



Promoting Religious Moderation through Multicultural Problem-Based Learning: A Study in Elementary Education

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Abstract

Indonesia is a country with immense diversity in religion, culture, and ethnicity. This diversity serves as both a wealth and a challenge in building a harmonious and tolerant society. In social reality, unmanaged differences could lead to prejudice, discrimination, and even intergroup conflict. The objectives of this study were to examine the effectiveness of multicultural problem-based learning, to identify teachers' perceptions, and to assess the contribution of this approach in fostering a tolerant, inclusive, and diversity-appreciating character in line with religious moderation values in primary education. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, presenting qualitative data gathered from interviews and quantitative data collected through a Google Form questionnaire distributed to elementary school (SD) and Islamic elementary school (MI) teachers in Kuningan Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The findings demonstrated that multicultural problem-based learning was viewed very positively by SD and MI teachers, as it effectively familiarised students with the values of diversity, tolerance, and inclusiveness while strengthening their character and 21st-century skills. This approach was deliberately strategic in

promoting religious moderation, attitudes, and building a peaceful and inclusive educational ecosystem.

Keywords: *multicultural education, problem-based learning, religious moderation attitude.*

Abstrak

Indonesia adalah negara dengan keragaman agama, budaya, dan suku yang sangat besar. Keragaman ini berfungsi sebagai kekayaan sekaligus tantangan dalam membangun masyarakat yang harmonis dan toleran. Dalam realitas sosial, perbedaan yang tidak terkelola dapat menyebabkan prasangka, diskriminasi, dan bahkan konflik antarkelompok. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji efektivitas pembelajaran berbasis masalah multikultural, mengidentifikasi persepsi guru, dan mengkaji kontribusi pendekatan ini dalam menumbuhkan karakter yang toleran, inklusif, dan menghargai keragaman yang sejalan dengan nilai-nilai moderasi beragama di pendidikan dasar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan metode campuran, menyajikan data kualitatif yang dikumpulkan dari wawancara dan data kuantitatif yang dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner Google Form yang disebarakan kepada guru sekolah dasar (SD) dan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) di Kabupaten Kuningan, Jawa Barat, Indonesia. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran berbasis masalah multikultural dipandang sangat positif oleh guru SD dan MI, karena secara efektif membiasakan siswa dengan nilai-nilai keragaman, toleransi, dan inklusivitas sekaligus memperkuat karakter dan keterampilan abad ke-21 siswa. Pendekatan ini sengaja dibuat strategis dalam mempromosikan moderasi beragama, sikap, dan membangun ekosistem pendidikan yang damai dan inklusif.

Kata kunci: *pendidikan multikultural, pembelajaran berbasis masalah, sikap moderasi beragama.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country renowned for its diversity. This diversity encompassed not only cultural and linguistic aspects but also religious, ethnic, and local traditions, spread across the archipelago from Sabang to Merauke. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (2023) specified that Indonesia's population was predominantly Muslim (86.88%), followed by Protestant Christians (6.96%), Catholics (2.91%), Hindus (1.69%), Buddhists (0.72%), and Confucians (0.05%). This diversity, as preserved in the national motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity), should ideally appear as the nation's wealth and strength. However, in practice, this diversity often encounters challenges, particularly in raising tolerance and social harmony within a pluralistic society.

Based on data from the Setara Institute (2022), there has been a 20% increase in cases of religious freedom violations in Indonesia compared to the previous year. Many cases indicate that religious and ethnic intolerance remains a problem that needs to be addressed through systemic and educational approaches, such as the case of the destruction of Christian graves at the Cemoro Kembar Cemetery in Solo by a group of elementary school children. This incident is believed to be linked to the intolerant doctrines that these children were exposed to in their educational environment (<https://news.detik.com/berita-jawa-tengah/d-5616554/7-fakta-aksi-intoleran-perusakan-makam-di-solo-yang-bikin-gibran-geram>, 2021).

From this case, it is evident that there remains a lack of awareness of religious moderation in everyday life, particularly among elementary school students.

