

## The implementation of multicultural education in Indonesian elementary education system

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**Abstract:** Known as multi-ethnic country, Indonesia, may face multi-cultural challenge if it is not managed properly. Accordingly, multi-cultural education required in the early stage of education, in elementary school. This paper aims to describe what multicultural education means in the Indonesian elementary education system, and how it is implemented. This study used literature review research design to review various literatures and see the multicultural system within teaching and learning in Indonesia. The data collected from various literatures of previous research on multicultural education and Indonesian elementary education system. Teachers should adjust their teaching to be more equitable and depend less on teacher-centric relations, and provide more room for students to participate in multicultural activities. Additionally, it is seen that multicultural education should not only be limited to a course subject, but embedded in every aspect of elementary education. Insights from this analysis offers an approach to the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesian elementary education system.

**Keywords:** Education, Elementary education system, Multicultural.

### 1. Introduction

Multiculturalism in the world refers to the diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions and languages that exist in global society. Each country has its own multicultural characteristics, with the United States, Canada, Brazil, and Australia being examples of countries with very diverse populations. In Europe, countries such as France, England, and Germany also exhibit complex multicultural dynamics resulting from migration and colonial history. Multiculturalism encourages respect for differences and interactions between various groups, but also raises challenges in terms of integration, national identity and equality. Apart from this region, multiculturalism in the Middle East is also a reflection of the long history of interaction between various ethnic, religious and cultural groups that live side by side in a region that is rich in historical heritage [1]. On the other hand, countries in Asia such as Indonesia are known for their ethnic and religious diversity that has existed for centuries, forming a rich and dynamic cultural mosaic. The dynamic and diverse culture is also reflected in our nation motto, “Bineka Tunggal Ika” which has the meaning unity in diversity that show the diversity of cultures but still unite as nation. Additionally, “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” or “Unity in Diversity” has been the Indonesian national motto ever since its inception. It is inscribed in the Indonesian national symbol, Garuda Pancasila, and is mentioned specifically in article 36A of the Constitution of Indonesia. The motto itself has a long history, and was found in the quotation from old Javanese poem predating the Dutch colonialism of the archipelago all the way back in the 14th century. Written in the age of the Majapahit Thalassocrat empire, it promotes tolerance between Hindus and Buddhist, the two main religion of present-Indonesia at the time.

From 14th century all the way the 20th, the people of Indonesia still believed in a notion of a strong, united nation, made up of different ethnicities, faith, race and all manners of cultural background. This

spirit led the various islands, though separated by the ocean, to unite together as it rose against forces of imperialism, and that spirit carry the young nation toward its independence.

But now the country is reaching its octogenarian days, and Indonesian's multi-cultural society has moved far from the day where the islands are remote, isolated entities. With more than 1000 recognized ethnic groups, and being the fourth-most populated country in the world, it is prone to sectarian conflict born from misunderstanding and inability to communicate properly grieve and aspirations. The republic spent the better part of the 20th and 21st century post-independence mired in various internal conflict, such as in Ambon, Aceh, and Papua.

While various truces, agreement, and concession has seen Indonesia mostly resolve these conflicts. A more permanent solution needed urgently to solve the country sectarian issue to solve the current and future conflict. One way to do it is to introduce a multi-cultural approach toward the education of the country. It is not a revolutionary concept. Fazilah Idris et.al has stated that education has role in producing new generation that enable in solving the real problems in our society, also to play a role in supporting youths' development toward a positive sense of ethnic identity. For instance, they can organize several programmes that can build up their sense of interaction and their understanding on other ethnics, which in turn would lead to a more harmonious society [2].

But, a multi-cultural approach in education itself is described by its proponent Bank as it is a notion, a reform movement, and a process. The overly general nature of that description is apt, as multi-cultural education itself lack an agreed upon definition. Nevertheless, the urgency and the necessity of an approach to solve Indonesia's problem necessitate a new exploration of ideas and practice. This paper would explore what it is a multi-cultural education, and how it can be applied with Indonesia's law, value and society.

