

Multicultural Education as a Strategy for Maintaining Unity and Harmony in Diversity in North Lombok Regency

Muhammad Najib

Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia
240701014.mhs@uinmataram.ac.id

Suprpto

Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia
suprpto@uinmataram.ac.id

Nurul Lailatul Khusniyah

Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia
nurullaila@uinmataram.ac.id

Ismail Thoib

Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia
ismail_thoib@uinmataram.ac.id

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Najib

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Abstract

North Lombok Regency is a region characterised by ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. This sociocultural reality demands an educational system that fosters tolerance, multiple identities, and social cohesion. This study explores the implementation of the Back to the Essence of Education Movement (GKKP) as a model of multicultural education based on locality. This study employs a qualitative approach with thematic content analysis of relevant educational policy documents, such as strategic plans, local curriculum content, character education enhancement guidelines, and annual GKKP program reports. Data were analysed based on Banks' five dimensions of multicultural education and Paulo Freire's principles of critical pedagogy. Validity is ensured through triangulation of sources and peer debriefing. Findings indicate that the GKKP integrates religious and local cultural values into intraschool and extracurricular learning. Using skill-building pocketbooks enables the structured internalisation of multicultural values, covering spiritual, national, school environment, and self-development aspects. The program also fosters an inclusive, collaborative, and democratic school culture and encourages the formation of dual identities among students as members of the local community and citizens of Indonesia. The GKKP model significantly contributes to developing a culturally relevant, localised, multicultural education approach. Despite challenges such as limited teacher training and local teaching materials, this initiative is a viable alternative to the dominance of Western-based multiculturalism approaches in educational literature.

Keywords: Multicultural Education; Local Curriculum; School Inclusivity; GKKP.

Introduction

Indonesia is a nation built on plurality, a sociocultural reality encompassing ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity.¹ This diversity is not only a cultural wealth that must be preserved but also presents strategic challenges in managing harmonious relations between individuals and groups within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.² In the context of multiculturalism, North Lombok Regency, as a region with a culturally and religiously heterogeneous society, represents the complexity of Indonesia's diversity at the micro level. According to Syaiful Anam, ethno-religious conflicts on Lombok Island are real, but North Lombok shows a positive anomaly, where diversity is a source of strength rather than division.³

Building and maintaining social integration in diverse communities remains an unresolved challenge. Multicultural education approaches have been widely recognised as relevant and effective strategies.⁴ Banks says multicultural education is not merely about adding diversity-related content to the curriculum. Still, it is a pedagogical paradigm rooted in principles of social justice, respect for collective and individual identities, and the cultivation of empathetic attitudes toward differences.⁵ The main objective of multicultural education is to develop students who are not only academically excellent but also socially sensitive and ethical toward cultural diversity and identities around them.

Various previous studies have highlighted the urgency of multicultural education. Syahidi Toha and Itaanis Tianah show that the consistent internalisation of multicultural values can reduce social prejudice and increase inclusivity.⁶ Wahyudi also emphasises that a multicultural approach in educational institutions enhances student solidarity and

¹ A Azra, "Cultural Pluralism In Indonesia: Continuous Reinventing of Indonesian Islam in Local, National and Global Contexts" 2 (2019): 56–60.

² H A R Tilaar, "Multikulturalisme, Tantangan Global Masa Depan," *Jakarta: Grasindo*, 2004.

³ Syaiful Anam, Nilam Handayani, and Khairurrizki Khairurrizki, "Konflik Antar Etnik-Agama Dan Pembangunan Perdamaian Di Lombok: Sebuah Eksplorasi Everyday Peace Di Lombok Utara," *RESIPROKAL: Jurnal Riset Sosiologi Progresif Aktual* 6, no. 2 (2024): 175–96.

⁴ Keke Qin, "The Integration of Multicultural Education and Global Perspectives in Social Work Education," *International Journal of Education and Social Development* 2, no. 1 (February 18, 2025): 60–65, <https://doi.org/10.54097/rymrpa87>.

⁵ J A Banks, "An Introduction to Multicultural Education (4th Eds)" (Boston, MA: Pearson Publication, 2008).