This aligns with the findings of research conducted by Huda et al. (2023), which suggest that multicultural education plays a crucial role in early conflict prevention efforts. This can be achieved by respecting the differences and diversity of students' backgrounds, social status, beliefs, and cultural groups. Additionally, research conducted by Atmaja (2024) indicates that multicultural education in elementary schools has a systemic and holistic nature, requiring comprehensive development. Given the findings of previous research on the importance of multicultural problem-based learning, this study aims to investigate the impact of problem-based learning on students' religious moderation attitudes.

Religious moderation was a concept that highlighted a non-extremist religious attitude, tolerance toward differences, and respect for humanity. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019) emphasised that religious moderation is a perspective, attitude, and practice of religious life in society, based on principles of justice, balance, and upholding human values and constitutional norms. This concept was highly relevant to familiarise students early on, particularly at the elementary school level, as it was the most fundamental stage for shaping values and character.

Meanwhile, problem-based learning has become one of the most effective pedagogical strategies for developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and social awareness skills in students. According to Suyono et al (2025), the problem-based learning model in multicultural classrooms significantly enhances critical thinking skills, cross-cultural collaboration abilities, and collective problem-solving capabilities. Therefore, this approach does not merely focus on academic problem-solving but on real-world issues that arise in society.

The application of problem-based learning models oriented towards multicultural values is very important in the context of Indonesia's diversity. Saqjuddin's (2025) research findings indicate that integrating multicultural values into social studies curriculum significantly enhances elementary school students' attitudes toward diversity. This demonstrates that multicultural education has a positive impact on shaping students' character, fostering harmonious social life, and serving as a platform to introduce students to concepts of pluralism, democracy, and social justice.

Hmelo-Silver (2004) argues that through this model, students not only learn to develop critical and creative thinking skills, but are also trained to analyze social issues objectively and reflectively. In this regard, problem-based learning offers a contextual and participatory model by presenting real-world problems as stimuli for thinking. Therefore, in the context of multiculturalism, problem-based learning can be an effective strategy for internalizing the values of pluralism and tolerance amid social, cultural, and religious diversity.

However, in practice, many elementary schools have not yet optimally integrated multicultural issues and religious moderation into the learning process. Teachers tend to focus on cognitive and academic aspects, and few have developed problem-based learning that is relevant to the local diversity of students. This suggests that the elementary school curriculum tends to focus primarily on the theoretical aspects of diversity, without providing students with opportunities for real-world practice (Ramadhani et al., 2021; Wardani et al., 2024).

Preliminary studies at Public Elementary School (SDN) 2 Cisantana & SDN 1 Sukamulya in Cigugur District, Kuningan Regency, show that religious moderation among elementary school students still faces challenges both conceptually and in daily practice. Most students do not fully understand the meaning of religious moderation, and this term has not been well socialised. Religious diversity does exist in schools, but theological dilemmas still arise in daily practices, such as interfaith holiday greetings, as well as incidents of religious-based insults that escalate into physical conflicts. This suggests a limited understanding among students regarding the importance of tolerance and the need to promote moderation systematically.

The integration of PBL with multicultural education content provides students with opportunities to discover and discuss real-world diversity phenomena in their surroundings. Maftuh (2023) claimed that multicultural education in schools can enhance students' competence in understanding sociocultural diversity as part of their character development. In this process, teachers act as facilitators, guiding students to comprehend root problems, identify differing perspectives, and formulate inclusive solutions. Several studies have proposed that PBL with a multicultural context can foster students' empathy, appreciation for differences, and inclusive attitudes (Banks, 2019; Sambu et al., 2020).

The implementation of multicultural education and religious moderation through problem-based learning models still faces various challenges, including teacher readiness, the availability of learning materials, and limited student understanding. Nurul Huda's (2021) study shows that many teachers at the elementary school level do not yet have sufficient competence in developing contextual learning models based on multiculturalism. In addition, lesson content is often only normative and does not touch on the practical aspects of students' daily lives. In other words, the study reveals the problem but does not offer alternative methodological approaches that can be practical solutions for teachers in the classroom.

