

Exploring Multicultural Education Through a Research-Based Learning: A Case Study of Sanggar Anak Alam

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ABSTRACT

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The diverse and multicultural educational dynamics of Indonesian society demand an inclusive model that is responsive to cultural diversity. The national curriculum often fails to accommodate multicultural values. This study explores the development of multicultural learning through a research-based learning cycle method at Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM), a culture-based non-formal schooling. A qualitative case study design was used, and data were collected through interviews, observation, and document analysis involving 35 participants. Thematic analysis and triangulation with Atlas.ti revealed three main findings: 1) inclusive understanding strengthens student multicultural awareness; 2) the learning cycle method proved effective in instilling multicultural values; and 3) close collaboration between facilitator parents and schools was key to driving innovation in learning practices. The model developed in this study contributes significantly as a prototype for enriching culturally responsive curriculum that can be adapted into formal education systems to build students' multicultural competence, critical thinking, and empathy.

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Introduction

The era of globalization increases awareness of diversity by removing boundaries in life and diminishing cultural barriers. The diversity of Indonesian society calls for education that is inclusive and responsive to cultural pluralism. The national curriculum in formal education is largely uniform and often does not effectively incorporate multicultural values [1],[2]. Culture is the root of education and the foundation of a nation's curriculum. By the opinion Ormond & Vietti [3], and Fullinwider [4] that "curriculum is a construct of that culture," it is interpreted that the existence of an educational curriculum is an instrument to build and reflect cultural values. Therefore, multicultural curriculum innovation is an urgent need to strengthen social tolerance and maintain the integrity of the Indonesian nation.

However, in reality, the Indonesian national curriculum implemented in formal schools tends to be uniform and has not been able to accommodate multicultural values practically and contextually fully. This conclusion is supported by the opinion Isabel [5], and Amzaleg and Masry-Herzallah [6] that the success or failure of multicultural education depends on the preparation of teachers and administrators to understand the learning needs of students. Another problem is the limited ability to adapt multicultural teaching based on students' diverse backgrounds as a learning resource. Additionally, the learning remains largely theoretical, which leads to an education that fails to incorporate students' direct experiences and respect for their differences.

Based on these problems, one potential solution is to implement multicultural learning based on local wisdom research. In the context of non-formal education, Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM) can be a natural laboratory for developing this kind of multicultural learning [7]. This innovation integrates multicultural practices rooted in research, offering an alternative to overcome the limitations of the formal education system. This approach uses a learning cycle that allows learners to develop knowledge based on direct experience in their environment. However, research Putri and Vera [8] indicates that academic literature rarely documents such innovations or implements them in formal education.

Previous research on multicultural education has focused on five primary topics. Some studies have looked at the implementation of multicultural education in the tri-center of education in the family, school, and community environments at the kindergarten to university levels [9], [10]. Research from Banks [11], Moraru et al. [12] emphasizes how the integration of character values can be embedded in the five dimensions of multicultural education through classroom learning practices. Furthermore, Barton and Ho [13] provide information that civic and multicultural education approaches explicitly or implicitly aim to prepare young people to play a role in influencing decision-making.

Meanwhile, Suri and Chandra [14] states that the need for multicultural education raises awareness to recognize differences related to race, ethnicity, gender, limitations, and social class, all of which are considered valuable for enriching the teaching and learning process. In addition, Derson and Gunawan [15] said that two approaches have been taken in implementing multicultural education, including not equalizing the views of certain groups and increasing awareness to promote open and critical thinking skills. While previous studies have examined multicultural education in formal settings, little attention has been given to non-formal schools that implement research-based approaches. This gap limits our understanding of how alternative learning environments can enrich multicultural practices.

This research focuses on innovating multicultural learning by employing a research-based approach that utilizes the learning cycle. The purpose of this research is to understand the application of the learning cycle in an educational context. In addition, this study provides an overview of the practice of research-based approaches to support multicultural learning. The study will also evaluate the impact of applying a research-based approach and the learning cycle in a multicultural context. This study contributes to the literature by offering a model of research-based multicultural learning that bridges non-formal and formal education contexts. Using a case study approach, this research will provide in-depth insights into multicultural practices and link them to the impact of more tolerant and independent learners. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of a research-based learning cycle in SALAM to strengthen multicultural education. The study contributes to the field by offering a framework that connects non-formal innovations with potential adaptations for formal schooling.

Materials and Methods

SALAM which represents a non-formal educational institution, has multicultural teaching practices, perceptions, and experiences. The main objective of this study is to explore these aspects. Using a case study approach, a qualitative descriptive approach was used in this study to examine how multicultural education is implemented. The learning cycle was used as a research-based approach in this study [16].