## 2. Research Method

This paper used qualitative approach to describe the collected and obtained data. The approach focuses on relationships so that this approach is identified with professional knowledge and clinical knowledge. In conducting qualitative research, there are also many interpretations made by researchers. So that humans become the main instrument in research. This review analyses several previous researches on multicultural education from a conceptual standpoint on a broad basis, before diving into an analysis on how such concept could be implemented in the Indonesian elementary system as a given system. As such, this review relies heavily on the researcher as the analytical instrument, that compiles and interprets previous research, before describing the findings and comparing them in a discussion. Lastly, the researcher would conclude with a descriptive view on how multicultural education is perceived in Indonesia, as well as how it could be further implemented in the Indonesian elementary education system.

## 3. Literature Review

Pancasila the official, foundational philosophical theory of Indonesia, mandated for a national unity of Indonesia, as well as social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia. This is then materialized in the preamble of the constitution, Undang-Undang Dasar 1945 (UUD 1945), in which education is seen as a national objective, as a reason for all the sacrifice made for independence. As a result, Indonesia by law supports the creation and implementation of a multi-cultural education. It is officially enshrined in Law no. 20 of 2003 National Education System which states:

- 1) Education is organized in a democratic and just manner and is not discriminatory by upholding human rights, religious values, cultural values, and national diversity
- 2) Education is organized as a systemic unit with an open and multi-meaning system
- 3) Education is organized as a lifelong process of cultivating and empowering students
- 4) Education is held by modelling, building will, and developing students' creativity in the learning process
- 5) Education is held by developing a culture of reading, writing and arithmetic for all members of the community

- 6) Education is held by empowering all components of society through participation in the implementation and control of the quality of education services.

Since the goal of education is to prepare the students to accept and be part of a diverse society, it is therefore the tasks of the local education authorities to create an education experience that impart necessary values and principles to live in the present and ever-increasingly multicultural society. An increase the students' capacity for communicating with others by making them participate actively in the process of learning, after all, necessitate cultural sensitivity strategies and the creation of equal opportunities for academic success and personal development for all students to begin with as real-world multiculturalism includes the awareness of race, ethnic background, language, sexual orientation, gender, age, disability, social class, education, religious orientation and other cultural dimensions [3], who Parekh supports by pointing out that if children never get beyond the framework of their own culture and beliefs (even if these are shared by the majority in their country), they are unlikely to develop lively enquiring minds, imagination or a critical faculty. A monocultural diet is likely to breed 'arrogance and insensitivity' among children from the majority culture and 'profound self-alienation' and a distorted self-concept among minority children [4]. Ensuring the education process allow for such development to occur begin with identifying the bedrock foundation of multi-cultural education.

Baril R. Singh believes that since at the political level liberal democratic value allows for equal recognition of personal worth and dignity to which all individuals are entitled, education within that framework caters for all classes, races, sexes or cultures. Such a system should allow for a number of cultural options from which students can choose [5]. The main point of multi-cultural education is Equal Recognition. Singh perceives that from a liberal democratic value perspective, one cannot reject or fail to give recognition to the existence of the plurality of value perspectives—many of which may be derived from various cultures—without being inconsistent in terms of such a value perspective, which demand equal recognition. Ethnic background, as well as the notion of race, sexual orientation, gender, and etc. is seen as “particular identity” that does not share the same position as the “universal identity” of man that deserve equal respect and equal opportunity for self-realisation. Singh roughly believe that by allowing and shaping children value to regard others with respect of the universal identity, the children will come to respect the particular identity that they and other chose for themselves, as those will not over-ride the universal right of all men of respect and self-realization. This becomes the second point of multi-cultural education, Freedom, —freedom from inherited biases and narrow feelings and sentiments, as well as freedom to explore other cultures and perspectives and make choices in full awareness of the available and practical alternatives. This idea then will be carried over past graduation. He did not believe however that no “particular identity” may have differed value that contradict the liberal democracy. Singh believed the culture with such attitude should not be allowed to stagnant, but evolve along liberal democratic value as it is not only inherent but also enshrined in UN Charter which solidify the value as benchmark for the modern human world, and the preservation of a culture at the expense of individual freedom and equality should not be condoned [5].