Therefore, the uniqueness of this study lies in its attempt to integrate PBL with multicultural education as a strategy to foster religious moderation at the elementary school level. This integration not only emphasises cognitive understanding of diversity but also encourages students to become accustomed to solving real problems related to diversity issues and connecting multicultural values with attitudes of religious moderation (tolerance, national commitment, and anti-violence) in everyday life.

Thus, this study fills a gap that has not been widely addressed in previous studies, namely the application of a learning model based on real problems with a multicultural perspective to strengthen religious moderation in elementary schools. This study not only contributes to the theoretical aspect but also provides practical contributions for teachers in designing learning that is more inclusive, contextual, and relevant to current social challenges.

METHODS

The research applied a mixed-methods approach. According to Creswell & Plano Clark (2011), mixed methods combine the integration of both quantitative (numerical/statistical) and qualitative (narrative/textual) data collection, analysis, and interpretation within a single study to enhance the understanding of the research problem. The study employed a sequential exploratory design, starting with qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by quantitative data collection and analysis to test or generalize the initial findings more broadly.

Qualitative data were collected through interviews with 10 teachers at Public Elementary School (SDN) Cisantana II and SDN Sukamulya 1, located in the Cigugur District of Kuningan Regency, West Java, Indonesia. Meanwhile, quantitative data were gathered through a survey method, which quantitatively described behavioural tendencies within a population by examining a sample (Creswell, 2017). In this study, the behaviours in question pertained to the importance of multicultural problem-based learning in fostering religious moderation attitudes.

Quantitative data were obtained online using Google Forms, with a sample of 100 teachers from both elementary schools (SD) and Islamic elementary schools (MI) across Kuningan Regency. The research instruments included an interview guide for teachers and a questionnaire consisting of 30 statements on the significance of multicultural problem-based learning in SD/MI.

The instruments used in this study comprised an interview guide and a questionnaire. Experts validated both instruments to ensure content validity, clarity of language, and the relevance of the items to the research objectives. Validation was conducted by lecturers specialising in multicultural education and religious moderation, who provided feedback on the structure, wording, and appropriateness of the items in measuring teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the implementation of multicultural problem-based learning. The stages of the research are explained in the figure below:

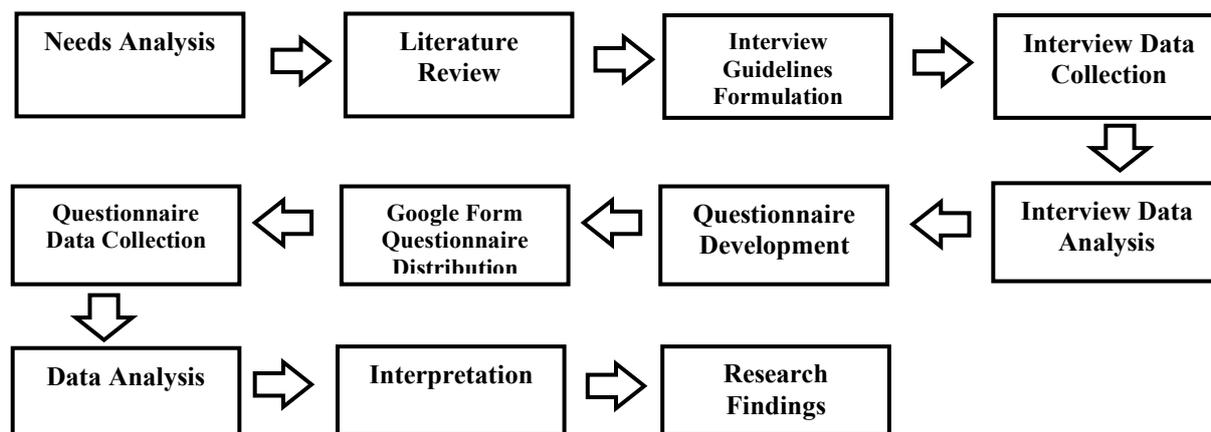


Figure 1. Research Process Stages

Based on the stages of the research process outlined above, the operational steps to be carried out in the research process will be explained. The first step needs analysis and literature review, which is very important because needs analysis provides empirical data obtained from the field that is factual in nature, while literature review provides scientific theoretical support that reinforces the results of the needs analysis so that the research process that will be carried out is in accordance with the issues that will be raised.

