

# MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AS A FOUNDATION FOR INDONESIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

**Received:** 9 January 2026

**Revised:** 23 January 2026

**Published:** 8 February 2026

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Recently, cases of child abuse and neglect have become everyone's concern. One example that is currently making the government and society shocked and sad is the case of neglect and abuse which resulted in the death of a little girl in Bali. This case is a crime against children which indicates that character in this era is increasingly unequal. Therefore, education has an urgency to teach characters that can make someone mature. According to Yaya Suryana and Rusdian, education is expected to be mature because being mature is a characteristic of having character. Therefore, every adult has a character that suits him. Therefore, education needs to encourage someone to be themselves

**Objective:** This literature study aims to analyze the relationship between Multicultural Based Education and Indonesian Character in Early Childhood Education

**Method:** This article uses a literature review research method with reference sources from previous research journals

**Discussion:** Early Childhood Education (PAUD) in Indonesia adopts a multicultural approach based on Indonesian character, which emphasizes the values of national spirit and love of the homeland amidst diversity. By instilling the values of tolerance, democracy, justice, peace and unity, this education aims to form a young generation who is aware of diversity and able to live in harmony. Implementation is carried out through cultural arts activities, interactive learning, an inclusive environment, and respect for diversity. It is hoped that Indonesian children will grow up as individuals with strong character who are ready to face global challenges without losing their national identity.

**Keywords:** Education, Multicultural, Indonesian Character

**CITATION INFORMATION:** Fauziah, S., & Nugroho, A. (2026). Multicultural Education as a Foundation for Indonesian Character Development in Early Childhood. *Procedia of Multidisciplinary Research*, 4(2), 20.

## BACKGROUND

The condition of Indonesia's territory will shape the character and culture of different communities. In addition, as a multi-ethnic society, in Indonesia there are hundreds of ethnic groups and their respective substances. Even though Indonesia is a country with a very diverse population, it is morally united in the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) with its motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Different but One Too). This diversity is not only due to the large number of ethnic groups, but also because it consists of various unique cultural differences inherent in each ethnicity, both horizontally and vertically (Kholik, 2017). This motto has extraordinary meaning for the nation's psychological condition. Because it is not only a motto but has the spiritual value of an emotional bond that is integrated in the history and motto of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. Which can be interpreted in the context of diversity, not only referring to the diversity of ethnic groups but also in the cultural context (Salim, 2017).

The cultural diversity possessed by the Indonesian nation is certainly not only seen in terms of strength, but can have implications for the emergence of conflicts based on cultural differences. Because basically cultural diversity has implications for thought patterns, behavior, and character that live as traditions in people's lives (Prasetiawati, 2017). Intercultural struggles provide opportunities for conflict when there is no mutual respect, communication, tolerance, harmonization, and mutual respect for each other.

Religious harmony amidst cultural diversity is an asset in building the nation. In the course of the nation's history, Pancasila has been proven as the most appropriate alternative for uniting Indonesia's very diverse society under an inclusive and democratic order. Unfortunately, the discourse regarding Pancasila seems to have disappeared along with the progress of reform. We often face various obstacles in creating religious harmony (tolerance). Various parties have agreed to achieve the goal of religious harmony in Indonesia, such as people from various groups, the government and religious organizations which play an active role in society (Prasetiawati, 2017). Various kinds of obstacles and challenges are faced in making harmony in people's lives a success. However, despite the obstacles faced by people in building harmony, they are always optimistic, that with the diversity of Indonesian society, it is a gift and even has great potential to become a developed nation.

The value of ethnic brotherhood is an absolute value. However, because it is a multicultural nation, its people are expected to be able to adapt to diverse cultures with Indonesian character values. This is so that society is willing to accept other groups to unite together, regardless of differences in culture, ethnicity, gender, language or religion. Thus, in the multicultural concept there is a demand for recognition of all differences as a unity in society whose existence must be accepted, respected, protected and guaranteed. Understanding and awareness of multiculturalism will foster self-respect. National identity and not ethnic identity which raises the issue of ethnic conflict between groups. Understanding and applying multicultural character can be done through education. Education has an important role in shaping national identity. Because education can be a learning medium for all ages and groups in order to become mature human beings with character. In education, it is important that each student grows according to his or her character. To make it meaningful, it needs to be reviewed based on multicultural education of the Indonesian character. Multicultural education needs to be implemented from an early age, namely in Early Childhood education, to make it meaningful. This is because we know that the early age range is in the golden age. The golden age is a time when children have a high absorption capacity for their environment, or what Montessori (2019) calls Mind Absorbing. This period can be analogous to the absorption of water by tissue paper. In the early stages, children always absorb information from the environment consciously and unconsciously. In other words, information is taken for granted. Meanwhile, in adulthood, information is absorbed little by little which is expressed in a knowledge structure and used for thinking.