Less politically charged, but nevertheless voices same ideas about the equality of all race, ethnic, and other cultural background, Aydin & Tonbuloglu's research finding found that in many respondents' mind, multi-cultural education inherently contains several underlying themes, namely: Equality, Democracy, and Justice [3]. Indeed, the research reveals that the word equality has been repeated 37 times by the participants and that this is the most used description, with almost all of the participants emphasized the notion of equality, voicing beliefs such as multicultural education is offering equal chances of success to students regardless of their cultural background ensuring them equal right to education. The word democracy was used 29 times, with respondents saying that a transition to a much more democratic educational system taking individual needs and differences into account and allow a consciousness of democracy for all would develop. Lastly, the word justice was used 17 times, and all participant emphasized the notion of justice and mentioned the importance of multicultural education in ensuring justice, whether as means to enact or ensure social justice [3].

Tilaar found that there are three programs of multiculturalism that could be strengthened through a multicultural curriculum, that multicultural education should be: 1) based on human equality, 2) aimed to achieve a smart Indonesia, and 3) based on the principle of globalization [6]. This is also in-line with

what Dixon believes, that the conceptual framework of global perspective of multicultural education is derived from four major interactive dimensions, namely, multicultural competence, equity pedagogy, curriculum reform, and teaching for social justice, all to achieve education that teaches respect for human dignity; to develop multiple historical perspectives, to strengthen cultural consciousness and to strengthen intercultural competence; to combat racism, sexism, other forms of prejudice and discrimination, and to build social action skills, and to increase awareness of the state of the planet and global dynamics [7].

#### 4. Findings

From the literature review, both from expert and interviewees, it can be seen that although the term of multi-cultural education may be fuzzy and muddled, the inherent value that should be imparted to children are the idea that diversity of multi-cultural society should be faced with equality, grounded in liberty of the individual and social justice of the community, with goals so that the students will be able to respect human dignity, develop his perspective and cultural consciousness, as well as to avoid forms of discrimination so that they would be able to face the society with awareness of differing cultural background and later on seed a more open, democratic society when they enter it.

The understanding of democracy which is really fundamental to be given for students of elementary school aligned with the taut of multicultural insight will raise the students' awareness to see the differences among Indonesian people. Through learning multi-culture, students can respect each other and get the value to live together. Teacher in the classroom is crucial in teaching this value to students through engaging material and interactive teaching and learning.

Awareness of the diversity from the early stage of education will make students have multi-cultural understanding especially in Indonesia which is known as the biggest multi-ethnic so that it makes Indonesia rich in different culture, habits, and beliefs. Understanding that each person may has different habits, beliefs that based on their culture will shape the students' attitude in their interaction with other person, including their friends. Harmonious interaction among students in the school or students with other people can be fostered by implanted multi-cultural understanding since their earlier stage of education. Furthermore, to be able to make the multi-cultural understanding rooted in the student's behaviour, teacher not only teach them limited on the concept of multi-cultural but also through the simple example in the school, modelling the multi-cultural behaviour to the elementary students.

This finding however, begs a question on how such values should be imparted. After all, education did not start and end with students alone. Perhaps the most obvious and impactful figure during the whole process of education is the teacher themselves. As Basbay and Kagnici stated, teachers have an important role in understanding and implementing multicultural education. They are the one who exemplify, dictate, and guide students toward this goal [8]. How should a teacher, especially as they also deal with a diverse cultural history of each students manage to do such thing?

Since knowing that Indonesia is an archipelago country consisting of many islands and having diverse cultures; hundreds of languages, different traditional clothes, and habit of life, students must have understood earlier to be able to have respectful to others. Thus, teacher in the classroom plays a pivotal role in implanting this value for them in the terms of teaching and learning. This has been supported by the teaching materials and tools through multicultural learning within the lesson.