Next is the formulation of interview guidelines, which are developed based on the results of the needs analysis. The purpose of these guidelines is to gather in-depth data in line with the research problem. The data collection phase involves conducting interviews directly with the informants, namely teachers at SDN 2 Cisantana and SDN 1 Sukamulya. The next step is analysing the interview results, which involves processing and interpreting the data obtained from the informants to identify meanings, patterns, and themes relevant to the research focus.

To support and strengthen the interview data, a questionnaire was distributed to elementary school teachers and madrasah teachers in Kuningan Regency. The results of the questionnaire will be analyzed and processed in accordance with the research focus to obtain an overview and results of the issues to be studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results that will be described include the findings from interviews conducted with teachers at SDN 2 Cisantana and SDN 1 Sukamulya, as well as the results of questionnaires distributed to elementary school teachers and Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers in the Kuningan Regency area, which were tailored to address the research problem's focus. The results of these two methods can be seen below:

The Importance of Multicultural Problem-Based Learning in Elementary Schools

Multicultural Problem-Based Learning was an educational approach that integrated problem-based learning principles with the values of cultural, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity. At the Elementary School and Islamic Elementary School (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) levels, this approach held significant importance, as students experienced crucial cognitive and social development phases that laid the foundation for their personality, attitudes, and perceptions of their environment.

During this age, children began to recognise differences, form opinions, and learn behavioural norms toward others. Consequently, Multicultural Problem-Based Learning is preserved as an effective tool for instilling the values of religious moderation, tolerance, and empathy, while enabling learners to understand diverse perspectives. Through this approach, students learned to respect differences and coexist harmoniously. These outcomes are closely tied to the core principles of multicultural education, which include justice, equality, and respect for diversity (Banks, 2006). Therefore, the significance of Multicultural Problem-Based Learning in SD/MI settings was demonstrated in the questionnaire results below:

Table 1. Results of the Questionnaire on the Importance of Multicultural Problem-Based Learning in Elementary Schools

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	The multicultural problem-based approach strengthened students' character in appreciating differences.	50.5%	49.5%	0.0%	0.0%
2	The implementation of multicultural problem-based learning was not intended to improve students' tolerance toward differences.	7.9%	29.7%	53.5%	8.9%
3	Multicultural problem-based learning has been shown to reduce negative stereotypes and prejudices in the school environment.	21.8%	75.2%	3.0%	0.0%
4	Problem-based learning helped students to enhance critical and analytical thinking skills.	47.5%	52.5%	0.0%	0.0%
5	Without the implementation of the problem-based learning model, students tended to be passive and were less	16.8%	72.3%	9.9%	1.0%

	engaged in efforts to find solutions to real-life problems.				
6	Problem-based learning was a relevant method to foster creative and solution-oriented character in students.	29.7%	68.3%	2.0%	0.0%

Column headers: SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; D: Disagree SD: Strongly Disagree

Based on the results of the questionnaire above, it shows that overall respondents have a positive perception of the implementation of multicultural problem-based learning. Most respondents agreed and strongly agreed. This indicates that multicultural problem-based learning is considered relevant to current educational needs, because it not only produces instructional impacts in the form of increased knowledge and skills, but also accompanying impacts in the form of shaping social attitudes, character, and values of tolerance in social life.

These results were reinforced by interviews with teachers at SDN 2 Cisantana and SDN 1 Sukamulya regarding the importance of multicultural problem-based learning, namely: *"We welcome the implementation of the multicultural problem-based learning model because it is considered effective in shaping students' character, particularly in terms of respecting cultural and religious diversity. This model is also seen as capable of enhancing students' critical and analytical thinking skills, as students are trained to analyze real-world problems and collaboratively seek solutions. In general, the multicultural problem-based approach is regarded as a relevant and contextual method for instilling character values such as tolerance, creativity, and a solution-oriented mindset in addressing diversity."*

Based on the research findings related to the indicators of the importance of multicultural problem-based learning in SD/MI, teachers' perceptions of its implementation were highly positive. The majority of teachers stated that this approach effectively strengthened students' character in appreciating differences, developed tolerance, and reduced negative stereotypes and prejudices in the school environment.

