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Multicultural Education and Student Tolerance in Indonesia

Darmin Tuwu
Social Welfare Science Study Program, Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia
Corresponding Author: Darmin Tuwu darmintuwu@uho.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity in schools makes tolerance an important social value for students in multicultural societies. This study aims to examine the role of multicultural classrooms in encouraging student tolerance in secondary school. This study uses a qualitative approach with a survey–case study method. Data were collected in several secondary schools in Kendari City, Indonesia, involving 30 informants consisting of students, teachers, school leaders, parents, and education stakeholders. Data collection techniques included qualitative surveys, in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings suggest that secondary schools serve as important social spaces where daily interactions between culturally diverse students contribute to the development of tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect. This research contributes to the literature on multicultural education by highlighting the importance of classroom interactions and inclusive educational practices in promoting tolerance among high school students in a multicultural context

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity in modern societies has significantly shaped the social environment of educational institutions (Zambeta, 2008; Zhang, 2019). Secondary schools in particular have become multicultural spaces where students from diverse backgrounds interact in daily learning processes (Meetoo, 2020). Such diversity presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, multicultural classrooms can promote intercultural understanding and social cohesion; on the other hand, differences in identity and cultural values may potentially generate prejudice, stereotypes, or social exclusion among students if not properly managed (Kaur et al., 2017; Kumar, 2024).

In many plural societies, issues related to intolerance, discrimination, and social division continue to emerge among young people (Harris, 2009; Janmaat et al., 2019). Reports from various educational contexts indicate that adolescents often reproduce societal biases within school environments, including cultural misunderstanding, religious intolerance, and social grouping based on identity differences. As a key socialization institution, schools play an essential role in shaping students' attitudes toward diversity (Trolian et al., 2022). Therefore, the classroom environment becomes a strategic arena for cultivating tolerance, empathy, and respect among students from different cultural backgrounds (Aramudin et al., 2024; Robbin et al., 2025).

Multicultural classrooms provide an important educational context where students learn not only academic knowledge but also social values related to diversity and coexistence (Schwarzenthal et al., 2020; Siregar, 2024). When properly facilitated through inclusive pedagogical practices, classroom diversity can foster dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect among students. However, without adequate educational strategies, diversity may also reinforce group boundaries and social distance (Jaffé et al., 2019). Consequently, understanding how multicultural classroom environments influence students' tolerance becomes an important issue in contemporary social and educational research (Koriakina et al., 2019).

Previous studies have widely examined the relationship between multicultural education and students' attitudes toward diversity. Research in the field of social and educational sciences indicates that multicultural learning environments contribute positively to students' cultural awareness, empathy, and respect for differences (Chaudhary, 2018; Fani et al., 2024). Multicultural education approaches that integrate inclusive curricula, collaborative learning, and intercultural dialogue have been shown to improve students' acceptance of diverse identities and perspectives (Sorkos et al., 2021; Elias et al., 2023).

Several empirical studies also highlight the role of teachers and classroom interaction in promoting tolerance in multicultural settings (Cancino et al., 2023; Sukardi et al., 2025). Teachers who apply inclusive pedagogical strategies, such as cooperative learning, discussion-based activities, and culturally responsive teaching, are able to encourage students to understand different cultural viewpoints and reduce social prejudice (Jain, 2019; Negara, 2025). These studies emphasize that the effectiveness of multicultural classrooms in fostering

tolerance depends not only on diversity itself but also on how the learning environment is structured and facilitated (Abacioglu et al., 2023).

Despite these contributions, existing research still shows several limitations. Many studies focus primarily on multicultural education policies or curriculum development, while fewer investigations examine how everyday classroom diversity influences students' tolerance in practical school settings. Moreover, empirical evidence from secondary school contexts in developing or multicultural societies remains relatively limited. Therefore, this study offers novelty by examining how multicultural classroom environments shape students' tolerance within the context of secondary schools, focusing on the dynamics of classroom interaction and social relations among students.