⁶ Syahidi Toha and Itaanis Tianah, "Internalization of Multiculturalism Values in Integrated Social Sciences Learning," *SOCIALE: International Journal of Social Studies* 1, no. 1 (2024): 132–43.

mutual respect.⁷ Meanwhile, Abdul Halim and Maskuri stress the importance of educators' capacity to implement adaptive learning in the local cultural context.⁸

The North Lombok government's policy, known as the Back to Khittah Education Movement, clearly demonstrates its seriousness about supporting the implementation of multicultural education through local policies.⁹ This policy aims to reorient the education system to be more rooted in local wisdom while remaining open to global challenges. The focus is not solely on academic achievement but also on student character development based on inclusivity, tolerance, and appreciation for cultural diversity.

However, comprehensive scientific studies that describe the implementation of GKKP, the values transmitted, and its impact on social cohesion in multicultural communities remain limited. In other words, there is still a knowledge gap regarding this region's mechanisms, effectiveness, and sociocultural context of multicultural education practices. Yet, a deep understanding of this is crucial for developing a multicultural education model that is not only conceptual but also practical and contextual.¹⁰

This study aims to explain how multicultural education is implemented in educational policies and practices in North Lombok as part of the "Back to the Essence of Education Movement." This study captures the process of integrating multicultural values into the curriculum and educational activities, including the strategies teachers and academic institutions use to convey values such as tolerance, equality, and respect for diversity.

Furthermore, this study also examines the contribution of multicultural education to strengthening social cohesion in the culturally and religiously diverse society of North Lombok. As stated by August Ufie,¹¹ Bakri Tahir and Krisman Heriamsal,¹² this

⁷ Ahmad Wahyudi, "Pendidikan Berwawasan Multikultural Di Lembaga Pendidikan Islam: Konsepsi Dan Implementasinya Di Mi Negeri Paju Ponorogo," *Piwulang: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 3, no. 2 (2021): 123–42.

⁸ Abdul Halim and Maskuri Maskuri, "Kompetensi Multikultural Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam," *Pendidikan Multikultural* 5, no. 1 (2021): 120–37.

⁹ Hery Mahardika, "Bupati Pelopori Gerakan Kembali Ke Khittah Pendidikan," *Radar Lombok*, 2017, <https://radarlombok.co.id/bupati-pelopori-gerakan-kembali-ke-khittah-pendidikan.html>.

¹⁰ Fita Mustafida, "Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Multikultural Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI)," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Indonesia* 4, no. 2 (2020): 173–85.

¹¹ August Ufie, "Mengonstruksi Nilai-Nilai Kearifan Lokal (Local Wisdom) Dalam Pembelajaran Muatan Lokal Sebagai Upaya Memperkokoh Kohesi Sosial (Studi Deskriptif Budaya Nilotiliet Masyarakat Adat Pulau Wetang Kabupaten Maluku Barat Daya, Propinsi Maluku)," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran (JPP)* 23, no. 2 (2017): 79–89.

¹² Bakri Tahir and Krisman Heriamsal, "LIVING HARMONI: Praktik Moderasi Beragama Di Desa Toabo, Sulawesi Barat," *TOLERANSI: Media Ilmiah Komunikasi Umat Beragama* 17, no. 1 (n.d.): 11–25.

understanding is crucial so that education does not only function as a means of imparting knowledge, but also as a strategic tool for building a just, peaceful, and civilized society.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to deepen its understanding of the implementation of multicultural education in North Lombok Regency.¹³ This approach is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to examine the social meanings hidden behind educational policy practices, particularly instilling values of tolerance, diversity, and respect for differences that occur naturally in the local context.

The unit of analysis in this study is policy and institutional documents directly related to implementing multicultural education. The documents were selected purposively based on their relevance to multiculturalism, the credibility of their sources, which were official institutions such as the Education Office, and their relevance to the local context and dynamics of North Lombok Regency. The documents analysed include the education office's strategic plan, local content curriculum, annual reports on regional education programs, guidelines for strengthening character education, and supporting academic references.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis techniques.¹⁴ The researcher carefully read each document, identified key terms and implied meanings, and then categorised them into main themes such as strategies for internalising multicultural values, implementing actors, and challenges faced. This categorisation is conducted inductively based on field data and guided by a pre-determined theoretical framework.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, the researcher triangulated sources by comparing information from different types of complementary documents. The analysis process was carried out by the principal researcher, who has expertise in multicultural education, and the initial results of the categorisation process were shared in a discussion session with two peers to obtain initial validation (peer debriefing). The coding and theme extraction process was done manually using a thematic template designed based on Banks' dimensions of multicultural education, supplemented by Paulo

¹³ Sugiyono, "Metode Penelitian Pendidikan Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif Dan R&D," 2013.

