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Strategies for Integrating Democratic and Multicultural Education in Schools in Facing the Challenges of the Contemporary Era

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Abstract

This research aims to explore strategies for integrating democracy education and multicultural education in the school environment through a thematic study approach. In the midst of the challenges of social disintegration and polarization in the contemporary era, schools are required to become social laboratories that are able to internalize the values of equality and tolerance in a practical way. The research method used is qualitative with a library research design. Data was collected from various scientific literature, reputable journals, and related policy documents, which were then analyzed using content analysis techniques. The results of the study show that the integration of democratic and multicultural education can be effectively achieved through two levels of strategy, namely the classroom level through the creation of an open climate and cooperative learning model, and the school level through inclusive consensus-based management. These findings confirm that the thematic study approach is able to transform the philosophical concept of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika into a measurable educational proxy. However, its implementation still faces significant obstacles in the form of inequality in educational infrastructure, the negative impact of social media disinformation, and the limitation of teachers' intercultural competence. This research provides a scientific contribution in the form of an integrative framework for the development of a more adaptive and inclusive civic education curriculum. As a recommendation, further quantitative research is needed to measure the effectiveness of this model in lowering the level of social prejudice of students more broadly.
Keywords: Democracy Education, Multicultural Education, Thematic Studies, Literature Studies, Learning Strategies.

Introduction

The conditions of Indonesian society are very diverse, making Indonesia a multicultural country. The diversity of society consists of various ethnicities, religions, races, and groups. At this time, Indonesia consists of 17 thousand large and small islands. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (2024), Indonesia's population is around 281 million people with various diversity, consisting of 1,300 tribes, and 718 languages. In addition, there are 6 religions that are officially recognized in Indonesia, namely Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, as well as various beliefs. The diversity of Indonesian society is expressed in the motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" which symbolizes all cultural differences as the basis of national policies, doctrines, philosophical, ideological, and reality since the beginning of the formation of the Indonesian state. Diversity in society brings great potential as well as empirical threats in aspects of culture and national development. Diversity can be a source of division if the system of life is not regulated fairly and openly. The state of Indonesia has also

experienced various major conflicts of diversity such as the inter-ethnic conflict in 1998, the interreligious conflict in Ambon in 1999, the Sampit conflict in 2001, and conflicts between groups and governments (GAM, RMS and OPM). This is where a democratic culture, which includes tolerance, openness to criticism, and respect for dissent, serves as a mechanism that accommodates differences and bridges the interests of society. Democracy is the choice of the government system because it can accommodate various interests and acts as a forum for binding national agreements that must be maintained.

In response to the conditions of this multicultural society, recent studies have highlighted the importance of the role of education. Ethnic, ethnic, racial, or religious diversity is a distinctive feature that needs to be managed. Steinberg (2009) Explains that multiculturalism is a position to answer differences related to race, socio-economic class, gender, language, and culture. The differences that exist in society are driven by historical backgrounds, geographical conditions, and foreign cultural influences (Wales, 2022). Studies from Inanna (2018) emphasizing that education is an important tool in social transformation that is able to change individual mindsets and behaviors so as to create a democratic and tolerant society. Other cutting-edge studies show that the relevant education is applied multicultural education to reduce prejudice (Agustin, 2019), and democracy education as a process of internalizing democratic values through learning (Tanjung et al., 2024). With the enactment of these two types of education, it is hoped that citizens will have knowledge and a positive attitude in responding to diversity.

Although recent studies have explored the theoretical importance of multicultural education and democracy, there is still a *gap* between these theories and real practice on the ground. Previous studies have tended to discuss the implementation of these two types of education separately or limited to conventional learning approaches. There has not been much research that specifically examines how the values of democracy and multiculturalism are integrated simultaneously and intact into school subjects, especially through an approach that is truly grounded and contextual to the reality of society. This multicultural understanding needs to be realized, fought for, and developed in integrated practice to minimize the possibility of conflict.

Based on the gap analysis, the values of democracy and multiculturalism are important to be integrated into subjects in schools, one of which is through the subject of Pancasila and Citizenship Education. Therefore, the main question in this study is how effective is the practice of thematic studies in integrating multicultural education and democracy education in schools? In line with this question, this study aims to discuss in depth the practice of thematic studies of multicultural education and democracy education in schools.