This study aims to analyze the relationship between multicultural classroom environments and students' tolerance in secondary schools. Specifically, the research seeks to examine how classroom diversity and social interaction among students contribute to the development of tolerant attitudes toward cultural, ethnic, and religious differences within the school setting.

This study argues that multicultural classrooms play a significant role in shaping students' tolerance when diversity is accompanied by inclusive interaction and supportive learning environments. Through daily social interaction, exposure to diverse perspectives, and collaborative learning processes, students develop greater understanding, empathy, and respect toward others. Therefore, multicultural classroom environments are not only spaces of academic learning but also important social arenas for cultivating tolerance and preparing students to live in pluralistic societies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Collaboration Theory in Public Policy

Collaboration between actors in public policy has become one of the dominant approaches in addressing complex social problems. Ansell and Gash (2008) introduced the concept of Collaborative Governance, which emphasizes the involvement of various actors in consensus-based deliberative processes. This model emphasizes the importance of trust building, dialogue, and shared motivation as the foundation of successful collaboration.

Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) then developed a framework for Collaborative Governance Regimes (CGR) that emphasizes three main dimensions: principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. This framework is relevant to analyze how actors at the local level, such as in Kendari City, build institutional capacity to address poverty.

In addition, Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) emphasize that cross-sectoral collaboration can generate policy innovation through the integration of resources, knowledge, and social networks. However, they also highlight challenges in the form of conflicts of interest, power imbalances, and rigid bureaucracy.

2. The Concept of Poverty

Poverty is not only understood as a lack of income, but also as a limitation of access to education, health, and social participation. Sen (1999) through the Capability Approach emphasizes that poverty must be seen as a limitation of the ability of individuals to live the life they value as valuable.

In Indonesia, BPS defines poverty based on poverty lines that include food and non-food needs. However, multidimensional approaches such as the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by Alkire and Foster (2011) are increasingly relevant to understanding the complexity of poverty at the local level.

3. Relevant Previous Studies

Research on multistakeholder collaboration in poverty alleviation has been conducted in various contexts. For example: the research of Tadung, Alwi, & Susanti (2025) found that in Kendari City, multi-stakeholder collaboration involves local governments, NGOs, academics, the private sector, and local communities. This collaboration results in collaborative coordination and leadership mechanisms that strengthen policy effectiveness.

Another study conducted by Purwanto & Sulistyastuti (2012) emphasizes that poverty alleviation policies in Indonesia often face problems of coordination between institutions, so multi-stakeholder collaboration becomes a strategic solution.

Furthermore, the research of Koppenjan & Klijn (2004) through Network Governance Theory emphasizes that public policy in the context of social complexity requires a network of actors that interact with each other, not just a bureaucratic hierarchy.

Thus, the literature shows that multistakeholder collaboration is not only a normative, but also empirical approach that has been shown to increase the effectiveness of poverty alleviation policies. However, the success of collaboration is highly dependent on factors such as leadership, trust, institutional capacity, and community participation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a survey–case study method to examine the relationship between multicultural classroom environments and student tolerance in secondary schools in Kendari City, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to explore deeply the social interactions, perceptions, and experiences of students and educational stakeholders regarding tolerance within multicultural classroom settings. Qualitative methods allow researchers to capture complex social realities, meanings, and contextual dynamics that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative measurement alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The survey–case study approach combines the breadth of survey data with the depth of case study analysis. The survey component enabled the researchers to gather perceptions from multiple stakeholders regarding classroom diversity and tolerance practices in secondary schools, while the case

study component allowed an in-depth exploration of how multicultural interactions occur within specific school environments. Case study research is particularly suitable for examining contemporary social phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2014).

This design allowed the researchers to analyze how multicultural education environments shape student tolerance by examining experiences, perspectives, and practices among students, teachers, and educational stakeholders within the specific sociocultural context of Kendari City.