¹⁴ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage publications, 2016).

Freire's principles of critical education to assess the extent to which diversity awareness was developed through education.

The theoretical framework used in this study is the five-dimensional model of multicultural education developed by James A. Banks, which includes content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equitable pedagogy, and empowering school culture. This framework guides in structurally evaluating existing policies and curricula. Additionally, this study employs a *localised multicultural education* approach rooted in the richness of local culture as an adaptive and contextual alternative to the national education system. ¹⁵

The Socio-Cultural Reality of North Lombok and the Need for Multicultural Education

North Lombok Regency has high cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity. Its population consists of the Sasak ethnic group as the indigenous people and Balinese, Bugis, Javanese, and other ethnic communities that have lived side by side for generations. This diversity is reflected in cultural practices, language, and religious rituals.

This condition serves as a social asset but also has the potential to trigger latent conflicts if not accompanied by systematic efforts in education on tolerance values and the management of differences. Therefore, multicultural education has become a strategic necessity. As Banks states, "Education that values diversity can serve as the foundation for social cohesion and justice in a pluralistic society." ¹⁶

The Movement Back to the Essence of Education (GKKP) as a Contextual Strategy

In response to the local need for education that can address diversity challenges, the North Lombok Regency Government launched a policy through Regent Regulation No. 21 of 2019 on the Movement to Return to the Essence of Education (GKKP).¹⁷ This initiative integrates noble cultural, religiosity, and social values into the intraschool and extracurricular learning systems.

¹⁵ Sonia Nieto, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*. (ERIC, 1992).

¹⁶ James A. Banks, "Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching," *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching*, 2015, 1–342, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315622255>.

¹⁷ Mahardika, "Bupati Pelopori Gerakan Kembali Ke Khittah Pendidikan."

For example, mathematics education at the junior high school/MTs level emphasises cube volume calculations. It relates them to the practice of wudhu, demonstrating the integration of scientific and religious aspects. On the other hand, in thematic social studies learning at elementary schools, the concept of cultural diversity is explained through student dialogue and the reinforcement of tolerance values, directly referencing a verse from the Quran (QS Al-Hujurat: 13) as a form of IMTAQ integration into the curriculum.

This model is in line with Gay's culturally responsive approach,¹⁸ and Lickona's integrative value education,¹⁹ This emphasises the importance of the connection between learning content and local values.

Implementation of Multicultural Values in the Pocket Book of Skills

The implementation of GKPP in the extracurricular domain is formalised through skill pocketbooks for students. This book serves as a documentation and evaluation tool for students' competency achievements in four main aspects:

1. Spiritual and moral,
2. Nationalism and diversity,
3. School and environment,
4. Self-development.

The contents of this handbook are very detailed and inclusive of religious diversity. For example, Muslim students are taught daily prayers, short surahs, and worship procedures. Christian and Catholic students are taught religious songs and critical religious days, as are Buddhist and Hindu students. This indicates that multicultural values are not just discourse, but are practised through structured and tiered training in religious diversity from early childhood education to junior high school/MTs. This confirms Rudianto's opinion that multicultural education designed based on concrete experiences will be more effective in instilling attitudes of tolerance and mutual respect.²⁰

¹⁸ Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (teachers college press, 2018).

¹⁹ Thomas Lickona, "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 25, no. 1 (1996): 93–100.

²⁰ Rudianto Rudianto, "Implementasi Pendidikan Multikural Dalam Membentuk Karakter Siswa," *Jurnal Multidisiplin Indonesia* 2, no. 6 (2023): 1360–66.

The Impact of Multicultural Education on School Culture

Based on the original document, the positive impact of GKKP implementation is evident in changes to school culture. Students become more open to cultural and religious differences, accustomed to collaborating across identities, and able to create a friendly and inclusive school ecosystem.

Examples of activities such as inter-ethnic art performances, interfaith student forums, public discussions, and community service strengthen students' social involvement and shape their agency as agents of tolerance in society.²¹ and Banks' theory of multicultural participatory citizenship²², where schools not only transmit knowledge but also shape the character of democratic and tolerant citizens.

Synergy of Local and National Identities

Integrating local values such as *begibung* (eating together), *gotong royong* (cooperation), and *musyawarah* (deliberation) into education strengthens students' cultural identity. These local values do not stand alone but are integrated with learning about Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, regional and national songs, and the history of national heroes.

