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From Indigenous Knowledge to Multicultural Learning: Reconnecting Indonesian Education with Local Communities

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Abstract. As a country with diverse local wisdom, education in Indonesia certainly faces its own unique challenges, particularly in efforts to integrate the value of diversity into an educational curriculum that frequently undergoes changes over time in line with massive technological advancements. This article aims to present a central idea related to efforts to reconnect educational activities with local communities not merely as monthly practical activities, but also as an integral part of Indonesia's educational curriculum. Through a literature review drawing on the ideas of Boaventura de Sousa Santos to address the research question of why local knowledge is important in education, as well as the ideas of James A. Banks to address the question of how local knowledge is incorporated into the world of education, this study also employs a conceptual approach to emphasize that multicultural education is not merely a concept but an essential component that deserves thorough elaboration so that the values of diversity can become a source of richness capable of fostering individuals with a tolerant attitude toward diversity. The findings of this study indicate that local knowledge is not something distant from the educational environment; rather, it can serve as an effective learning tool because it exists not only as a non-formal institution but also as a contextual learning resource that is not merely confined to theoretical concepts but is manifested in active practice. Another point worth noting is that multicultural awareness, tolerance, and appreciation for diversity can be found in the integration of local knowledge. Therefore, multicultural education should not merely be confined to theoretical concepts but should be actualized through contextual learning.

Keywords: *Multicultural Education, Local Knowledge, Indonesian Education Curriculum, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, James A. Banks*

INTRODUCTION

As a diverse nation with a wide variety of ethnic groups, languages, cultures, and religions, Indonesia has unique characteristics. This uniqueness is reflected in the motto "*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*," the nation's philosophy signifying that Indonesia upholds the values of diversity [1]. In education, these values of diversity are encapsulated in a concept known as multicultural education.

Multicultural education is conceived as an educational reform effort aimed at bringing about fundamental changes in how education is delivered to students [2]. Theoretically, multicultural education is often associated with differences in ethnicity, culture, language, and religion; in practice, it is hoped that these differences can be effectively integrated through educational methods so they are not viewed as a divide but as a unique quality that must be preserved and nurtured collectively.

In Indonesia, although it is not explicitly designated as a form of multicultural education system, the National Education Law [3], in Chapter III on the Principles of Education Administration, Article IV, number I, states that "*Pendidikan diselenggarakan secara demokratis dan berkeadilan serta tidak diskriminatif dengan menjunjung tinggi hak asasi manusia, nilai keagamaan, nilai kultural, dan kemajemukan bangsa*". This demonstrates that Indonesia's education system also provides a sufficiently comprehensive foundation for multicultural education through legislation. In addition, number VI states that "*Pendidikan diselenggarakan dengan memberdayakan semua komponen masyarakat melalui peran serta dalam penyelenggaraan dan pengendalian mutu layanan pendidikan*". This statement implies that education is not limited to institutional settings alone but can also involve the social environment and/or local communities as part of the educational ecosystem.

Why local communities? Because diverse knowledge, experiences, values, and even cultural practices can be found within local communities, and these should be used as a source of context-based learning [4]. This is not to glorify local communities as something that must be included in educational curriculum standards, but when discussing multicultural education and enabling every individual (student) to adopt an open attitude toward differences [2], learning through context may become part of students' learning activities.

Azizi et al.[5] state that the surrounding environment is a resource worth considering as part of the learning process. This statement is based on their research on how local resources can benefit students' innovative development, particularly in the field of science (natural sciences). Rumtutuly et al. [4] state that context-based education helps students more easily understand and practice local cultural values in their daily lives. Context-based teaching can help shape students' attitudes and social sensitivity toward various issues, including cultural differences, other forms of inequality, and even global problems. Santos [6] argues that local knowledge can essentially provide agency not merely as an object of extractive research, but rather as an active cognitive subject capable of offering new experiences. Given its diversity, a wide range of knowledge can be acquired, as local knowledge or what he also refers to as artisanal knowledge is deeply intertwined with and inseparable from human life, and such knowledge can be regarded as part of ways of knowing.