Informants and Sampling

The study involved 30 informants drawn from relevant educational stakeholders associated with secondary schools in Kendari. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify participants who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic (Patton, 2015). The selection criteria were based on the informants' involvement in school activities and their familiarity with multicultural classroom interactions.

The composition of informants included: 10 secondary school students, 8 teachers, 4 school principals, 3 guidance and counseling teachers, 3 parents of students, and 2 education office representatives.

This diverse group of informants was chosen to capture multiple perspectives regarding multicultural classroom environments and the development of student tolerance. Including various stakeholders allowed the study to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from different institutional and social viewpoints.

Prior to data collection, all informants were informed about the research objectives and provided voluntary consent to participate. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for participants' rights were maintained throughout the research process.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three primary qualitative techniques, namely surveys, in-depth interviews, and classroom observations. The use of multiple data collection techniques enabled triangulation and enhanced the validity of the findings (Denzin, 2017).

First, the qualitative survey was conducted to gather general information regarding perceptions of multicultural classroom environments and student tolerance. Unlike quantitative surveys that rely primarily on numerical responses, qualitative surveys emphasize open-ended questions that allow participants to express their experiences and opinions in greater detail.

Survey questionnaires were distributed to the 30 informants and included questions related to: Experiences interacting with culturally diverse classmates, Perceptions of tolerance and respect in classroom environments, Teachers' strategies for managing diversity in classrooms, Challenges related to multicultural interaction in schools. Responses from the survey served as preliminary data to identify key themes and guide further in-depth interviews.

Second, to obtain deeper insights into the dynamics of multicultural classrooms, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with selected informants. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore participants' experiences while maintaining flexibility to probe further into emerging topics (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or online depending on participants' availability. Interview questions focused on: Students' experiences interacting with peers from different cultural backgrounds, Teachers' approaches to promoting tolerance in classrooms, Instances of conflict or misunderstanding related to cultural differences, Educational practices that encourage mutual respect and inclusion. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and later transcribed for analysis.

Third, classroom observation was conducted to directly examine social interactions among students in multicultural classroom settings. Observations were carried out in several selected secondary schools in Kendari to capture real-life classroom dynamics.

The observations focused on several aspects, including: Patterns of interaction among students from different backgrounds, Teacher strategies in facilitating inclusive learning environments, Student participation in collaborative activities, Expressions of tolerance or exclusion within classroom interactions. Field notes were recorded during each observation session to document important events and behavioral patterns observed during classroom activities.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative analysis model proposed by Miles-Huberman (2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2014). The first stage involved organizing and reducing raw data collected from surveys, interviews, and observations. Interview transcripts and field notes were carefully reviewed and coded to identify recurring themes related to multicultural classroom environments and student tolerance.

After coding, the data were organized into thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation. Data displays included summarized interview responses, observation notes, and key findings from survey responses. These displays allowed the researchers to compare perspectives among different stakeholders and identify patterns across cases.

The final stage involved interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions regarding the relationship between multicultural classroom environments and student tolerance. Conclusions were continuously verified by revisiting the original data sources to ensure consistency and credibility. This iterative process helped ensure that interpretations accurately reflected the participants' perspectives and experiences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Secondary Schools as Social Spaces for Developing Student Tolerance

The findings of this study show that secondary schools function as important social environments where students develop attitudes toward diversity and tolerance. Based on survey responses, interviews with informants, and classroom observations conducted in several secondary schools in Kendari City, it was found that daily interaction among students from different cultural backgrounds plays a significant role in shaping their perspectives on social diversity.

From the qualitative survey results involving 30 informants, most participants emphasized that secondary schools are spaces where students encounter peers from various ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Teachers and school principals noted that the composition of classrooms in Kendari reflects the broader multicultural character of the city. Students from different ethnic groups such as Tolaki, Bugis, Butonese, and Muna attend the same schools and participate in collaborative learning activities.

A school principal explained during the interview:

"Our school consists of students from many different ethnic backgrounds. In one classroom, you can find students from several cultures interacting every day. This environment naturally teaches them to respect differences."