Banks (2001) argues that multicultural education is a set of beliefs and explanations that examine and assess the importance of cultural and ethnic diversity in shaping lifestyles, social experiences, personal identities, and educational opportunities for individuals, groups and countries. Banks defines multicultural education as an idea, educational reform movement and educational process, the main aim of which is to change the structure of educational institutions so that both male and female students, students with special needs, and students who are members of different racial, ethnic and cultural (cultural) groups these various groups will have the same opportunity to achieve achievement (Banks, 1993). Through multicultural education from an early age, it is hoped that children will be able to accept and understand cultural differences which have an impact on differences in a person's usage (ways), folkways (habits), mores (behaviors), customs (customs). With multicultural education, a person is able to accept differences, criticism and have a sense of empathy and tolerance for others from an early age regardless of status, social class, class, gender, ethnicity, religion or academic ability (Farida Hanum, 2005).

The development of national character and culture through learning among teaching staff is considered very important. As agents of change, educators are expected to be able to instill characteristics, traits and character as well as a spirit of independence, responsibility and competence in life in their students. Apart from that, this character is also very necessary for an educator because through this spirit, educators will have a work orientation that is more efficient, creative, innovative, productive and independent (Tambunan, 2020). This means that education does not only focus on the cognitive development of students, even more important is how students have the character needed to build the nation that Pancasila aspires to. Education has a role in preparing prospective members of society who are in accordance with the spirit and values of Pancasila. So discussions about multicultural education in forming national character and identity are part of efforts to restore the function of education in accordance with national education goals.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Early childhood education programs**

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is an integral part of the national education system which is currently receiving considerable attention from the government. PAUD from year to year continues to experience rapid growth when seen from the significant increase in the number of independent community-based Early Childhood Education units throughout the country. This development is an important part of a large national education development program.

Furthermore, based on Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system Article 1 paragraph 14 which states that PAUD is a development effort aimed at achieving children from birth to the age of six by providing educational stimulation to help growth and development. Physical and spiritual development so that children are ready to enter further education. NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children), stated that early childhood is children aged zero to eight years. Children at this age are in the golden age because this is the "sensitive period" where the absorption of knowledge is extraordinary. This is in line with the opinion of Benjamin S. Bloom who stated that 80% of students' mental and intelligence development occurs at an early age. This should enable everyone, especially educators, to provide maximum stimulation to early childhood, so that the goals of early childhood education can be achieved. To achieve this goal, there are many aspects of early childhood education and children's characteristics that must be taken into account. For example, children basically have various conditions, characteristics and cultures that can be well understood by educators, parents and society.

Multicultural education also has a significant connection in global world development. The diversity of nations in the world requires world citizens to recognize differences in religion,

belief, ideology, ethnicity, race, skin color, gender, sex, culture and interests (Yaqin, 2005). Children who have differences in physical, intellectual, social-emotional conditions, language and so on have the same right to receive a decent education. This is in accordance with the 1945 Law (already amended) article 31 paragraph 1 which states that every citizen has the right to education. The government provides the opportunity for all children to go to school without looking at differences in these children. According to researchers, the emergence of education for all children and without discrimination is partly motivated by the diversity of Indonesian society. This can also be seen from the motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" which reminds us that it is impossible to avoid the diversity that is the reality of Indonesian society, but how can people live side by side in a peaceful, safe and comfortable manner. Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a form of development aimed at ensuring that children from birth to 6 years of age are provided with an educational stimulus to help the child's growth and development physically and spiritually so that they are ready to participate in further education. Furthermore, PAUD is organized based on age groups and types of services. PAUD services for ages birth to six years consist of Child Care Places (TPA) and Early Childhood Units (SPS). PAUD services for ages 2 to 4 years as Play Groups (KB). PAUD services for children aged 4 years to 6 years consisting of Kindergarten (TK), Raudlotul RA (RA) or RA Bustanul (BA).

The type of ECESALAM service is in accordance with Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 146 of 2014 concerning Early Childhood Education, namely the type of service for children aged 2-4 years is called Playground and for children aged 4-6 years is called Children's Garden. This is in accordance with KI Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy, namely that educational praxis from a "parenting" perspective is carried out gradually by students at an age which is believed to influence the child's psychological level. According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, early childhood, the 0-7 year age group is referred to as a playground for Play Groups (KB) and a children's park for kindergarten (TK) services. Early Childhood Education is a priority for habituation in order to maintain the behavior and rules that are born, which is usually called the Wiraga (physical) method.

The wiraga method, or according to researchers, is called the concrete method, must be visible and appropriate to the child's language and world so that it is easy for the child to understand. The wiraga method is used because it is in accordance with children's nature, children can explore according to their developmental age. Wiraga is a very appropriate method to use in early childhood education to instill Indonesian character from an early age, because character is more effectively implemented through habituation. Habituation needs to be carried out intensively in children, because according to Piaget, children's cognitive development is at the preoperational stage (2-7 years). Children begin to demonstrate clearer thought processes. Children begin to recognize symbols and signs, including language and images. Children are able to play symbolic games, imitate (either directly or indirectly) and are able to anticipate situations that will occur in the future. However, children are very egocentric in their way of thinking, children may not be able to take other people's points of view, whether perceptual, emotional, motivational or conceptual. The characteristic of this concept is the lack of ability to carry out conservation where the way of thinking is still focused so that attention is only focused on one dimension (ignoring other dimensions).