Here are a few examples illustrating how tolerance is learned contextually: in North Maluku, specifically in the city of Tobelo, students from MAN 1 North Halmahera participated in church activities and performed traditional dances. Also in Tobelo, members of a women's *qasidah* vocal group performed at a church to demonstrate tolerance; in East Nusa Tenggara, elementary school students helped a classmate with a disability by carrying him and assisting him with writing; and in several other places, students have helped classmates with disabilities, along with other acts of tolerance. At first glance, such actions might seem like heroic deeds. Still, on closer examination, they reflect an attitude of tolerance that is not merely theoretical but put into practice through concrete actions. This illustrates how education is not confined solely to formal institutions but can also be effectively realized, so that the commitment to upholding the values of tolerance is not merely theoretical rhetoric but is also actualized in the lives of the community.

METHODS

This study focuses on the dynamics of education in Indonesia, specifically on the discourse of multicultural education, which remains a hot topic of discussion. By conducting a literature review based on conceptual theories from previous researchers such as books, scholarly journals, and other supporting media this study aims to generate insights that offer fresh perspectives on education, particularly multicultural education in Indonesia.

The analysis employs a philosophical reflection approach, aiming not only to explore the proposed topic in terms of theoretical validity but also to delve deeper into the question examining why local knowledge and local communities are significant and how both can be integrated into multicultural education in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Multicultural Education in Indonesia

History of Development

As a diverse nation, multicultural education is crucial for Indonesia's educational system. Although this diversity is a potential asset that can be leveraged to showcase the nation's identity, it is undeniable that awareness of this diversity can also spark conflicts that ultimately threaten the nation's unity and integrity [7]. Why? Because differences are a natural phenomenon that give rise to diversity; if not grounded in tolerance, these differences can spark conflict due to competing claims of truth among different groups. It is precisely this kind of issue that has driven the development of multicultural education in Indonesia.

Mahfud [8] notes that multicultural education began to develop around 1997, when Indonesia was experiencing a monetary crisis marked by the disintegration of socio-political and socio-economic values, and extending to the disintegration of socio-cultural values. Based on this chronology, multiculturalism was ultimately declared a much-needed framework for upholding democracy and ensuring the well-being of society; ideologically, multiculturalism is not considered self-sufficient but requires other ideologies to support it theoretically [8].

One of the key figures in the development of multicultural education in Indonesia is Ki Hajar Dewantara. He asserted that education is a cultural endeavor grounded in the principle of civility, aimed at a way of life that elevates the human condition. Furthermore, Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasized the importance of developing an education system that respects cultural diversity and local customs [9].

Current Implementation in Educational Institutions

Multicultural education in Indonesia is implicitly enshrined in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which contains three main elements: the principles of justice, democracy, and respect for human rights. However, upon closer examination, the discourse on multicultural education has not yet resulted in specific policies aimed at systematically integrating multicultural education into the curriculum [10].

Within educational institutions (formal schools), multicultural education is often linked to other educational disciplines, such as arts and culture education, religious education, and civics education. Given this, one might conclude that the issue of multicultural education should already be resolved. However, this is not the case, as the implementation of multicultural education has not gone smoothly [11]. Nevertheless, teaching and learning efforts continue in formal educational institutions, even though a gap remains between national policy and academic theory in classroom practice due to the lack of adequate practical guidelines for teachers in the field [12].

Efforts to implement multicultural education can be seen in combined learning approaches at the school level, such as the implementation of multicultural education in history classes [13], multicultural education based on local wisdom [14], multicultural education and religious tolerance [15], and various other combined subjects commonly found in school classrooms.

Local Communities as a Platform for Developing Multicultural Education in Indonesia.

Let's begin this section by asking: What are local knowledge, local communities, and multicultural education?

Drawing on the ideas of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, local knowledge is viewed as “artisanal knowledge” that is, knowledge encompassing various aspects of skills, techniques, and/or practices. Thus, Santos categorizes local knowledge as “ways of knowing” [6]. Every social practice is, by its very nature, a practice that contains elements of knowledge. Local knowledge is an alternative or counter-knowledge that is legitimate, valid, and credible enough to guide the concrete actions of communities [16]. Local knowledge is practical, collective, and contextual. Furthermore, local knowledge incorporates elements of “feel-think” and “feel-act,” as this knowledge is inherent to human beings and grows out of their daily needs [16].

