of multicultural education is James Banks, who is considered the figure who refined the concept of multicultural education into educational equality. This idea of multicultural education ultimately became a global concept and commitment that was universally adopted, including in Indonesia. Paradoxically, multicultural education is seen as highly relevant and appropriate to the conditions of Indonesian society, which is very diverse in culture, religion, ethnicity, tribe, and customs. However, in reality, education in Indonesia still displays distinctions (differences) that are still

"distance" (in terms of equality and learning opportunities for every citizen) in practice. (Hidayat, 2015)

According to (Alfiya et al., 2025), why multicultural education needs to be provided from an early age, because children need to be introduced to the reality of a pluralistic society so that they can develop social sensitivity, empathy, and the ability to interact across cultures and religions.

According to (Ulfadhilah et al., 2025), a curriculum designed with a multicultural approach can provide children with the opportunity to learn about diversity directly through interactive activities, stories, and games that encourage the instilling of values such as empathy, openness, and tolerance. Furthermore, the role of educators is crucial in creating a safe and inclusive learning environment, where all children's voices and identities are valued. Thus, early childhood education (PAUD) that implements multicultural education not only functions in developing children's cognitive aspects but also makes a significant contribution to preventing radicalization and extremism at an early age. Multicultural education in PAUD environments is an approach whose importance is increasingly recognized in dealing with the social dynamics of diverse communities. In this era of globalization, children are exposed to various different cultures, values, and traditions from an early age.

Furthermore, globalization and technological developments increasingly demand education that is responsive to diversity. Children are exposed to global culture through digital media from an early age, requiring education that can guide these interactions in a healthy and ethical manner. In this regard, multicultural Islamic education in early childhood education (PAUD) can be an effective strategy for building a strong sense of identity in children while fostering an openness to differences (Alfiya et al., 2025).

This approach should be an integral part of a character-oriented education system, to ensure that children not only grow into intelligent individuals but also become part of a peaceful and harmonious society in the future. Multicultural education in the environment Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an approach that is increasingly recognized for its importance in addressing the social dynamics of diverse communities. Through a curriculum that integrates multicultural elements, children can learn to appreciate differences, whether in terms of ethnicity, religion, or culture (Ulfadhilah et al., 2025).

Objectives and Methodology

In this study, we employ a qualitative approach and descriptive methods through a literature review. The literature review process involves researching and processing information from various published scientific sources. The researchers utilized data extracted from the Google Scholar database and journals identified by Sinta. The tools used in this study include journals relevant to the existing literature review. In this literature review, we will analyze approximately 10 sources. The articles studied were published within the last 5 to 10 years.

Result and Discussions

Multiculturalism is cultural diversity. Etymologically, the term multiculturalism is derived from the words multi (many), kultur (culture), and isme (school of thought). Essentially, the word multiculturalism embodies the recognition of the dignity of human beings living in communities with their own unique cultures.

Meanwhile, culture itself cannot be separated from four important themes, namely: religion (stream), race (ethnicity), tribe, and culture.² This means that the discussion of multiculturalism includes not only cultural differences, but also includes religious, racial, and ethnic diversity. Multicultural education can be understood as education for people of color. That is, education in which there are various kinds of people, or education aimed at seeing human diversity. Thus, multicultural education is an educational model offering that carries an ideology that understands, respects, and values the dignity and worth of humans wherever they are and wherever they come from (economically, socially, culturally, ethnically, linguistically, beliefs, or religion, and country).

Inclusive education is an educational approach that involves all children, including those with special needs, learning together in a shared environment, accommodating the diverse interests, abilities, and needs of each individual. The goal is to create an equitable, safe, and supportive education system where all learners participate and achieve optimally without exception.

According to Tremblay et al. (2016), multicultural education is inherently everyone's dream due to its inevitability as a concept of "humanizing humanity." Humans who recognize their humanity

will undoubtedly need this type of multicultural education, embracing social justice, deliberation, human rights, and political, moral, educational, and religious issues.

Inclusive and multicultural education have nearly the same etymological meaning. The only difference lies in their objectives. Multicultural education focuses on diversity, while inclusion focuses more on the subjects of education—students with more "special" circumstances than other students.

James A. Banks provides a definition of multicultural education in his book

Multicultural Education:

Multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school. (Banks, 1993: 1)(Fatimah & Nuryaningsih, 2018)

The Concept of Multicultural Education in the World of Early Childhood Education

Inclusive and multicultural education share the same concept: reducing intolerance from an early age. Indonesia is a country with diverse cultures, customs, and religions. Furthermore, multicultural and inclusive education aims to instill in children a sense of respect for others, regardless of cultural, religious, or physical differences. This educational concept aims to provide all children with the opportunity to learn together without fear of discrimination.