Observations conducted in several classrooms confirmed that students frequently interact with peers from different backgrounds during group discussions, collaborative assignments, and extracurricular activities. These interactions allow students to become familiar with cultural differences and gradually develop mutual understanding. In many cases, students reported that they had learned to appreciate different cultural traditions, languages, and religious practices through daily communication with classmates.

Students interviewed during the research also expressed that the multicultural environment in their classrooms helped them build friendships beyond cultural boundaries. One student stated:

"At first I did not know much about other cultures, but after studying together with friends from different backgrounds, I learned to understand their traditions and beliefs."

The analysis of school policy documents further supports this finding. Several schools have implemented programs aimed at strengthening social cohesion, such as cultural celebration days, interfaith discussions, and collaborative community service activities. These initiatives encourage students to engage with diversity in constructive ways.

Overall, the findings indicate that secondary schools serve as important social institutions where students learn to interact with diverse peers. Through daily interaction in multicultural classroom settings, students gradually develop attitudes of tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect.

Diversity in Schools Can Trigger Conflict Without Multicultural Education

While diversity provides opportunities for intercultural learning, the research findings also reveal that multicultural environments in schools may generate tension or misunderstanding if not properly managed through inclusive educational practices. Interviews with teachers and guidance counselors indicate that differences in cultural backgrounds sometimes lead to miscommunication or social grouping among students.

According to several teachers interviewed during the study, students occasionally form friendship circles based on shared ethnic or cultural identities. Such grouping can sometimes create social boundaries between different groups of students. One teacher explained:

"Sometimes students feel more comfortable staying within their own cultural group. If this is not guided properly, it can create distance between students from different backgrounds."

Classroom observations also revealed instances where students preferred to work with peers from the same cultural background during group activities. Although these situations did not necessarily lead to open conflict, they sometimes limited interaction between different groups of students.

Survey responses from stakeholders further indicate that misunderstandings related to cultural differences occasionally occur among students. Some informants reported that students may unintentionally make insensitive remarks related to language, religious practices, or cultural traditions. While such incidents are usually minor, they demonstrate the importance of providing structured opportunities for students to learn about cultural diversity.

A guidance counselor noted during the interview:

"Adolescents are still learning how to understand differences. Sometimes jokes or comments related to culture or religion can lead to misunderstandings among students."

The document analysis also shows that schools have recognized the potential challenges associated with diversity. Several school regulations emphasize the importance of promoting respectful communication and preventing discriminatory behavior among students. These policies aim to maintain harmonious relationships within the school community.

The findings therefore suggest that diversity alone does not automatically produce tolerance. Without proper educational guidance, multicultural classroom environments may unintentionally reinforce social divisions or stereotypes. This highlights the need for deliberate efforts to integrate multicultural education into classroom practices and school programs.

Multicultural Education Enhances Student Tolerance and Inclusivity

Another important finding of this research is that the implementation of multicultural education practices significantly contributes to the development of tolerant attitudes among students. Teachers in several schools reported that they intentionally incorporate multicultural values into their teaching strategies in order to promote inclusivity and respect for diversity.

Based on classroom observations, many teachers use collaborative learning methods that encourage interaction among students from different cultural backgrounds. For example, group discussions and project-based learning activities often require students to work together regardless of their cultural identities. These collaborative processes create opportunities for students to exchange ideas and develop mutual respect.

One teacher explained:

"When students work together in mixed groups, they begin to see that everyone has something valuable to contribute. This helps reduce prejudice and encourages cooperation."

Survey results from stakeholders also indicate that multicultural-oriented learning activities play an important role in fostering tolerance. Informants highlighted several educational practices that support inclusive attitudes among students, including classroom discussions about cultural diversity, lessons on national unity, and activities that promote respect for religious differences.

Students themselves acknowledged that such educational activities helped them understand diversity more positively. One student stated during an interview:

"In our class, teachers often remind us that Indonesia has many cultures and religions. We are taught that respecting differences is part of being a good citizen."