In addition to local knowledge, local communities also serve as forums for people to develop aspirations and ideas that are practically relevant to daily life. By their very nature, local communities with the various aspects they encompass can function as spaces for practice that foster a collective consciousness that is not merely theoretical but is lived out contextually [17].

Meanwhile, the concept of multicultural education is based on the framework proposed by James A. Banks [2], which identifies three key elements: ideas and/or concepts, educational reform movements, and an ongoing process. He explains these three elements as follows: **first**, ideas or concepts, the belief that multicultural education can provide a foundation for students to achieve equality in terms of gender, social class, race, ethnicity, language, and/or culture, all of which must be viewed as equal without exception. **Second**, the educational reform movement, this is a structured effort aimed at the educational institutions, ensuring there are no social strata within any educational institution and that everyone has equal rights to receive an education. **Third**, as a continuous process, multicultural education is not a temporary endeavor but one that must be consistently upheld, so that equality and justice continue to evolve and its primary objectives can be fully realized.

The next question, then, is: What is the significance of local knowledge and local communities for multicultural education in Indonesia?

As previously explained, multicultural education in Indonesia has long been conceptualized even enshrined in education laws yet in practice it still faces various challenges due to a lack of practical guidelines for educators at the school level [18]. Multicultural education will remain nothing more than a meaningless concept if it is limited to theoretical teachings without considering context-based realities.

Furthermore, when people hear the terms “local knowledge” or “local community”, the first thing that likely comes to mind is teachings of local wisdom that focus solely on culture (such as dance, art, and so on). However, local knowledge and local communities are far from that simple, because local knowledge implies various life lessons, as evidenced by the statement that customs embody the essence of life an effort to live in an orderly and peaceful manner and this is not subject to the influence of time and place [9].

Local communities serve as a real-world (contextual) learning environment because, through practical teaching, they consistently demonstrate tangible multicultural values not merely presented through theoretical instruction but expressed through concrete activities carried out together with the pluralistic community [19]. As social institutions, they should be utilized as a shared learning resource to achieve the goals of inclusive education. Learning designed to be flexible and open to diversity can provide an authentic learning space free of discrimination through adaptation and tolerance [20].

Much can be learned from local knowledge, such as integrating philosophical values that tend to lead to communal ways of life, which connect learning to the realities of daily life [21]. The philosophy of life embedded in local knowledge also teaches collective responsibility for living side by side regardless of differences, as exemplified by mottos such as “*mari moi ngone faturu*,” a motto from North Maluku rich in values of togetherness and cooperation, regardless of differences [22], as well as “*si tou timou tumou tou*,” a

motto in the world of education that embodies the attitude of treating all people with humanity, regardless of differences [11].

Overall, neither local communities nor local knowledge, as discussed here, are intended to serve as the main pillars that should be incorporated into curriculum standards. However, if given due consideration, local communities and local knowledge should be able to become part of a real-world learning system contextual learning and learning alongside a diverse community so that the inclusive education we hope for is not confined solely to the theoretical realm of formal educational institutions but can also be realized through concrete actions, thanks to direct learning experiences within the diverse environments that exist in reality.

CONCLUSION

Becoming a safe country a nation where people respect one another is certainly the hope of everyone living there. This is especially true for Indonesia, a developing country that continues to strive toward progress; it undoubtedly requires support from various parties, including education. Diversity exists in education, but the challenges these differences pose also exist within it. That is why multicultural education exists as an educational standard that accommodates the differences and diversity of every individual.

All of this will be in vain if multicultural education which is expected to foster a sense of mutual care remains merely a theoretical concept discussed in the classroom without considering the broader reality. Theory is inherently limited, especially when it is integrated with other major theories; naturally, multicultural education will constitute only a small part of the whole. Therefore, hands-on learning learning through contextual instruction can certainly serve as an alternative to foster the inclusive educational attitude we hope to achieve.

Thus, based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that local knowledge and local communities are part of a learning system that may not be explicitly designed within a single standardized curriculum; however, their presence can be considered as a vehicle for contextual learning that is closely tied to the community and open to diversity, flexibility, and tolerance. Consequently, the desired multicultural education is not limited to theoretical discourse but can be actualized in the lives of students and the broader community.

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