

LEARNING STRATEGIES TO REDUCE MULTICULTURAL INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT The cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of Indonesian society is a defining characteristic that reflects the nation's richness. However, this diversity also has the potential to create multicultural divides if not managed wisely. Within the context of education, these divides frequently manifest through unequal treatment and a lack of teachers' ability to accommodate differences in pupils' backgrounds. The objective of this community engagement initiative is to enhance pedagogues' competencies in implementing inclusive learning strategies with a focus on the reinforcement of multicultural values. The approach adopted is a collaborative participatory one, involving teachers, pupils, and the school community. The activity was methodically executed in three stages: teacher training and workshops, support for the implementation of multicultural learning, and joint reflection to evaluate the outcomes. The findings of the activity indicated an enhancement in teachers' comprehension and proficiency in the management of diversity in the classroom. Teachers began to implement project-based learning strategies, intercultural dialogue, and collaborative learning, fostering empathy and a spirit of mutual respect among students. Moreover, this initiative had a favourable effect on the school environment, through the reinforcement of values of tolerance, cooperation, and social cohesion among the school community. It is evident that multicultural learning strategies have been demonstrated to be efficacious in the reduction of intercultural disparities within the educational environment. Furthermore, these strategies have been shown to contribute to the fortification of a national character that is characterised by tolerance, inclusivity, and civility. The viability of this programme is predicated on the establishment of a teaching community that is committed to multiculturalism and the development of teaching materials that are grounded in local wisdom.

KEYWORDS: *Learning Strategies, Multicultural Education, Social Inequality, Inclusivity, Community Service*

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary educational sector is confronted with the reality of a society that is becoming increasingly pluralistic and diverse. The Indonesian context, characterised by a rich tapestry of ethnic groups, religions, languages and cultures, serves as a microcosm of a multicultural society, wherein educational institutions are instrumental in reflecting this diversity. This diversity represents a significant potential for national progress; however, without proper management, it can lead to multicultural disparities and conflicts (Lee et al., 2023). These disparities frequently manifest in the form of discrepancies in learning opportunities, unequal treatment, and a paucity of understanding regarding students' backgrounds (Maulidiah et al., 2023) .

Education should be a safe and inclusive space for every individual to thrive without discrimination (Faiz, 2023). In order to address this issue, it is essential that teachers implement teaching strategies that are capable of transcending cultural and social differences within the classroom environment. In addition to subject knowledge, it is imperative that teachers exhibit intercultural competence to cultivate mutual respect among learners (Alves et al., 2020). Research has demonstrated that pedagogical approaches that are culturally sensitive have been shown to enhance social cohesion and cultivate multicultural awareness within the school environment (Pant, 2024). This pedagogical approach facilitates not only the acquisition of cultural knowledge but also the cultivation of an appreciation and understanding of the diversity that surrounds them (Windayani et al., 2024; Arfa & Lasaiba, 2022).

The issue of multicultural disparities in community service is significant because schools form part of a diverse social community. It is asserted that an education system that does not take into account the diversity of its students may result in a generation that is intolerant of difference and unresponsive to it (Purnomo et al., 2023). It is therefore incumbent upon educators and the community to engage in collaborative efforts to formulate learning strategies that are oriented towards fortifying the values of tolerance, inclusivity, and civility (Irawati & Winario, 2020). Multicultural education is not the sole responsibility of schools; rather, it is an integral component of societal structures that influence the development of learners.

The implementation of multicultural education necessitates the collaboration of teachers and the community to establish a learning environment conducive to intercultural dialogue (Irawati & Winario, 2020; Rudianto, 2023). Through community engagement activities, educators can share best practices on how inclusive learning strategies can be effectively implemented in schools. Such practices may include cross-cultural collaborative activities, community-based projects, or the development of learning materials that highlight the value of diversity (Sarnita & Titi Andaryani, 2020; Lutfi & Lestari, 2021).

Consequently, the development of learning strategies to reduce multicultural gaps is not merely an academic activity, but a tangible manifestation of education's contribution to building a tolerant and civilised society (Putri et al., 2022; Ichsan & Hadiyanto, 2021). The hypothesis that a collective awareness will be fostered that diversity is a strength and that education plays a central role in maintaining social harmony is predicated on community service activities focused on multicultural education (Ulfah et al., 2022; Solikhah et al., 2021).