The analysis of school curriculum documents also reveals that multicultural values are integrated into several subjects, particularly civic education and social studies. These subjects emphasize themes such as national identity, social harmony, and respect for diversity. Teachers often connect these themes with students' everyday experiences in multicultural classrooms.

Additionally, extracurricular activities also contribute to strengthening students' inclusive attitudes. Cultural events, student organizations, and community service programs provide opportunities for students to collaborate across cultural boundaries. Such activities reinforce the values of cooperation and mutual respect outside formal classroom settings.

Teachers and school administrators emphasized that creating an inclusive school climate is essential for cultivating tolerance. They believe that multicultural education should not be limited to classroom instruction but should also be reflected in school policies, extracurricular programs, and daily interactions among members of the school community.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that multicultural education plays a critical role in transforming diversity into a positive learning resource. When supported by inclusive teaching strategies and school policies, multicultural classrooms can foster greater tolerance, empathy, and social cohesion among students.

DISCUSSION

Secondary Schools as Social Spaces for Developing Student Tolerance

The findings of this study indicate that secondary schools function as important social environments for cultivating tolerance among students. Through daily interaction within multicultural classroom settings, students are exposed to diverse cultural identities, beliefs, and social practices. These interactions provide opportunities for students to develop empathy, mutual respect, and understanding of differences. The results of interviews, observations, and survey data in Kendari secondary schools demonstrate that students who frequently interact with peers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds tend to develop more open and tolerant attitudes.

These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that schools play a critical role in shaping students' social values and attitudes toward diversity. Educational institutions are widely recognized as key sites for socialization where young people learn norms, behaviors, and perspectives that influence their engagement with broader society (Banks, 2016). In multicultural societies, classroom environments provide opportunities for students to encounter diversity in meaningful ways and develop intercultural competencies. Exposure to diversity during adolescence has been found to positively influence attitudes toward cultural differences and reduce prejudice (Schachner et al., 2019).

The results of classroom observations further highlight the role of interaction in shaping tolerance. Students in multicultural classrooms regularly engage in collaborative learning activities, discussions, and group assignments. These interactions allow students to negotiate differences and build mutual understanding. Research in social psychology suggests that direct interpersonal contact between members of different groups can reduce stereotypes and promote positive intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). When students collaborate in shared tasks, they develop common goals and mutual dependence, which can strengthen social cohesion and reduce prejudice.

In addition, the findings from this study show that secondary school students are at a developmental stage where identity formation and social awareness are particularly important. Adolescence represents a critical period for developing moral reasoning and social attitudes toward diversity (Killen & Rutland, 2011). Schools therefore play an essential role in guiding students toward inclusive perspectives and democratic values. Multicultural classroom environments provide opportunities for students to engage with different viewpoints and reflect on their own beliefs.

These results also reinforce the idea that classroom diversity itself can be an educational resource. When managed effectively, diversity encourages dialogue, critical thinking, and social learning among students (Gay, 2018). In the context of Kendari City, where multiple ethnic communities coexist, multicultural classrooms mirror the broader social diversity of society. Consequently, schools become microcosms of multicultural society where students learn how to navigate cultural differences and develop skills necessary for living in pluralistic communities.

However, the benefits of multicultural classrooms depend on the quality of interaction and the presence of supportive educational practices. Simply placing students from diverse backgrounds in the same classroom does not automatically lead to tolerance. Instead, meaningful engagement and inclusive educational strategies are necessary to ensure that diversity contributes positively to students' social development (Gorski, 2016).

Diversity in Schools Can Trigger Conflict Without Multicultural Education

Although multicultural classroom environments provide opportunities for intercultural learning, the findings of this research also reveal that diversity may generate tension or misunderstanding when not supported by inclusive educational approaches. Interviews with teachers and guidance counselors indicate that students sometimes form social groups based on shared cultural identities. While such grouping is a natural part of adolescent socialization, it may also create social boundaries between groups if not properly addressed.