The novelty of this research lies in the formulation of a thematic study approach that holistically connects theory with real practice in society thru a two-level integrative conceptual framework, namely at the classroom level and the school level. Unlike previous studies that tend to discuss democracy and multicultural education separately or are limited to conventional theoretical levels, this research integrates both domains simultaneously and comprehensively within school practices. This approach not only operationalizes the philosophical value of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika into measurable educational proxies thru an open classroom climate and consensus-based school management but also proactively positions these two-level strategies as strategic instruments to address real challenges of the contemporary digital era, such as social media misinformation, polarization, digital access inequality, and teachers' intercultural competence limitations. Thru this conceptual synthesis, this research provides a new scientific contribution in the form of an adaptive, comprehensive, and applicative citizenship education curriculum and governance model to foster tolerant, inclusive, and democratic student character.

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Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library *research design*. The design of this study was chosen because the focus of the study focuses on the search, study, and in-depth analysis of various literatures, concepts, and theories that are relevant to the practice of integrating thematic studies in democratic education and multicultural education in schools. The data sources in this study are entirely in the form of secondary data consisting of scientific journal articles, textbooks, proceedings, and relevant education policy documents To maintain the novelty and credibility of information, relevant publications from the last 10 years were accessed through academic databases including Google Scholar, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and national journal portals. The literature selection process applied strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure data robustness. The inclusion criteria comprised: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, or academic textbooks; (2) research focusing specifically on democratic and multicultural education strategies at either the classroom or school level; and (3) literature addressing contemporary educational challenges in the digital era. Conversely, exclusion criteria were applied to non-scientific popular articles, opinion pieces, and studies outside formal education contexts.

The data collection was then carried out through documentation by systematically collecting, studying, classifying, and recording important information from the selected literature that met these predefined criteria. After data from various literature is collected, the data analysis technique used is content analysis (*content analysis*). This analysis process is carried out through the stages of data reduction to filter the most crucial arguments, descriptive-narrative presentation of data to compare findings between literatures, and drawing conclusions to synthesize the most effective integration model applied in schools (Wardah, 2023). Through this rigorous methodological stage, research can produce comprehensive and scientifically accountable ideas.

Results

Dual-Level Integration Strategies: Classroom and School Environments

Based on the systematic content analysis of the selected literature, the findings of this study are synthesized into a structured and comprehensive model. The interconnectedness between democratic education, multicultural education, the two-level implementation strategies, and contemporary challenges is illustrated in the Integrative Conceptual Framework (Figure 1).

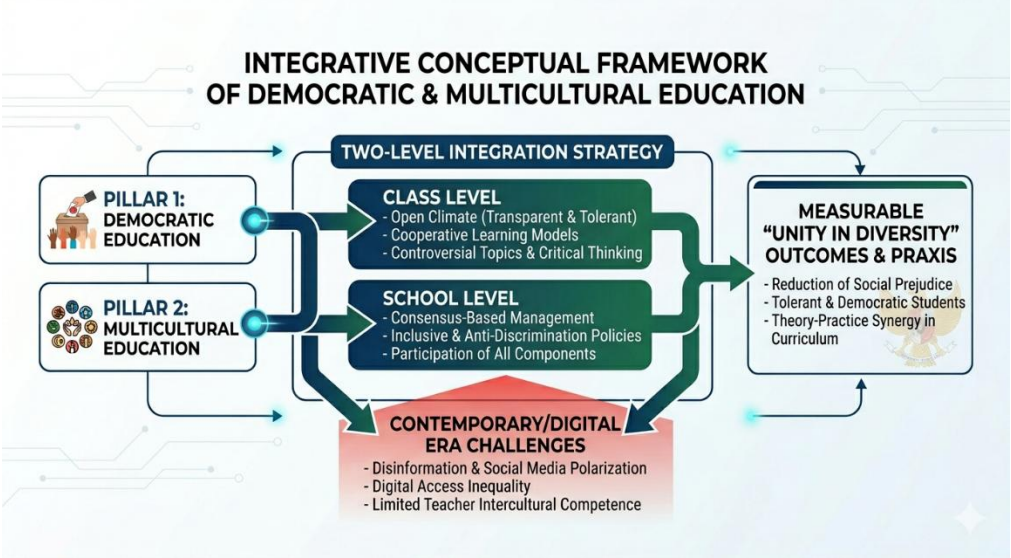


Figure 1. Integrative Conceptual Framework of Democratic and Multicultural Education

This framework demonstrates that the integration of democratic and multicultural values is diachronically operationalized through classroom-level and school-level environments. By doing so, this dual-level approach serves as a strategic instrument to build institutional and pedagogical resilience against the disruptions of the contemporary digital era, ultimately leading to measurable outcomes aligned with the national philosophy of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

Democracy education basically aims to guide students to become more mature in democracy by socializing democratic values so that their behavior can reflect a democratic life. In democracy education, there are two things that must be emphasized, namely democracy as a concept and democracy as a praxis (Khuzaimah & Pribadi, 2022). Democracy as a concept talks about the meaning, meaning, and attitude of behavior that is classified as democratic, while democracy as a praxis actually democracy has become a system (Sobri & Umar, 2022).