2. METHOD

This community engagement activity employs a collaborative participatory approach that emphasises the active involvement of teachers, pupils and the school community in designing and implementing multicultural-based learning strategies. The rationale behind this choice is twofold: firstly, it is aligned with the activity's overarching objective, which is to cultivate understanding, attitudes and skills in managing diversity within the educational environment; and secondly, it is a pragmatic approach that is likely to engender the desired outcomes. The implementation of participatory strategies has been demonstrated to engender a sense of ownership and involvement in a learning process that reflects cultural diversity (Tasrim et al., 2023). The method of carrying out the activity consists of the following stages:

a. Preparation Stage

In this stage of the project, a needs assessment of partner schools was conducted. This was done in order to identify the forms of multicultural gaps occurring in the learning process. This stage is of crucial importance as a foundation for curriculum adaptation and the development of methods suitable to the local context (Sofwana et al., 2020). Consequently, an activity plan was formulated, encompassing training materials, schedules, resource persons, and evaluation tools. (Derung et al., 2023) posit that a systematic plan is instrumental in ensuring the coherence and effectiveness of activity implementation. Consequently, we have developed teaching materials and training modules that incorporate inclusive learning strategies and those based on multicultural values. This encompasses training aspects that facilitate understanding of the social issues and diversity encountered within the educational (Ni'mah, 2024).

b. Implementation Phase

The primary activities were executed through the following forms of engagement:

- a) Workshops and teacher training sessions focused on: The following text provides an introduction to the fundamental concepts of multicultural education. Multicultural education has been identified as a key factor in fostering awareness of social and

cultural diversity (Langi et al., 2023). The development of teachers' intercultural competencies in managing diversity in the classroom is the second point to be considered. This approach has been shown to enhance teachers' skills in dealing with diverse and dynamic classroom situations (Makrufi et al., 2023). Thirdly, the implementation of collaborative, thematic and project-based learning strategies is imperative, with the integration of values such as tolerance, empathy and mutual respect being of paramount importance. Education has the responsibility of upholding universal values that support harmony amidst diversity (Ardhiyansyah et al., 2023).

- b) Mentoring of learning implementation: a team of practitioners supports teachers in applying multicultural learning strategies in real classrooms. It is imperative to recognise the pivotal role of support in ensuring the effective application of theoretical concepts in practical settings (Wiratama et al., 2022).
- c) The incorporation of reflective activities and group discussions among educators, students, and the community is essential for the dissemination of experiences, challenges, and best practices acquired during the course of the activities. These discussions facilitate a collaborative process of mutual learning, enabling all participants to collectively address and overcome challenges (Ardhiyansyah et al., 2023).

c. Evaluation and Follow-up Stage

The evaluation process is conducted in a dual manner, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. These methodologies are employed through various means, including observation, interviews, and the administration of questionnaires. The objective of this multifaceted approach is to measure changes in participants' understanding and attitudes towards multiculturalism (Anhar et al., 2023). This evaluation process serves as a reflection for continuous improvement. The evaluation results are used to design strategies for the sustainability of activities, such as the formation of a community of teachers committed to multiculturalism, the development of locally-based learning materials, and the integration of multicultural values into school extracurricular activities. It is anticipated that these actions will serve to enhance the involvement and commitment of all parties to multicultural education (Moridu et al., 2023) .

It is anticipated that this approach will enhance teachers' intercultural competence, reinforce values of tolerance among pupils, and foster a harmonious, inclusive and civilised school environment. The initiative has been proven to engender changes in teaching practices and to strengthen social cohesion within the educational environment when it is executed in collaboration

between lecturers, teachers and the community (Rasmuin, 2022).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This community service activity was carried out at one of the partner schools, which is characterised by a diverse socio-cultural profile, in terms of the ethnicity, religion and economic background of the pupils. The programme was implemented in three stages: teacher training, support for the implementation of learning, and joint reflection with the school community as a form of awareness of the importance of diversity in the context of multicultural education.