Beyond character values, multicultural problem-based learning was also considered capable of nurturing critical and analytical thinking skills, which constitute essential 21st-century competencies. Multicultural problem-based learning is considered effective in shaping students' character to be tolerant, critical, and adaptive to diversity. This is supported by various theories that emphasize the importance of multicultural education as a means of instilling values of tolerance, reducing stereotypes, and building inclusive attitudes from an early age (Lonergan et al. 2022, Qondias et al. 2022, Banks, 2015; Nieto, 2010). Additionally, the problem-based approach can encourage active student engagement and develop critical and analytical thinking skills as part of 21st-century competencies (Barrows, 1986). Thus, multicultural problem-based learning is considered a relevant and contextual method for fostering students' creative, solution-oriented, and adaptable character in the face of diversity.

Generally, these findings indicated that multicultural problem-based learning was not only theoretically understood but also practically valued by educators as a pedagogical strategy capable of instilling religious moderation values and fostering an inclusive educational ecosystem from the elementary education level.

Teachers' Perceptions of Multicultural Values in Problem-Based Learning

Teachers realised that student diversity in cultural, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds was an unavoidable reality that should be integrated into the learning process. In this context, problem-based learning was regarded as a relevant and practical approach for instilling multicultural values in a contextually and meaningfully meaningful way.

Several studies have confirmed that teachers perceive multicultural values in problem-based learning not merely as instructional content, but also as an inherent part of the pedagogical process itself. Applying PBL to perceive multicultural values arising through the selection of inclusive problems, heterogeneous student grouping, and the cultivation of open-minded thinking during classroom discussions (Sari, 2020; Yuliana & Rahman, 2021). Therefore, teachers' perceptions of multicultural values in problem-based learning could be observed in the questionnaire results below:

Table 2. Results of the Questionnaire on Teachers' Perceptions of Multicultural Values in Problem-Based Learning

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Without the implementation of problem-based learning, multicultural values were less effectively embedded in students.	14.9%	71.3%	11.9%	2.0%
2	Through problem-based learning, students learned the importance of tolerance toward religious, cultural, and ethnic differences.	38.6%	61.4%	0.0%	0.0%
3	Problem-based learning that incorporated multicultural values prevented discrimination and prejudice in the school environment.	30.7%	67.3%	2.0%	0.0%
4	Problem-based learning provided students with opportunities to collaborate with peers from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.	31.7%	68.3%	0.0%	0.0%
5	Multicultural problem-based learning facilitated students' critical thinking about diverse social issues.	33.7%	64.5%	2.0%	0.0%
6	Without developing multicultural problem-based learning models, students' understanding of Indonesia's cultural diversity tended to be limited.	14.9%	67.3%	17.8%	0.0%
7	Developing multicultural problem-based learning models strengthened patriotic attitudes and national commitment.	32.7%	66.3%	1.0%	0.0%
8	Teachers needed to be involved in developing problem-based learning models that promoted multicultural values.	35.6%	63.4%	1.0%	0.0%

Column headers: SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; D: Disagree SD: Strongly Disagree

The results of the questionnaire above show that the application of problem-based learning (PBL) integrated with multicultural values has a very significant positive impact on students. The majority of respondents gave ratings in the 'agree' and 'strongly agree' categories, while the percentage who chose 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' was relatively small. This demonstrates that the multicultural-based problem-based learning (PBL) model is highly relevant and effective in shaping attitudes of tolerance, preventing discrimination, increasing understanding of diversity, and fostering a sense of nationality in students.