Gay states that teachers generally perceive their own values, beliefs, and experiences as standard rules and that what they know and what they teach is governed by educational principles. She states that they may engage, knowingly or unknowingly, in erroneous educational practices because they do not understand the racial, social, and linguistic diversity of their students [9]. Aydin and Tonbuloglu cited an analysis on teachers' perceptions that states that teachers put too little time into getting to know their students and they know very little about them for this reason. It also states that the experiences of students belonging to cultural minority groups are ignored by the teacher due to the teacher's perception and to the fact that he/she may not have taught similar students before [3].

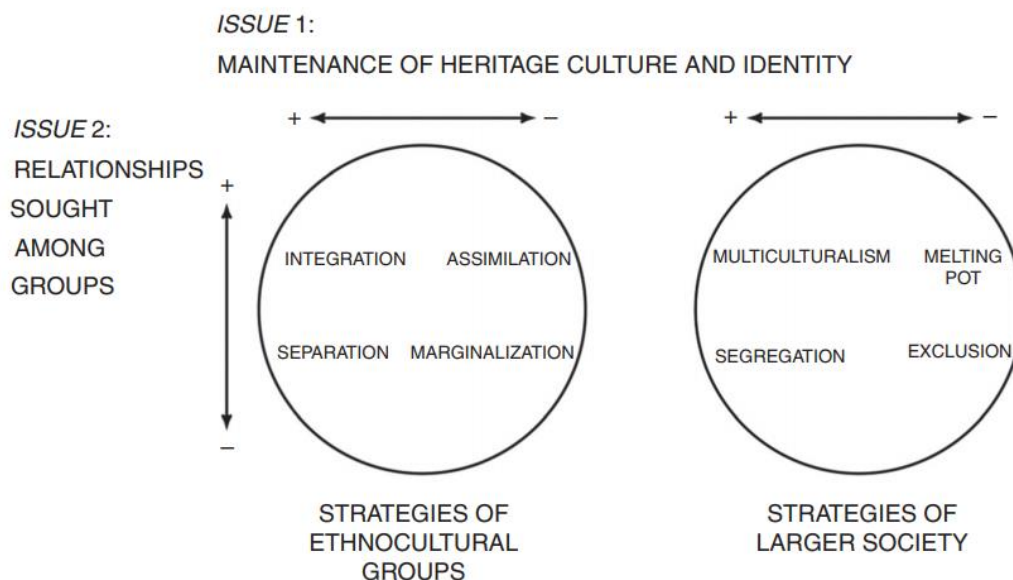
A study by Kang et. Al found that teachers cultural intelligence would help teachers to better connect with students. Yet, teachers may have not enough opportunities to expand and expand their cultural knowledge through professional development [10]. Thus, Aydin emphasizes the importance of

training educators who can design educational programs starting from preschool in the establishment of an academic infrastructure that will implement a multicultural education system [11]. Washington states that teachers need three important basic skills, namely “understanding oneself”, “understanding the culture of others,” and “academic multicultural qualifications” [12], and Basbay and Kagnici believes the qualifications may be standardized and determined by the Education authority bodies, as they determine the teacher capability in knowing the student, diversifying the education by taking individual differences into consideration, valuing, understanding and respecting the students and attaching importance to national and universal values that necessitate that the teachers be at a certain level in terms of multiculturalism [8].

Barton and Ho however, believe that the more important aspect of teaching a multi-cultural education is preparing young people to participate in deliberatively informed action on important social issues. In order to achieve this goal, educators need to cultivate young people’s innate but partial ‘sprouts’ of benevolence, which are rooted in feelings of empathy and compassion. It is after all, a worldview, instead of only a teaching program. Connecting theories and action is crucial to ensure the continuity of such perspective after the student left the education faculties. Students must engage with the concrete and tangible knowledge of people’s circumstances that will enable them to understand and care about the issues they face that later would enable them to engage with others who come from different backgrounds, discuss potentially difficult and controversial topics with those whose views differ from their own, and with benevolence, be willing, to devote the energy necessary to engage in such deliberations meaningfully [13].