More specifically, there were three main objectives of this study. First, to see how teachers view student freedom as the basis for multicultural teaching. Second, to use the learning cycle, including identifying the conditions of parental involvement that can support child development, to find out how parents view the research approach. Third, to examine how this method impacts the formation of students' personalities [17]. Therefore, this study not only looks at it from the teachers' perspective but also looks at how parents play a role and influence their students. This provides a broad understanding of the multicultural education offered at SALAM.

A. Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to generate samples for this study [18], [19], [20]. The following additional selection criteria were used to ensure that the sample reflected a variety of perceptions about multiculturalism and the teaching experiences of facilitators as part of their daily work: a) Each participant must currently be employed as a facilitator at SALAM; and b) each participant must have at least three years of experience as a facilitator before data collection. The researchers sought to interview the founders of Sanggar Anak Alam with at least ten years of experience because previous research has shown that it takes time for facilitators to navigate the alignment of perceptions with the learning system at SALAM [21], [22]. It was also important to construct a sample that included the involvement of parents and students because the literature highlights how perceptions and impacts are applied through the research approach via the learning cycle system [23], [24]. The sample also included parents and students from different backgrounds, economic statuses, and demographic regions to ensure that it reflected the diverse experiences brought by parents and students [18], [23], [25]. Researchers who act with well-applied reflexivity can increase the credibility and accuracy of the research.

B. Participant description

Participants in this study totaled 35 individuals. The number of participants was selected based on the principle of data saturation, where information began to repeat, and no new themes were found. The participants were divided into several groups, including ten facilitators, one founder of SALAM, ten parents, and fifteen students from different geographical and economic backgrounds. For example, eight participants came from lower-middle social status backgrounds, while seven represented upper-middle social status backgrounds. An additional point is that their learning system was organized based on mutual consultation to form an independent curriculum between facilitators, parents, and students. Based on gender, thirty of the participants were female, and ten were male. There were also differences in the highest level of formal education among the participants. For example, ten of the participants had obtained a bachelor's degree at the time of the study, while ten participants reported that they had completed their studies at the elementary to high school levels. One participant was working on completing their doctoral degree when the interview took place. The average length of experience in the facilitator sample was three to six years, while the parents' sample had between three and eight years of experience participating in SALAM. Only one of the participating facilitators had less than one year of experience [22], [23].

C. Interview

Each participant participated in an interview. The interview protocol included seven open-ended questions for the facilitator and five open-ended questions covering multicultural

understanding, instructional practices, and collaborative experiences for parents and students. These questions [7], [26] inspired the interview questions and probes, focusing on identifying participants' perceptions and strategies for creating multicultural learning and inclusive environments throughout the learning process. The researcher provided questions to participants before the interviews and allowed them to revise the transcripts for accuracy and to add anything they might have missed during the interview. The longest interview lasted 1 hour, 23 minutes, and 24 seconds, and the shortest lasted 30 minutes and five seconds. The interviews were open-ended. For example, in situations such as a research presentation workshop or a parent-teacher open-ended class discussion, the researcher was asked to participate, resulting in comprehensive data collection. Pseudonyms are used in place of participants' real names throughout this article to protect the anonymity of all secondary school principals who participated in the study.

D. Data analysis

Data were analyzed through three stages: (1) *open coding* to identify units of meaning, (2) *axial coding* to connect categories, and (3) *selective coding* to develop main themes. The first stage is the analysis of triangulated data sources involving the results of interviews with facilitators, parents, and students [15], [27], [28]. The purpose of this triangulated data source analysis stage is to obtain data as a basis for initial coding of perceptions and experiences of multicultural education. The second stage is thematic analysis coding, which consists of the process of analyzing and interpreting findings [29], [30]. While the third stage involves connecting data (and breaking it down) in an effort to conclude the coded data and initial categories [31], [32]. The purpose of the thematic analysis coding stage using *Atlas.ti Software* version 9 is this stage aims to identify themes that emerge from the coded data. Thus, this analysis process combines a qualitative approach through triangulation of sources and thematic analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of multicultural learning practices. Validity was strengthened through member checking with participants and discussion of initial results with fellow researchers.

Results and Discussions

This study shows three main findings, namely understanding multicultural education, research-based learning cycles, and multicultural learning innovations.

A. Understanding Multicultural Education

The results of a qualitative analysis of 20 respondents, including facilitators and parents, indicate that inclusive school environments are influenced by individual perceptions, which impact the development of students' multicultural understanding. This understanding of multicultural education is shown in Fig. 1.