This finding aligns with previous research highlighting that cultural diversity can sometimes lead to social fragmentation when individuals lack the skills or knowledge to engage constructively with differences (Verkuyten, 2018). In school settings, students may initially feel more comfortable interacting with peers who share similar cultural backgrounds. Such tendencies may reinforce in-group preferences and limit opportunities for cross-cultural interaction.

Furthermore, the survey data from stakeholders suggest that misunderstandings related to cultural practices occasionally arise among students. Adolescents may unintentionally express stereotypes or insensitive remarks regarding cultural traditions or religious beliefs. Although such incidents are often minor, they demonstrate the importance of educational guidance in helping students understand diversity more constructively. Studies in multicultural education emphasize that prejudice and bias among young people often stem from limited knowledge and lack of exposure to different cultural perspectives (Nieto, 2017).

The potential for conflict in multicultural environments has also been widely documented in educational research. Cultural differences in communication styles, values, and social norms may lead to misinterpretations or disagreements among students (Deardorff, 2020). Without appropriate mediation or inclusive learning strategies, such differences may create tension within the classroom. Therefore, schools must actively facilitate dialogue and cooperation among students from different backgrounds.

The findings of classroom observations in Kendari schools illustrate that some students initially prefer working with peers from the same cultural group during collaborative activities. While these preferences do not necessarily indicate intolerance, they suggest the presence of social comfort zones that may limit intercultural interaction. Research on social identity theory explains that individuals tend to identify with groups that share similar characteristics, which can influence patterns of social interaction (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

In this context, multicultural education becomes crucial in guiding students toward more inclusive perspectives. By encouraging dialogue, empathy, and understanding, schools can transform diversity from a potential source of conflict into a positive learning experience. Educational strategies that emphasize shared goals, cooperation, and mutual respect have been shown to reduce intergroup tensions and promote social harmony (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Multicultural Education Enhances Student Tolerance and Inclusivity

Another key finding of this research is that the implementation of multicultural education significantly contributes to the development of tolerant and inclusive attitudes among students. Teachers in Kendari secondary schools reported incorporating multicultural values into classroom instruction through collaborative learning activities, discussions on cultural diversity, and lessons emphasizing respect for differences.

These findings support a large body of research demonstrating that multicultural education can positively influence students' attitudes toward diversity. Multicultural education aims to promote equality, cultural awareness, and inclusive values by integrating diverse perspectives into the curriculum and teaching practices (Banks, 2016). When students learn about different cultural traditions and social experiences, they become more open to alternative viewpoints and more respectful of diversity.

Classroom observations conducted during this study show that teachers frequently use cooperative learning strategies that require students to collaborate with peers from different backgrounds. Cooperative learning has been widely recognized as an effective method for fostering positive intergroup relationships because it encourages communication, mutual support, and shared responsibility among students (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Such interactions can reduce prejudice and promote inclusive attitudes.

Survey responses from students further indicate that classroom discussions about cultural diversity help them better understand the importance of tolerance. Students reported that lessons related to national unity, cultural diversity, and civic values encouraged them to reflect on their attitudes toward others. These findings are consistent with research showing that civic and multicultural education programs can strengthen democratic values and intercultural competence among students (Osler & Starkey, 2018).

The integration of multicultural themes into school curricula also plays an important role in shaping students' perspectives. Subjects such as civic education and social studies provide opportunities for teachers to discuss topics related to cultural diversity, social justice, and equality. Research suggests that curriculum content that reflects diverse cultural experiences can help students develop a more inclusive worldview (Sleeter, 2018).

In addition to formal classroom instruction, extracurricular activities also contribute to promoting tolerance among students. Cultural festivals, community service programs, and student organizations provide opportunities for students to collaborate across cultural boundaries. Such activities reinforce

inclusive values and strengthen social bonds within the school community. Studies have shown that participation in intercultural activities can enhance empathy and reduce social prejudice among adolescents (Schachner et al., 2019).