In integrating democratic education in schools, the strategies that need to be prepared must include the grade level and the school level. The cultivation of democracy education in schools at the grade level requires a transparent and tolerant classroom climate or conditions (atmosphere) in all differences, both in terms of attitudes and opinions from students. An open and loose classroom climate will create a conducive atmosphere to socialize democratic values, this is because in such climate conditions the atmosphere will be democratic so that the learning process will be dynamic. In terms of class climate, there are at least 2 types of class climate, namely democratic and undemocratic class climate.

The characteristics of a democratic class climate include that all class members have equal and equal opportunities, different perspectives are something that strengthens the common life in the class, all possibilities related to the fulfillment of class relations must be clearly conveyed to all class members, and class members are able to build associations or groups that are not limited in the classroom and even at school. Meanwhile, an undemocratic classroom climate is characterized by several characteristics, including a rigid and authoritarian class climate, passive student activities, and time dominated by teachers, limited discussion opportunities, and never discussing contentious problems, class members' opportunities to make decisions are very limited or even non-existent, and class members often complain without any effort to find solutions to existing problems (Rosyada, 2004).

The strategy that needs to be used in order to integrate democracy education in schools at the grade level in addition to being able to create a democratic classroom climate, the strategy that needs to be used is the modification of learning activities in the classroom. Learning activities in the classroom in order to integrate democracy education need to be modified in such a way with the aim of creating a more peaceful and conducive sense of democracy in the classroom. In this case, teachers are more emphasized to be creative in choosing and using learning strategies or models. Effective learning strategies or models are student-focused and student-centered learning, raising controversial topics or problems to provoke students' critical thinking and providing more opportunities for students to participate in expressing their opinions and accommodating all differences during learning in a tolerant and egalitarian manner (Sobri & Umar, 2022).

Meanwhile, the strategy in integrating democracy education at the school level requires the participation of institutions in making it happen. A school is classified as a democratic school if it has the following characteristics. First, management is always based on agreement. Whatever form of program to be developed and implemented must be based on the agreement of all components in the school. Second, a democratic approach is appropriate for organizations with members from professional circles, namely those who have technical abilities and skills and have authority in their expertise. Third, the inculcation of values, culture and habits in the organization is carried out by members of the organization that have started in the education

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phase and the first years of work. Fourth, decision-making on various important policies is carried out by a committee and not carried out individually by the principal with his leadership authority. Fifth, all decisions are made by consensus or compromise and as much as possible avoid organizational polarization due to differences of opinion (Sobri & Umar, 2022).

The application of multicultural education in schools must be integrated into other school subjects and activities in managing and organizing the educational process in order to achieve the success of school goals and to develop a harmonious Indonesian society (Mania, 2010). In the school environment, multicultural education is a teaching and learning activity that provides knowledge, understanding, attitudes and actions in developing the conditions of differences and similarities of students related to gender, race, culture, ethnicity and religion. Munadlir (2016)states that schools that are committed to developing pluralism must have several specifications in their implementation, namely: (1) developing respect for school activities towards ethnic diversity, (2) developing cohesiveness based on the joint participation of several cultural groups, (3) providing maximum opportunities for all individuals and groups, (4) facilitating constructive changes that can improve the dignity and ideals of democracy. In multicultural education learning activities, teachers are required to be able to implement cooperative learning strategies by implementing interdependence, constructive face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, social skills and the effectiveness of the learning process in groups.

The stages of developing multicultural education strategies in schools can be carried out with several multicultural-based teaching and learning activities by applying several ways, including: (1) joint learning activity strategies *(cooperative learning)* This means teaching and learning activities that pay attention to changes in students' ability to learn together in order to socialize regional cultural values and concepts in the learning group together by paying attention to the background of existing differences. This strategy is expected to enable students to participate in looking at local values and developing national attitudes (2) concept achievement strategies *(concept attainment)* used in teaching and learning activities to facilitate students in carrying out local cultural study activities from the regions in their study groups, (3) value analysis strategies *(value analysis)* aims to train students' ability to develop constructive thinking from the realm of expression and commitment of local cultural values towards the framework and structure of buildings about a broader perspective in the national scope on the basis of national attitudes, (4) social analysis strategies *(social analysis)* aims to provide calm information on phenomena in the lives of people who have various cultures, ethnicities, religions, and customs, so that students can analyze these various backgrounds in building and developing understanding and awareness of cultural differences in society, so that a positive response can emerge, namely an attitude of respect and respect for various cultures in the framework of the life of the nation, state and the era of globalization (Munadlir, 2016).