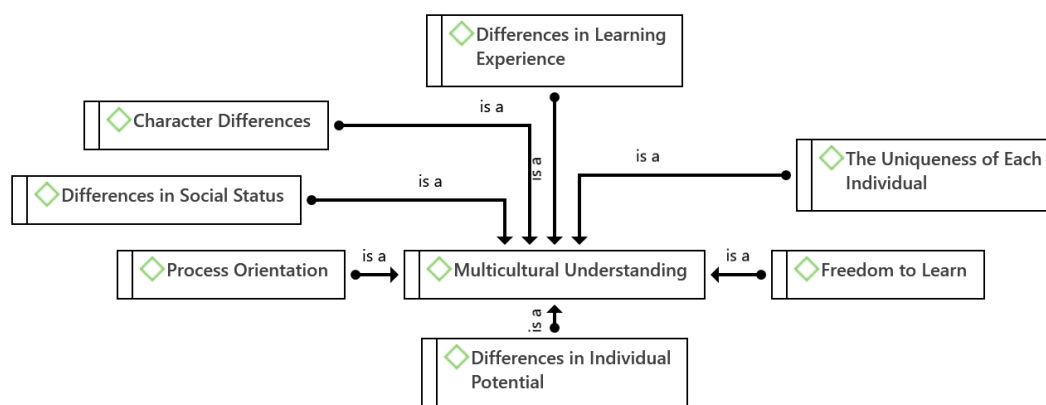


Fig. 1. Multicultural Understanding
Source: Atlas.ti Data Processing (2025)

Acceptance of differences and diversity is the essence of multicultural understanding. Fig. 1 shows several themes emerging from interviews with respondents, such as orientation toward the learning process, freedom to learn, differences in potential, social status, and individual uniqueness. These findings reveal that dialogue is a key strategy for fostering multicultural awareness, as explained by informants.

"Children are very free to choose their interests in any field, of course, in determining their interests, children are assisted by the existing learning cycle system to understand the points of view and opinions of others. They learn from each other through the experiences they have; the point is they can build a dialogue of freedom of learning " (D12:2)

"This approach does not only focus on results, but emphasizes the learning process itself" (D13:3)

"My understanding of alternative schools is that they support children's learning by accepting their diverse backgrounds and not separating children's potential" (D14:4)

Quotes (D12:2) and (D13:3) show that students not only receive information but also develop critical attitudes through direct experience. This is in line with the theory of Derson & Gunawan [15], Banks and Banks [33] that dialogic participation is the core of multicultural education. In addition, the respondent quote (D14:4) emphasizes the support of acceptance of diverse backgrounds as an alternative to creating a tolerant cultural environment. This is reinforced by Wardani & Ghiffari [34] Who emphasizes one of the indicators of multicultural education by empowering the school culture. Therefore, it can be concluded that the respondents' understanding agrees that the multicultural approach contributes significantly to the development of attitudes and knowledge as well as children's experiences, especially regarding uniqueness and freedom of expression.

Although the perceptions of parents and facilitators assess the essence of multicultural education as very important, there are still several challenges in its implementation, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Findings

Category	Findings	Illustration Quote
External	Character Differences	<i>"The challenges may be different from those faced by facilitators here, if I were you. There's also a limited number of facilitators who can teach at every level of education, because the facilitator recruitment system is uncertain. Because there are no work contracts, some facilitators can come and go at any time. " (13:3)</i>
	Parental Involvement	
Internal	Reduction of Administrative Burden	<i>"It's actually quite difficult, because teachers in formal schools are already burdened with so much administration, let alone being forced to understand the diverse characteristics of children. While the learning system might not be feasible, adapting some of the learning values is still possible if adopted for formal education." (D18:8)</i>
	Class Agreement Violation	
	Facilitator Limitations	
	Difficulty Concentrating	
	Difficulty Sharing Focus	
	Emotional Instability	
	Differences in Learning Systems	

Another external challenge is resistance from the rigid formal education structure, as expressed by the informant (D13:3). This innovative system was designed as an alternative solution for non-formal schools, and its adaptation requires several considerations and support. This is consistent with Friska and Paradila [35], Ashari and Zulherman [36] the fact that its implementation demonstrated a conflict between the flexibility of the new system and the standardization of the already uniform national curriculum. Meanwhile, the interviewee (D18:8) revealed that internal obstacles focused more on the burden borne by individuals, in this case, teachers and students. This finding reveals a fundamental dialectic between the pedagogical innovation of the learning cycle system and the standardized structure of formal education. It also highlights the need for a more flexible and contextual approach to education policy, one that allows for the integration of multicultural and interest-based principles without compromising the national standards framework.