The findings of this research therefore confirm that multicultural education is a crucial component of inclusive schooling. By integrating diversity into teaching practices, curricula, and school activities, educators can create learning environments that promote tolerance and social cohesion. In the context of increasingly diverse societies, such educational practices are essential for preparing students to participate constructively in pluralistic communities.

Overall, this study demonstrates that multicultural classrooms have significant potential to foster tolerance among students when supported by inclusive educational strategies. Schools that actively promote intercultural dialogue, collaborative learning, and respect for diversity can transform classroom diversity into a valuable educational resource. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions in social and educational research regarding the role of multicultural education in strengthening social harmony and democratic values among young people.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight that secondary schools play a significant role as social environments in shaping students' attitudes toward diversity and tolerance. Through daily interactions within multicultural classroom settings, students are exposed to peers from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. The research conducted in several secondary schools in Kendari City demonstrates that these interactions contribute to the gradual development of mutual understanding, empathy, and respect among students. Data obtained from interviews, surveys, observations, and document analysis indicate that multicultural classrooms function not only as academic learning spaces but also as important social arenas where students learn to negotiate cultural differences and build inclusive relationships. The results also reveal that collaborative learning activities, group discussions, and extracurricular programs provide meaningful opportunities for students to engage in intercultural dialogue and cooperation. These experiences help students develop a broader social perspective and a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity. However, the study also shows that diversity alone does not automatically lead to tolerance. Without proper guidance, students may initially form social groups based on shared cultural identities, which can limit cross-cultural interaction and potentially create social boundaries within the classroom. Therefore, the findings emphasize that educational institutions must actively facilitate inclusive learning environments to ensure that multicultural interactions contribute positively to students' social development.

Another important finding of this research is the central role of multicultural education in promoting tolerance and inclusivity among students. The study shows that when teachers integrate multicultural values into teaching strategies and classroom activities, students are more likely to develop

positive attitudes toward diversity. Teachers in the observed schools applied various inclusive pedagogical approaches, such as cooperative learning, classroom discussions on cultural diversity, and lessons emphasizing respect for differences. These educational practices enable students to understand diverse perspectives and reduce potential prejudice. The presence of school policies and curricular elements that emphasize national unity, cultural respect, and social harmony also strengthens the development of tolerant attitudes among students. Furthermore, extracurricular programs and cultural activities organized by schools provide additional opportunities for students to interact across cultural boundaries, reinforcing the values of inclusivity and cooperation beyond formal classroom instruction. These findings confirm that multicultural education is a key component in transforming diversity into a constructive learning resource. In this regard, schools function not only as institutions for academic instruction but also as platforms for cultivating democratic values, intercultural competence, and social cohesion among young people. In the context of increasingly diverse societies, strengthening multicultural education in secondary schools becomes essential for preparing students to live and interact constructively in pluralistic communities.

Recommendations

This study also presents several strengths and limitations that should be acknowledged. One of the main strengths of the research lies in its use of a qualitative survey–case study approach that integrates multiple sources of data, including interviews, surveys, observations, and document analysis. This methodological triangulation provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of multicultural classrooms and the development of student tolerance in real educational settings. By involving various stakeholders such as students, teachers, school leaders, parents, and education officials, the research captures diverse perspectives that enrich the interpretation of findings. Additionally, the focus on secondary schools in Kendari City provides valuable empirical insights into how multicultural education operates within a local context characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

The study has several limitations. First, the study was conducted within a limited geographic area and involved a small number of informants, which may limit the generalisation of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the qualitative nature of the study emphasises depth of understanding rather than statistical measurement, which means the findings primarily reflect contextual interpretations of social interactions in a particular school. Future research may expand the scope of the research by involving more schools in different regions and incorporating a mixed-methods approach to examine the relationship between multicultural classrooms and student tolerance more thoroughly. Despite these limitations, this study provides important insights into the role of multicultural education in fostering inclusive attitudes among students. It highlights the importance of developing an educational environment that encourages respect for diversity and social harmony.

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