According to James Bank (Tremblay et al., 2016), multicultural education is education for people of color. James Bank's opinion, complemented by Paulo Freire, must be able to create an educated and well-educated society, not one that glorifies social prestige as a result of wealth and prosperity.

The results and discussion section contains the research findings and their scientific discussion. Describe the scientific findings obtained from the research conducted, but they must be supported by adequate data.

Multicultural education needs to be implemented from an early age. The hope is that children will appreciate differences as they grow into adulthood. This will open their minds to the diversity of customs, cultures, and religions in the world. Indeed, early childhood is a period of time when children can quickly grasp the responses given by their teachers.

The Goal of Multicultural Education

According to (Tremblay et al., 2016) The purpose of multicultural education in the National Education System Law is: to add an attitude of sympathy, respect, appreciation and empathy towards adherents of different religions and cultures. The main purpose of multicultural education is to instill an attitude of sympathy, respect, appreciation and empathy towards adherents of different religions and cultures. Gorski stated that multicultural education aims to facilitate learning experiences that enable students to achieve maximum potential as students and as active individuals and have high social sensitivity at the local, national and global levels and to realize a strong, advanced, just, prosperous and prosperous nation without ethnic, racial, religious and cultural differences. With the

spirit of building strength in all sectors so that shared prosperity is achieved, having high self-esteem and being respected by other nations.

Based on the description by (Fatimah & Nuryaningsih, 2018) Multicultural education is an idea or concept that aims to recognize, appreciate, and integrate cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, and social background diversity in the learning process. Multicultural education strives to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to develop their academic and social potential without discrimination, by utilizing diversity as a source of strength to create a harmonious environment. Multicultural education also aims to foster tolerance, awareness, and respect for human rights and the values contained therein. So that it can foster a just and pluralistic society.

The Function and Multicultural Education in Preventing Intolerance from an Early Age

Multicultural education has numerous functions in preventing intolerance from an early age, including:

According to the National Council for Social Studies, multicultural education has several important functions that confirm its existence. These functions include:

- a) **Providing a Clear Self-Concept:** Multicultural education helps individuals understand and develop a strong and positive self-identity. With a better understanding of self-identity, students can become more confident and appreciate the differences around them.
 - b) **Understanding the Experiences of Ethnic and Cultural Groups:** Through a historical perspective, this education enables students to understand the experiences and contributions of various ethnic and cultural groups. This understanding is crucial for avoiding stereotypes and prejudice that often arise from a lack of knowledge about other groups.
 - c) **Recognizing the Conflict between Ideals and Reality:** Multicultural education teaches that every society experiences conflicts between ideal values and existing realities. Students are taught to understand that injustice and oppression are part of social reality that must be faced and overcome.
 - d) **Developing Decision-Making, Social Participation, and Citizenship Skills**
Students are taught to make informed decisions, actively participate in society, and develop sound citizenship skills. These skills are essential for developing responsible citizens who contribute positively to society.
 - e) **Respecting Linguistic Diversity:** This education also emphasizes the importance of recognizing and appreciating diversity in language use. Language is a crucial aspect of cultural identity, and respecting linguistic diversity means respecting cultural diversity.
- Multicultural education emphasizes that schools serve as a foundation for social change, with the goal of eliminating oppression and injustice. The primary function of this education is to influence social change, which can be broken down into three main aspects:
- **Personal Change:** Change begins with individual students who increasingly respect others, enabling them to live harmoniously within their communities. This is evident in

their attitudes and interactions both at school and in the wider community. This personal change involves developing empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for differences.

- **School and School Change:** As agents of change, schools are expected to be able to build an inclusive and equitable environment, thereby positively impacting change in society. Schools need to be spaces where every student feels accepted and respected, regardless of their cultural or ethnic background.
- **Societal Change**

With changes at the individual and school levels, it is **The Role of Teachers and Early Childhood Education Institutions**

According to Rahayu Nila Fadlilah & Mursid (2024), teachers also serve as role models in teaching religious tolerance. Teachers' attitudes and behavior in the classroom significantly influence how children view and treat religious differences. Teachers play a crucial role in:

- Developing a curriculum and learning activities that reflect multicultural values.
 - Avoiding stereotypes and prejudice when speaking to or judging children.
 - Creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment.
 - Involving parents from diverse backgrounds in participating in school activities.
- In addition to these roles, teachers are also considered to need specific strategies to instill the value of tolerance from an early age. As stated by Koilmo et al., 2025, there are several strategies to achieve the goal of reducing intolerance from an early age, namely:
- **Learning through textbooks**
 - **Habituation**
Teachers can conduct learning through habituation, aimed at enabling students to apply the values of interfaith tolerance in their daily lives, especially within the school environment.
 - **Role Model:** As a teacher, you must be a role model so that students can emulate you in their daily activities within the school environment.
 - **Guidance:** Guidance is necessary when a student engages in behavior that violates school regulations, such as fighting between students of different skin colors.