This two-differing approach to multi-cultural education hints toward a more wide and fundamental difficulties of implementing, and later teaching, multi-cultural education, and that is what’s the end goal of multi-cultural education itself. While the goal of understanding other people from different background is universal, how will this understanding be acted on is again left on the multi-cultural society that educate their young about it. How far the resolution of cultural differences should be solved through multiculturalism, what’s the underlying tenet of said multi-cultural society, and how to decide what should be maintained and what should evolve.

It should be noted that as a post-colonial nation, Indonesian experience with multi-cultural society differs from United States “melting pot” multi-culturalism or globalized homogeneous national culture like those in Europe or East Asia, as it is mired with not only the complexity of power relation between competing groups and the reality of an archipelagic state but also the post-colonial legacy that continues to linger in every level of society. In the context of Berry’s [14] observation on the relationships between ethnocultural groups and their respective larger society, Indonesian society, based on its Pancasila ideology, constitution, and the governing laws, would fit in the society that seeks integration into multiculturalism. Indonesia thus, ideally and pragmatically, needs to draw from its own experience rather than misapplying methods that may not be suited to its condition and needs. Pancasila, the national ideology, was promulgated to resolve the contrasting priorities between ethnic, political, and religious lines that developed endemically within Indonesian society, thus therefore still remain one of the foundations of the nation that rarely have equitable outside examples it can learn from.



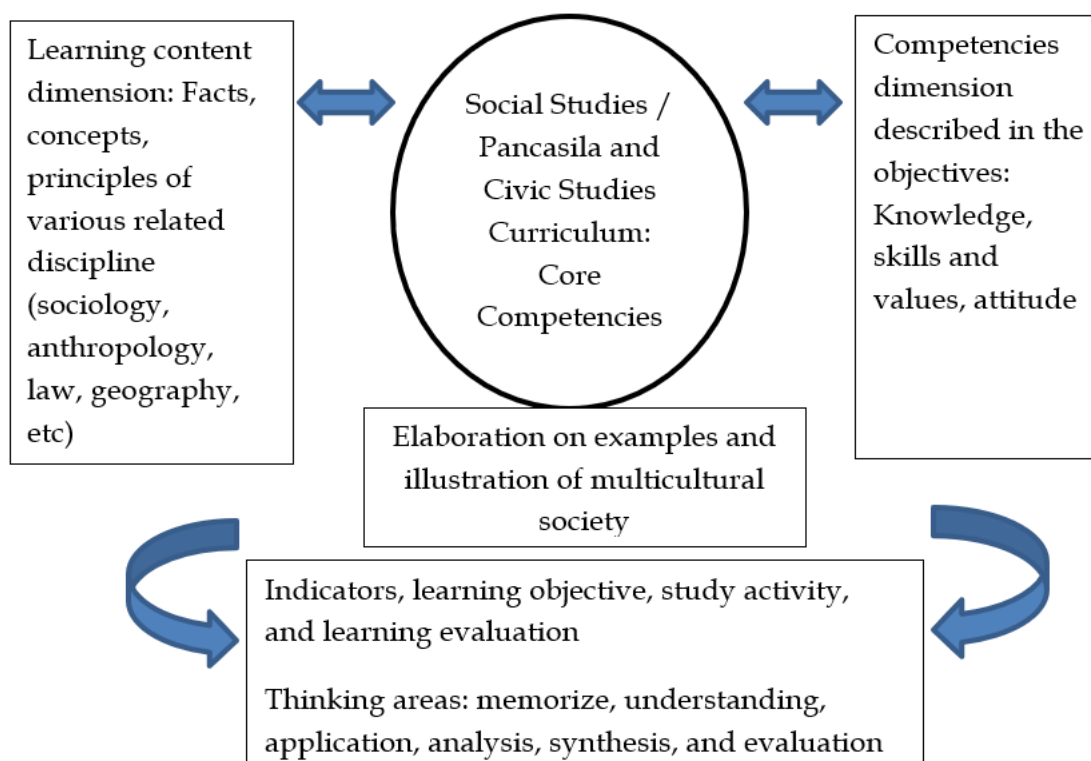
**Figure 1.**

Berry's intercultural strategies in ethnocultural groups and the larger society [14].