In the national and diversity aspects of the Grade 9 junior high school handbook, students are assigned to conduct simple research on the application of Pancasila, participate in ceremonies, learn about national symbols, and sing mandatory and regional songs. This serves as a concrete form of dual identity education: as members of the local community and as citizens of Indonesia. These findings align with John W. Berry's dual identity theory.²³

Supporting and Hindering Factors in the Implementation of GKKP

Various factors influence the program's effectiveness in implementing multicultural education in North Lombok, both supporting and inhibiting factors. On the supporting side, the cultural diversity of the people of North Lombok is a substantial social capital for promoting inclusive educational practices. The diversity of ethnicities, religions, and

²¹ John Dewey, *The School and Society* (University of Chicago Press Chicago, 1961).

²² James A. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education Fifth Edition, Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, University of Washington*, 2014.

²³ John W Berry et al., "Immigrant Youth: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation," *Applied Psychology* 55, no. 3 (2006): 303–32.

cultures that coexist provides space for education to build values of tolerance and mutual respect for differences.

The local government's commitment, as manifested in policies such as Perbup No. 21 of 2019, also provides a solid policy foundation for implementing multicultural values in education. In addition, the active participation of teachers and schools as technical implementers in the field plays a vital role in guiding contextual and adaptive learning in response to diversity. Equally important, the support of the community and religious and traditional leaders strengthens the social legitimacy of multicultural education programs, while ensuring that the values instilled in schools align with community life.

However, several challenges hinder the optimisation of the program. One of the main obstacles is the lack of in-depth understanding of multicultural education concepts and practices among educators. Many teachers have not received adequate training, so applying diversity values is often symbolic.

Another obstacle is the lack of learning resources developed based on the local context, making the learning process less relevant to students' lives. In addition, stereotypes and social prejudices between groups are still found in the school environment, which can disrupt the creation of an inclusive learning atmosphere. Infrastructure limitations, especially in remote areas, are also serious obstacles to the dissemination and equitable distribution of the program. In response to these issues, Murniati Agustian emphasises the importance of critical reflection-based teacher training and the development of contextual local learning media as key strategies for strengthening the implementation of multicultural education.²⁴

Empirically, this study shows that a locally-based multicultural education model implemented through curriculum integration, regional policies, and school practices has made a real contribution to creating a harmonious learning environment. The GKKP program has successfully promoted increased student tolerance, expanded participation in interfaith and intercultural social activities, and created synergy between national values and local wisdom. The impact of this approach is also evident in strengthening social cohesion, not only within the school environment but also in the surrounding community. Thus, this model contributes to developing multicultural education in

²⁴ Murniati Agustian et al., "Meningkatkan Kompetensi Guru Di Lingkungan Forum Guru Agama Nasional Untuk Meminimalkan Sikap Intoleran Dengan Pendekatan Pendidikan Multikultural Di Kelas," *WIDYA LAKSANA* 12, no. 1 (2023): 134–41.

Indonesia. Amid the dominance of multicultural education theories originating from Western countries, as highlighted by Sonia Nieto, which emphasise multicultural education in a local context, this finding demonstrates the relevance of a localised *multicultural education* approach rooted in local cultural richness as an adaptive and contextual alternative for the national education system.

Conclusion

This study confirms that cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity in North Lombok is a strategic strength that can be harnessed through education to build an inclusive society. The Back to the Roots of Education Movement (GKKP), regulated by Regent Regulation No. 21 of 2019, has proven to be a model of locally-based multicultural education that can integrate religious values and local wisdom into both intraschool and extracurricular learning. This approach enriches learning experiences and fosters positive attitudes toward diversity through direct practices, such as pocketbooks containing interfaith values and collaborative activities at school.

The impact is evident in the creation of an inclusive, collaborative, and democratic school culture, as well as in the strengthening of students' dual identity as members of the local community and citizens of Indonesia. The success of this program is supported by social capital in the form of community diversity, policy support, teacher involvement, and collaboration with the community. However, challenges such as limited teacher understanding, a lack of contextual teaching materials, and social stereotypes still need to be addressed through critical reflection-based training and the development of local learning media. Theoretically, the GKKP model offers an essential contribution to the literature on multicultural education, particularly as a socially and contextually relevant local values-based alternative to the dominance of Western approaches.

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