There are several strategies that schools can do to develop multicultural education, including: (1) the educational process in schools is tried to implement multicultural-based school management by parties related to the school, namely, the principal, vice principal, all teachers, all students, parents and school committees, (2) developing a conducive atmosphere in the school, characterized by mutual respect, Respect between various parties that differ from its multicultural aspects, such as: cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, religious, language, gender, and age aspects, (3) develop school policies or regulations that avoid discriminatory nature against one or more multicultural groups in the school, (4) the school can meet the needs of all multicultural elements proportionately, both cultural, socio-economic aspects, language, gender, age, ethnicity and so on in the dynamic community of the school, (5) develop effective communication and interaction between school residents, in order to avoid the emergence of

unresolved multicultural group problems, (6) the school develops the vision, mission, and goals of the school in order to receive support from all school residents by paying attention to the plurality aspect, (7) the school needs to develop normative support to prevent, develop and take action so that multicultural education in schools runs harmoniously and dynamically. (Munadlir, 2016)

Challenges in Practice of Democracy Education and Multicultural Education in Schools

Democracy education faces great challenges in its practice or implementation in schools, especially in the era of globalization (Sihono, 2011). Very clear challenges regarding democratic education include access inequality, political polarization, the negative impact of social media, inequality in the digital era, and the inability of the education system to respond to contemporary challenges. The first challenge faced in terms of democratic education practice is access inequality. This inequality of access to democratic education often occurs, especially in marginalized areas or conflict areas (Lathifah et al., 2024). Democracy education is a fundamental right for every individual, regardless of social, economic, or geographical background. This inequality of access is clearly a challenge that can cause a gap in democratic participation, so a policy that ensures inclusivity is needed.

The second challenge faced is political polarization, with the occurrence of increasing political tensions that can hinder the achievement of consensus in the formation of an inclusive democratic education curriculum (Erlande et al., 2024). The next challenge is the negative impact of social media, digital technology has a dual role in democratic education. On the one hand, technology can be used to disseminate access to information, but on the other hand, on the other hand, the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media can also cause damage to the integrity of democratic education (Hasibuan et al., 2024). The next challenge is inequality in the digital era, unequal access to technology and information in the digital era, causing inequality. Individuals who have limited access to technology tend to lag behind when it comes to participatory skills development. This challenge strengthens the gap in democratic education so that policies are needed that can support equal access to technology (Swastiwi, 2024).

The last challenge is the inability of the education system to respond to contemporary challenges, the education system in Indonesia is not considered to be able to answer all contemporary problems or challenges such as globalization, technology, and political polarization. A deep understanding of these challenges is essential to design a resilient democratic education. With the ability to respond to issues such as globalization, technology, and polarization holistically, democracy education can encourage the creation of an inclusive, participatory, and democratic society. The challenge in implementing multicultural education in Indonesia is a complex issue and requires a deep understanding. Here are some of the challenges of implementing multicultural education, including:

First, the complex cultural diversity, with a total of more than 300 ethnic groups that bring diversity of customs, languages, and beliefs, is certainly very difficult to integrate these various aspects of culture into an education system is a challenge that requires a fair and inclusive approach. Multicultural education needs to be able to accommodate cultural diversity so that every individual feels valued and accepted in the educational environment. This approach emphasizes the importance of fairness, equity, and diversity in the learning process. On the other hand, multicultural education must also be expected to form an attitude of tolerance, mutual understanding, and intercultural cooperation. In the context of multicultural education, the intercultural approach becomes relevant because it adopts a holistic and inclusive approach, the intercultural approach emphasizes intercultural mutual understanding, respects differences, and promotes intercultural dialogue (Supriatin & Nasution, 2017). This approach is in line with

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the concept of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, Indonesia's national motto, which contains the meaning of the importance of unity in diversity.

Second, the limitation of intercultural skills is one of the main challenges in multicultural education in schools. Teachers and prospective teachers need to have the ability to understand and respond to the diverse needs of students, as well as facilitate intercultural dialogue in the classroom. In addition, the non-integration of multicultural concepts in the curriculum leads to the risk of a superficial understanding of cultural diversity. Teachers must be able to integrate multicultural concepts in teaching materials when carrying out learning (Suroyo et al., 2024).

Third, in implementing multicultural education in the curriculum, the integration process must be comprehensive and in harmony with the core competencies of the curriculum. This aims to create a solid foundation, ensuring that multicultural values are not just a separate and limited element to one specific area, but rather an integrated part of the entire learning process (Suroyo et al., 2024).