B. Research-Based Learning Cycle

A thematic analysis of the research-based approach framework revealed a positive relationship between the learning cycle and multicultural awareness. The findings of the thematic analysis are supported by student interview data presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Stages of Research-Based Learning

No.	Learning Syntax	Information	Illustration Quote
1.	Observing	Digging into experiences or events that have been experienced as discussion material to understand the learning value behind them, such as from daily activities.	<i>"When I interviewed someone who owned a duck-selling business" (D15:5) When visiting a pottery shop (D5:1)</i>
2.	Collecting Data	Collecting data from their experiences as support to reveal learning activities and events based on field facts	<i>"Activities to find data on how to make pottery" (D5:2)</i>
3.	Processing Information	Processing, analyzing, and interpreting the values from	<i>When drawing 3D animated characters (D10:1)</i>

No.	Learning Syntax	Information	Illustration Quote
		experiences and data obtained during the learning process.	<i>When making bread dough</i> (D9:1)
4.	Conclude	Concluding and interpreting each event as a form of learning. Problems or issues are used as strategies for learning and discussion.	<i>"It was a memorable experience when I tried to explain the tarot card results"</i> (D8:1)
5.	Apply	Understand the values of learning events and are expected to be able to apply them in everyday life, as well as develop independence in learning.	<i>"I once applied it when trying to dismantle the AC machine"</i> (D7:1)

Based on interviews with respondents, a variety of research activities tailored to the individual interests of students creates a meaningful learning process *and* increases active student participation. Unlike previous studies by Gulsia and Yadav [32], Ashari and Zulherman [36], and Burakauskaitė and Čiginas [37] focusing on the implications of multicultural education and the learning cycle in formal schools, this research demonstrates the contribution that non-formal institutions such as SALAM can make as laboratories for multicultural innovation.

C. Multicultural Learning Innovation

The results of the thematic analysis of multicultural learning innovations revealed diverse perspectives from facilitators, parents, and schools, which emphasized the importance of a holistic approach to diversity-based education as listed in Fig. 2.

Through in-depth exploration (D16:6) and (D6:7) thematic analysis reveals two key perceptions about the transformation of multicultural education, integration policy innovation, and practical strategies through school cultural habituation. The following is the respondent's presentation.

"I hope that a learning system like this can be further developed both in formal schools and in the Indonesian education system" (D6:7)

"The best way to innovate multicultural learning is by integrating it into school habituation programs" (D16:6)

"Innovation is more about providing training to teachers regarding multicultural education, and easing administrative burdens" (D17:7)

This finding is supported by Ormond and Vietti [3], Barton and Ho [38], Khoiri and Hanafie [39], Banks [40] of respondents (D:17:7) who expressed a contradictory understanding, emphasizing teacher training as the key to change, while simultaneously viewing innovation as an additional administrative burden. However, Fadholi [2], Fullinwider [4], and Wang [41] criticized this view as an additional approach that actually burdens teachers. Essentially, the contribution of SALAM's learning model can be adapted into the formal curriculum.

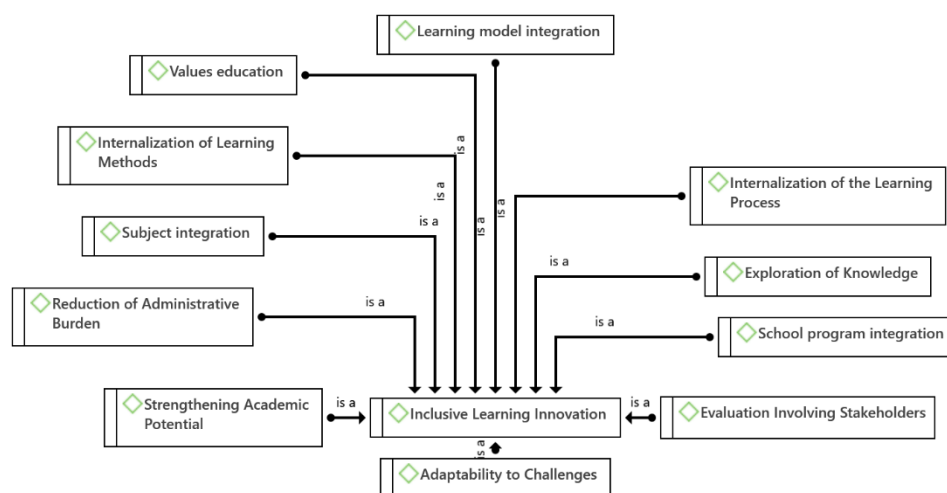


Fig 2. Multicultural Learning Innovation
Source: Atlas.ti Data Processing (2025)

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the findings, it is concluded that the integration of multicultural education through research-based learning using *the learning cycle approach* effectively accommodates student diversity and fosters inclusive attitudes, despite facing structural barriers such as parental participation and teacher burden, so that school-family-community collaboration is key. Theoretically, this study enriches the multicultural education model through the integration of research-based learning; practically, this model needs to be adapted to formal schools; and policy-wise, its principles can be integrated into the national curriculum, such as P5. The limitations of this study in non-formal contexts with limited participants imply the need for improved facilitator training and more operational curriculum design within the Independent Curriculum framework.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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