These results were reinforced by interviews with teachers at SDN 2 Cisantana and SDN 1 Sukamulya, regarding teachers' perceptions of multicultural values in problem-based learning, which are as follows: *"Problem-based learning models integrated with multicultural values are very effective in instilling religious moderation in students. Teachers believe that the implementation of this model can foster tolerance, reduce prejudice and discrimination, and enhance students' critical thinking skills regarding diverse social issues. Additionally, this learning approach encourages collaboration among students from diverse backgrounds and strengthens their love for the homeland and national commitment. The success of this model heavily depends on teachers' active involvement in its development and implementation within the school environment. Thus, the multicultural problem-based learning approach emerges as a relevant and contextual strategy in shaping students' inclusive, tolerant, and nationally-minded character"*.

Based on the study's results, teachers hold a positive view of the effectiveness of multicultural problem-based learning in instilling values of diversity and tolerance in students at the elementary school and madrasah ibtidaiyah levels. Without the development of a multicultural problem-based learning model that emphasises multicultural values, students' understanding of Indonesia's cultural diversity will remain limited. Conversely, the development of such a model is considered capable of strengthening love for the homeland and national commitment, and is worthy of being developed in collaboration with teachers, who are the primary implementers of learning.

The results of this study are relevant to Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which emphasises the importance of social interaction in the learning process, especially in building understanding through real-world contexts such as diversity and socio-cultural aspects. Furthermore, according to Abacioğlu, C., et al. (2020), a positive relationship exists between teachers' multicultural attitudes and perspective-taking abilities, as well as their adoption of culturally responsive teaching practices. Thus, multicultural problem-based learning has been proven to not only encourage students' critical thinking skills on social issues, but also plays an important role in building students' character to be tolerant, collaborative, nationalistic, and open to differences, in line with the values of the Pancasila Student Profile and the principles of Religious Moderation.

Religious Moderation in Multicultural Problem-Based Learning

Religious moderation was a religious attitude that positioned individuals at the midpoint avoiding both left-wing and right-wing extremism while prioritising principles of tolerance, justice, non-violence, and respect for differences (Kemenag RI, 2019). One practical approach to encourage religious moderation was multicultural problem-based learning. This method focused not only on resolving academic problems but also addressed social and diversity

issues relevant to students' lives, such as religious conflicts, intergroup prejudices, or neglect of local cultures.

Furthermore, the students were guided to think critically, discuss, and collaboratively seek solutions by incorporating real-world problems within diverse contexts. This process enabled the natural internalisation of tolerance and empathy. The approach aligned with multicultural education principles, emphasising social justice, equality, and identity recognition in classrooms (Banks, 2006). Therefore, the role of religious moderation in multicultural problem-based learning could be observed in the questionnaire results below:

Table 3. Results of the Questionnaire on Religious Moderation in Multicultural Problem-Based Learning

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Strengthening religious moderation in SD/MI contributed to a peaceful and inclusive school environment.	46.5%	51.5%	2.0%	0.0%
2	Failure to implement religious moderation education from an early age often results in students lacking tolerance for differences.	23.8%	68.3%	6.9%	1.0%
3	Mutual respect among religious communities needed to be cultivated through real-life examples in daily school activities.	52.5%	47.5%	0.0%	0.0%
4	Through multicultural problem-based learning, students valued differences and diversity as part of national unity.	35.6%	64.4%	0.0%	0.0%
5	Through multicultural problem-based learning, students were not fully open to discussing religious diversity without prejudice.	10.9%	63.4%	25.7%	0.0%
6	Multicultural problem-based learning encouraged students to collaborate regardless of their religious backgrounds.	28.7%	71.3%	0.0%	0.0%
7	Multicultural problem-based learning motivated students to preserve local religious-based cultures.	27.7%	71.3%	1.0%	0.0%
8	Multicultural problem-based learning helped students understand that local cultures often contain noble religious values.	31.7%	65.3%	3.0%	0.0%
9	Multicultural problem-based learning had not yet fully established students' understanding that every religion teaches peaceful values.	17.8%	61.4%	19.8%	1.0%
10	With this approach, students became more open to perspectives and respected religious diversity without causing conflict.	37.6%	59.4%	3.0%	0.0%

Based on the results of the above questionnaire, it appears that multicultural problem-based learning in elementary schools/Islamic elementary schools is considered very effective in fostering religious moderation. The majority of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that this approach is capable of promoting a peaceful and inclusive school environment, as well as instilling mutual respect among religious communities. In addition, it is also considered to enhance interfaith cooperation, foster awareness of the importance of local cultures that embody noble values, and strengthen a sense of unity and commitment to the nation.