Implementation in Early Childhood Education Environment

Examples of concrete implementation:

1. Activities with the theme "My Country" or "My Culture": Children learn about the diverse cultures of Indonesia.
2. Traditional stories and songs: Children from various regions are used to foster pride and respect for differences.
3. Collaborative projects: Children work together with friends from different backgrounds.
4. Celebrating national holidays together: Without highlighting a particular religion or culture, they emphasize universal values such as mutual cooperation, sharing, and compassion.

5. Teachers as role models: Demonstrating fairness, non-discrimination, and respect for all children.

Positive Impact of Multicultural Education in Early Childhood Education

- Children learn empathy and tolerance from an early age.
- Harmonious social attitudes are formed among children.
- Prevents discrimination or bullying based on differences.
- Helps children grow into democratic citizens with character.
hoped that positive changes will occur in society as a whole. An inclusive and just society is the result of education that values diversity and encourages the active participation of all its members. (Fatimah & Nuryaningsih, 2018)

The Role of Education in Reducing the Level of Intolerance in the World of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is a form of education that emphasizes laying the foundation for growth and six developmental areas: religious and moral, physical motor skills, cognitive skills, language skills, social-emotional skills, and the arts, in accordance with the unique characteristics and developmental stages of early childhood, as outlined in Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 137 of 2014 concerning National Early Childhood Education Standards (replacing Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 58 of 2009).

Early childhood education has two objectives:

- The main goal: to develop quality Indonesian children, namely children who grow and develop according to their developmental level, thus achieving optimal readiness for primary education and navigating life as adults.
- Another goal: to help prepare children to achieve academic readiness in school, thereby reducing the school dropout rate and enabling them to compete healthily at the next level of education. According to Article 28 of the National Education System Law No. 20/2003, paragraph 1, the range of early childhood education is 0-6 years. Meanwhile, according to studies of the PAUD scientific group and its implementation in several countries, PAUD is implemented from 0-8 years of age (the golden age) (Tremblay et al., 2016).

Education, particularly at the early childhood education level, plays a strategic role in instilling humanitarian values, empathy, and respect for differences.

Here are some of its important roles:

a) Instilling the Value of Tolerance from an Early Age

Through learning activities that emphasize cooperation, sharing, and respect for peers, children learn that everyone is valuable, even if they are different.

For example, children are encouraged to play together without discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or economic status.

b) Developing Empathy and Compassion

Teachers help children understand the feelings of others through stories, drama, or role-playing.

For example: "How would your friend feel if you didn't play with them?"

c) Introducing Diversity Positively

Early childhood education can introduce various cultures, languages, traditional clothing, foods, and traditions in a fun way.

The goal is for children to learn to see differences as beautiful and natural, not as threats.

d) Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

Teachers must ensure that all children are accepted without discrimination.

Children from different backgrounds should feel valued, listened to, and have equal opportunities.

e) Becoming a Role Model for Tolerance

Teachers are the figures most often imitated by children. The way teachers speak, act fairly, and respect each child will be a concrete example for children in behaving towards others.

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Conclusion

Multicultural education is crucial, especially for Indonesian society, as this educational paradigm offers numerous benefits in strengthening cohesion, solidarity, and familiarity amidst the diversity of ethnicities, races, tribes, customs, religions, cultures, and needs that exist in our society. Some of the functions of multicultural education include the formation of a clear self-concept, an understanding of the experiences of ethnic and cultural groups, an awareness of conflicts between expectations and reality, and the development of skills in decision-making, social participation, and citizenship, as well as an appreciation for linguistic diversity.

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that early childhood education is an opportune time to foster a sense of tolerance from an early age. This is because young children tend to respond quickly and imitate. Therefore, teachers in early childhood education institutions should always set a good example for their students. So that children can grow into individuals who can appreciate and accept the various differences in their surroundings,

whether ethnicity, culture, religion, or skin color. This will ultimately lead to a harmonious atmosphere of life in our country.

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