For Indonesia, the principles of Pancasila, as well as the practical socio-political, economic, and cultural conditions, at least on national level, will inevitably be the guiding idea of the multicultural education. The philosophy of Pancasila officially a philosophy of life which meant that it's a philosophy that is used as a guideline and guide by the Indonesian people in everyday life. The philosophy of Pancasila is a philosophy to be practiced in everyday life in all areas of life and livelihood, as it is derived from the personality of the Indonesian nation and became a distinctive feature of the Indonesian nation. Pancasila, where the term "panca" is five, and "sila" is principles, has become the guidance for all Indonesian people to conduct lives through having a good value. As the principles, the Indonesian people have to respect each other's religion, and how the conduct their beliefs and how Indonesian citizens live in justice. Living in Indonesia, which has diverse cultures, must hold the understanding that being respectful to others is a kind of identity as the citizen which will differ us from other nations.

So how should Pancasila be applied to Indonesian education? Abduh and Taniredja found that since the political ideology is in its nature quite contextual due to the abstract definition of the pillars, ideal multi-cultural education in Indonesia should rely on teachers as the ultimate and good model for their students, with school life being the main means of contextualizing the values of Pancasila. In a way, Indonesia has applied this by integrating teachers who majors in Pancasila and civic education to urban and rural schools. But with the lack of attention toward multi-cultural education in Indonesia as is stated earlier may hint that this measure is not quite adequate to ensure the equality principle of multi-cultured education is fulfilled, or how this approach manage to find the balance between cultural survival and cultural evolution [15].





**Figure 2.**

Framework for multicultural education integration into Social Studies / Pancasila and Civic Studies [16].

A straight-forward approach to multicultural education would be to create a course subject dedicated to study multicultural values for the students. Such subjects exist in the Indonesian elementary education system in the forms of Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial (Social Studies) and Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan (Pancasila and Civic Studies). Moeis highlighted that both subjects are in-line with the goals of multicultural education, that is to develop students' knowledge of citizenship, which is adaptive to the rate of globalization, social mobility, and rapid information mobility. The goals of the subjects are to equip students with reflective, critical, and rational decision-making abilities in their lives. Furthermore, the subjects also develop the intellectual, social, and participatory skillset of students. Which is a goal to help students solve issues through critical and knowledge-based thinking, interact and find a place for themselves within a multicultural society of varying race, ethnicity, and religions. Next, they develop cross-cultural communications and interactive skills, which is also in direct relation to the multicultural society of Indonesia, as well as the rate of globalization. Lastly, they provide a chance for the students to determine values that are "good" through critical and reflective thinking, which by doing so, they are hoped to be able to determine their actions within a multicultural society with autonomy [16].

## 5. Discussions

Indeed, previous research have found that multicultural education should not stop at being a single course subject, but instead integrated into the all aspects of education. Moeis have particularly highlighted the ability for social studies and civic studies as course subjects are compatible with multicultural education. This is since a good multicultural education was seen to be a "good pedagogy", a form of good teaching much like "good governance", that is an inclusive process to develop various dimensions of a student's personality [17]. Building upon the previous notion that multicultural education as a form of "understanding oneself", "understanding the culture of others," and "academic multicultural qualifications", as well as a form of preparation for the students to participate in

deliberatively informed action on important social issues, multicultural education in Indonesia should then be aimed to qualify both its students and faculty to understand themselves and the others, especially in social settings.

An analysis on teaching or pedagogy is a good start to analyse how multicultural education should be implemented in Indonesian elementary education system. Research has found that Indonesian education have not fully embraced an equitable pedagogy, or a teaching system where students could participate in a democratic manner. Furthermore, it was also found that teachers still play the role of creating a uniform mindset of their students on a particular material subject, without giving room for students to provide their thoughts or questions into the activity [18]. Small examples such as the practice of calling out students by teachers to answer questions, as well as the reliance of teachers as the source of information instead as a source of drive to explore information, show that teaching in Indonesian elementary education system have remained based on the teacher-centric relations. These facts show that on how teaching is performed, there are still room to provide for students' participation through simple changes in how questions are asked, or on how information on a particular subject is disseminated by teachers. Furthermore, these facts also emphasize on the need for teachers to commit into a more participative method of teaching in order to provide room for a more practical and student-centered learning based on equity.