These results were reinforced by interviews with teachers at SDN 2 Cisantana and SDN 1 Sukamulya regarding religious moderation in multicultural problem-based learning are as follows: *"The problem-based learning approach combined with multicultural values is considered very beneficial in strengthening students' religious moderation. Teachers emphasised that instilling religious moderation from an early age is crucial for creating a peaceful, inclusive, and harmonious school environment. They agreed that if these values are not taught from an early age, students tend to be less tolerant of differences.*

Teachers also emphasise the importance of real role models in the school environment in fostering mutual respect among religious communities. Through a multicultural problem-based learning approach, students seem to be better able to appreciate religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity as part of national unity. They also begin to get used to working together, regardless of their religious background, and learn to appreciate the local cultures that incorporate religious values.

However, some students are still not fully open to discussing religious diversity without prejudice, and understanding of the peaceful teachings of each religion also needs to be improved. Nevertheless, in general, this approach is considered effective in fostering openness, respect for diversity, and avoiding potential conflicts between religious groups in the school environment. Teachers welcome the continuation of this model to strengthen students' character in the context of a diverse and multicultural society.

Based on the questionnaire results, it was concluded that teachers held highly positive views regarding the importance of strengthening religious moderation through multicultural problem-based learning approaches at the Elementary School (SD) and Islamic Elementary School (MI) levels. Most teachers believed that strengthening religious moderation could create a peaceful, inclusive, and harmonious school environment. A majority of teachers also identified that the absence of learning about moderation values from an early age potentially weakened students' tolerance towards diversity.

Furthermore, teachers strongly supported the notion that mutual respect among religious communities needed to be fostered through direct role modelling within the school environment. Multicultural problem-based learning was assessed as effective in cultivating appreciation for differences and diversity, strengthening national unity, and encouraging students to cooperate regardless of religious background (all teachers agreed). Some teachers also acknowledged that students' understanding of the peaceful values within each religion was not yet fully formed. The data indicated that the multicultural problem-based learning approach still required deeper thematic and dialogical development to effectively explore interfaith meanings more openly and reflectively. Conversely, this approach also played a significant role in fostering students' appreciation for local cultures rooted in religious values and in strengthening their open-mindedness in respecting diverse viewpoints.

The results of this study are relevant to Banks' (2015) theory, which posits that multicultural education should develop students' understanding of cultural plurality and strengthen their attitudes of fairness and respect for differences. Meanwhile, Ghani, et al. (2021) emphasize that problem-based learning models foster the social/affective skills (empathy, cooperation) necessary for religious moderation. Therefore, multicultural problem-based learning supports the development of students' nationalistic and open-minded characters, which align with the values of the Pancasila Student Profile and the principles of Religious Moderation. Therefore, multicultural problem-based learning can be considered a strategic approach for strengthening religious moderation in primary and secondary education institutions, both through the conceptual transfer of values and through contextual and collaborative socialisation of habits.

CONCLUSION

The research findings revealed that multicultural problem-based learning was perceived very positively by teachers at the Elementary School (SD) and Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) levels. The teachers stated that this approach was practical in encouraging values of diversity, tolerance, and inclusiveness while strengthening student character. It also developed critical, reflective, and analytical thinking skills—components of 21st-century competencies—and simultaneously reinforced the values of the Pancasila Student Profile. The teachers believed this approach could serve as a means to build a peaceful, harmonious, and inclusive educational ecosystem from an early age through contextual and collaborative learning. Furthermore, multicultural problem-based learning was regarded as a strategic approach for strengthening religious moderation, both through conceptual value transfer and tangible social habituation in schools. Consequently, this learning model required continuous thematic, dialogical, and participatory development to fortify students' character as tolerant, open-minded citizens prepared to thrive in a pluralistic society.

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