The Enhancement of Teachers' Understanding of Multicultural Education

The results of the pre-test and post-test administered to the training participants indicated a significant improvement in their understanding of the concept of multicultural education. A survey conducted prior to the training programme revealed that the majority of teachers (approximately 65%) perceived diversity in the classroom to be a challenge to learning. Following the training, 90% of participants demonstrated an understanding that diversity can, in fact, serve as a learning opportunity that enriches pupils' experiences. This training is consistent with the findings of the study, which emphasises that direct experience in multicultural education helps students and teachers to develop an understanding and appreciation of diversity. During the workshop sessions, teachers acquired novel insights into the fundamental principles of multicultural education, including equality, inclusivity, cultural empathy, and social justice, which align with the perspective (Irawati & Winario, 2020) regarding the importance of multicultural education in valuing cultural pluralism. This activity demonstrates that enhancing teachers' capacity to understand and manage diversity is a first step towards reducing multicultural disparities in schools.

The Implementation of a Multicultural Learning Strategy

During the mentoring phase, teachers implement various teaching strategies that emphasise cross-cultural collaboration among pupils. The most effective strategies include Project-Based Learning rooted in local culture, where students work in heterogeneous groups to produce cultural products that reflect the values of tolerance and togetherness, in line with the principles outlined by (Rahmad Hidayat et al., 2020) regarding the importance of project-based learning in a multicultural context. Integrated thematic learning also links subject matter to social issues such as cultural diversity and the importance of mutual respect, which aligns with research by (Arfa & Lasaiba, 2022) showing that multicultural education can foster tolerance and cooperation among students. Furthermore, the intercultural dialogue model implemented provides a space for students to share

experiences and perspectives; this is supported by findings from regarding the development of students' character to be inclusive and respectful of differences.

Impact on the School Environment and the Community

This community engagement initiative has also had a positive impact on the school environment as a whole. The headteacher and school committee have initiated the process of incorporating multicultural values into school activities, including flag-raising ceremonies and extracurricular activities (Windayani et al., 2024). This implementation is intended to enhance awareness of diversity among pupils, as stated by the aforementioned authors. The involvement of the local community through reflective discussion activities serves to reinforce the awareness that multicultural education is a shared responsibility between schools and the community. The collaborative efforts of teachers, pupils, and parents have been demonstrated to foster a more harmonious and inclusive school environment (Dwitya Sobat Ady Dharma, 2020).

The results of this study suggest that learning strategies grounded in multicultural values can serve as an effective means of reducing disparities among pupils. The implementation of project-based strategies, reflective dialogue, and collaborative learning has been shown to enhance cross-cultural understanding and strengthen social cohesion within the school environment (Noventue & Ediyono, 2023). These findings lend support to the perspective advanced by Arifin (2021), which emphasises that education capable of accommodating cultural diversity can prevent social exclusion and discrimination in the learning environment. Consequently, this community service programme has the capacity to engender short-term impacts in the form of enhanced understanding and skills among teaching professionals. Moreover, it has the potential to cultivate a more tolerant and inclusive school culture. The sustainability of these activities is expected to be realised through the formation of a community of teachers committed to multiculturalism, as well as the development of learning materials based on local wisdom to strengthen the nation's cultural identity amidst the tide of globalisation.

4. CONCLUSION

This community engagement initiative demonstrates that the implementation of a multicultural values-based learning strategy can be an effective solution in reducing social and cultural disparities within the educational environment. This initiative has been successful in enhancing educators' intercultural understanding, attitudes and skills in managing diversity in the classroom through a participatory approach involving teachers, pupils and the community. The training and mentoring provided encouraged teachers to develop more inclusive, collaborative, and human-centred learning. Furthermore, an increase in empathy, tolerance, and awareness of the importance of respecting

differences was demonstrated by the students. Community involvement in reflective activities has been demonstrated to foster a stronger sense of synergy between educational institutions and the broader community, thereby instilling multicultural values. It is evident that multicultural learning strategies play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of learning and contributing to the development of a national character that is characterised by tolerance, civility, and appreciation of diversity. In order to ensure the continuity of the programme, it is essential to establish a community of teachers who are committed to multiculturalism. Furthermore, the development of contextual teaching materials based on local wisdom is necessary in order to embed multicultural values sustainably within the education sector.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

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