Putting multicultural education in the context of Indonesian elementary education system is to contextualize the education system as a "small society" with differing distinctions in its polity of students and teachers. Thus, schools which make up the small societies in the education system is seen to have to take into consideration: 1) the differing development needs of the students, including personal and social needs, 2) career and vocational needs, 3) psychological and spiritual-moral needs [19]. This is important to prepare students for a society, which for it to function properly, requires: 1) academic aptitude, 2) psychological needs, 3) a sense of belonging, and 4) safety [19].

A study on the practices of multicultural education in Indonesian elementary education system found that in reality, school's curriculum does not contain materials that discredit multiculturalism. Furthermore, it was found that no cultural clash such as hate speeches, violence, or intimidation, has been found in the daily activities of sample schools [18]. This is even though the sample schools usually are made up of a majority and minority population structure for both of its students and faculty. From such example it could be seen that schools as small societies have generally attempted to provide its students with tolerance to diversity, as well as equality among its population.

Despite so, the goal of multicultural education to qualify both students and teachers to understand themselves and the others in social settings may not be achieved in its entirety. This is seen in examples such as even though the school is made up of a diverse population, the mandatory prayer rituals conducted in schools are usually catered to a certain religion. Aside from such, activities such as cultural performances which include arts, dresses, and other attributes, are mainly derived from a certain ethnicity [18]. While the school's students and faculty may understand themselves and others in a social setting, they may have not necessarily acted upon their understanding to create a multicultural environment. Furthermore, it can also be seen that schools as small societies are still heavily influenced by the external socio-political cultures worn by its majority population.

A way forward is then to introduce diversity to the population of the school's students and faculty, so as to allow schools as small societies to have their own multicultural setting. This is believed to be able to help students to build a collective identity as well as collective norms based on equality and multiculturalism [20]. This way, students would be able to not only immerse themselves in a multicultural setting during their time in the education system, but also in the broader society after graduation. This is further in-line with what Sutjipto proposed on "Empowering School Culture", which is to immerse students in social settings through the creation of school climate that allows for development [18].

## 6. Conclusion

In the end, as much as the most criticized point of multicultural education in the literature is the lack of an agreed upon definition, so does the implementation of it is often untested, blurry, and different



on case-to-case basis. This review shows that in case of states like Indonesia, where post-colonial legacy mixes with the complexity of multi-cultural society, there's still need to be a search for a common framework that spans the various cultural values that would help us to find a method, by which we could synthesise the necessity of creating an education that is equal and aware of the subtlety of differing cultural backgrounds. Such also should be applicable to the nature of the archipelago's varied society, to be present in the lives of every student's moment of growth.

In practice, such a framework at first should be based on a pedagogy of equality, and a premise of qualification to understand self and other in a social setting. While Indonesian education system has attempted inject these premises into the multicultural education system, it is seen that understanding alone is not enough. There should be actionable areas to further strengthen multicultural education. This can be operationalized through looking at each school as a "small society", with its own unique school culture, which should inherently be based on multiculturalism. To implement these ideals, in terms of the method of teaching, teachers should provide more room for students to participate in teaching activities, as well as in providing a drive for students to look for information, instead of setting themselves as the only source of information. In terms of curriculum, multicultural education should not only be limited to a single course subject, but embedded in the whole process of elementary education, covering activities from prayers to extracurricular activities such as cultural performances and other forms of multicultural interactions.

It can be concluded then, as elementary education system builds small multicultural societies, students will be immersed in multicultural environment at an earlier age, and internalise the very basic concepts of multiculturalism and equality. They will be able to build collective identity and norms based on equality and multiculturalism, before then later introduced to a multicultural society of much greater scale.

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