Fourth, the inequality of educational facilities is a challenge in efforts to implement multicultural education in schools. Inadequate educational facilities in rural and remote areas can pose serious barriers to access to multicultural education for people living in these areas. Limited educational infrastructure can create gaps in learning opportunities and access to multicultural knowledge, thereby hindering the achievement of inclusive multicultural education goals (Yansen, 2014). The importance of equality in education is an important highlight, especially in the context of multicultural education. Inequality in access to education between ethnic, religious, and cultural groups can be a major obstacle in creating an inclusive and multicultural educational environment (Firtikasari & Andiana, 2024). This not only creates inequities in the understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, but can also reinforce social inequalities that already exist in society.

Fifth, there are *very significant stereotypes* and prejudices in the context of multicultural education. One of the impacts is the inhibition of an inclusive learning environment. Students who fall victim to racial or ethnic stereotypes may feel unappreciated and less motivated to actively participate in the learning process. This can have a negative impact on class dynamics, where the potential of each individual cannot be optimized due to the limitations caused by the stereotype. In addition, the impact of this stereotype and prejudice will be felt on the injustice in treatment in the classroom. Teachers affected by prejudice may not give equal attention to all students, creating inequities in learning approaches. This will obviously cause difficulties for students from minority groups to access educational opportunities and resources optimally, detrimental to students' academic growth and personal development.

Discussion

When compared to other relevant studies, the findings in this study are in line with and expand the literature in the field of civic education, such as the Sobri & Umar study (2022) which emphasizes the importance of committee consensus-based decision-making at the school level. On the multicultural aspect, this finding also strengthens the idea of Munadlir (2016) dan Banks (2001) By not only suggesting conventional lecture methods, but specifically emphasizing the need for four active strategies, namely learning together (*cooperative learning*), the achievement of local cultural concepts, the analysis of national values, and the analysis of social phenomena. The contribution of the novelty of this research lies in the incorporation of the democratic and multicultural approaches into one integrative thematic study framework. Therefore, these findings carry very crucial theoretical implications by enriching Inanna's theory

of social transformation (2018) proves that the philosophical concept of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika can be operationalized in a measurable manner in the classroom.

Practically, the implications of these findings require a paradigm shift, where teachers are required to have qualified multicultural competencies to facilitate minority groups, while schools are required to implement diversity-based management that involves all components to prevent all forms of discriminatory practices. However, in interpreting these ideal results, this study honestly acknowledges the limitations of methodology and the limitations of the implementation context in the field. The main limitation is that this analysis is still dealing with variations in the infrastructure and competence of educators in various regions, so that this concept is difficult to generalize instantly because it often clashes with real obstacles, such as inequality of access to facilities in remote areas, strong political polarization and social media disinformation that damages students' critical reasoning, lack of intercultural understanding of teachers, and strong stereotypes and prejudices that trigger unfair treatment. fair in class.

Based on the presentation of these results, implications, and limitations, there are several strategic suggestions for further research. In terms of methodology, it is highly recommended that large-scale quantitative research or purely experimental research be used to measure the effectiveness of the use of this thematic study in reducing the level of prejudice statistically. Furthermore, in terms of topics, future researchers are advised to specifically examine the impact of social media penetration and digital polarization on the democratic character of students at the secondary level, as well as further research the variables of teachers' intercultural competence and their significant influence on the academic achievement of minority groups, so that in the future it can provide more comprehensive technical guidance for the improvement of the national education system.

Conclusion

It can be concluded critically and logically that the integration of democratic education and multicultural education is an essential praxis that must be realized in the school environment to guarantee freedom of participation without discrimination. Through a thematic study approach, this integration can be effectively operationalized through a two-level strategy, namely the classroom level that focuses on open climate and cooperative learning, and the school level that prioritizes consensus-based management. Theoretically, this research has advanced scientific knowledge by offering a synthesis model that bridges philosophical concepts of nationality with practical measures in schools, thus providing a more applicative framework for educators.

However, generalizations to these findings must be done with great caution considering that this study has intrinsic limitations as a literature study. The main limitation lies in the complete dependence on secondary data, so the resulting findings have not been verified through direct empirical observations in the field to see real responses of teachers and students in *real-time*. In addition, the depth of analysis is greatly influenced by the availability and quality of accessible literature, and there is a subjectivity gap in the process of synthesizing various sources that have different regional contexts. Therefore, the strategies formulated in this study should be seen as a conceptual framework that still requires further field testing to ensure its effectiveness on various characteristics of diverse schools in Indonesia.

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