Wiraga is an ideal method when applied to pre-operational early childhood cognitive development which is developed gradually, so it requires concrete things that can be followed in everyday life. Furthermore, because their thinking is still very egocentric so they only pay attention to one direction, there is a need for role models or examples that can be imitated, in this case educators who become role models need to instill habitual character from an early age, as if seen from their cognitive development. The characters instilled in children will be easy to imitate both in symbolic and social games in everyday life.

### **Multicultural Education Based on Indonesian Education**

In the history of multicultural education in Indonesia, actually in the reality of the nation we can see Indonesia which consists of various races, ethnicities and cultures that exist in Indonesia. In Indonesia there are many tribes or ethnicities that use no less than 300 dialects, have many tribes, so that Indonesia is a conflict-prone and multicultural country. What is no less important from Indonesia's perspective is that, as a multi-religious country, Indonesia can be said to be a country that is vulnerable to national integration, in line with the recent symptoms of disintegration involving religion as one of the causal factors.

Multicultural education by definition means education that provides awareness to students about the importance of better understanding various ethnic, racial, cultural, religious and gender differences. Multicultural education has prioritized the principles of democracy, equality and justice in which there are values of tolerance as a medium that can raise awareness of multicultural education in understanding differences. This is one of the results of multicultural education which can make people mature in character.

According to Aristotle, character as good character is living with correct behavior, correct behavior in relationships with other people and with oneself. Furthermore, according to researchers, character education is a good attitude towards God, humans and nature. These three things must be balanced to form a character of harmony, tolerance and democracy.

Character is the values that underlie human behavior based on religious, cultural, legal or constitutional norms, customs and aesthetics. If it is related to education, character education is a planned effort to stimulate students to know, care and behave as perfect humans. Therefore, education in Indonesia aims to create learning humans who have four main characters, namely religious humans, personal humans, social humans, and humans as citizens. Based on these four characters, education in Indonesia applies to forming the character of students, namely religious, honest, tolerant, disciplined, hard work, creative, independent, democratic, curious, spirit of nationalism, patriotism, respect for excellence, friendship, love. Peace, likes to read, cares about the environment, social care, and responsibility. The character values developed in educational institutions are universal characteristics of perfect humans. In the midst of the diversity of nations in the world, the Indonesian people should have an Indonesian character which is a sign that Indonesia has an identity that is different from other nations. Therefore, it needs to be invested early. Indonesian character in this context is defined as human character that differentiates Indonesian people from other nations as an embodiment of the self-existence and self-image of the Indonesian nation.

The basic values of the character of the Indonesian nation can be applied by fostering children's sense of love and pride for their nation. Or in the sense of being proud to be an Indonesian child. In order for the nation to become the children of Indonesia, educators need to introduce the multicultural character of the Indonesian nation from an early age which is taught and grown in children according to the character of the Indonesian nation. Multicultural education based on Indonesian character is instilled from an early age, integrated thematically by instilling stimulation so that one can determine one's identity and later become familiar with the surrounding environment. The environment is a source of media and learning to recognize multicultural and Indonesian character. Of course, this education starts from the simplest and closest to the child. For example, children can play together with friends of different religions, ethnicities, genders and ages. How can children socialize, mingle but not unite while still adhering to their own identity. Things like this have become a habit for children, making them normal and equal so that in the future they can adapt wherever they live.

As time goes by, in the process of forming a child's identity, the spirit of nationalism needs to be instilled. Never separated from the world of children, namely play. Children should always have their national spirit stimulated by playing, singing and all things that are fun, both in individual and group activities. The spirit of nationality can be instilled through introducing

multicultural Indonesian society by looking at the environment that has a diversity of languages, foods and cultures so that children should know, utilize and preserve them. So, children have knowledge about local culture that is appropriate to their environment. Preserving local culture is one of the national spirits that prioritizes the interests of the nation above the interests of one's own group, although in the end individuals and groups share in the way they think, behave and act in this regard.

The value of love for one's country needs to be instilled from an early age by looking at the characteristics of a multicultural nation, so education is needed that can stimulate children to get used to thinking, acting and doing things that show loyalty, concern and high appreciation for the nation. Nation, physical and social environment, culture and economy. This kind of education will not be properly embedded without habituation and a high level of national spirit, so its implementation needs to take into account the characteristics of early childhood. Apart from that, multicultural education must also prioritize belief in the Almighty God because essentially every religion teaches peace and love of the homeland. Therefore, education is highly integrated in educational concepts and practices, to always study the living environment of each region in Indonesia, so that character is maintained to participate in everyday life. The character of the Indonesian nation is instilled from an early age so that their identity will be formed in the diversity of Indonesian society and the world.

### **Basic Principles of Developing Multicultural Education Learning Models**

Indonesian people here adhere to pluralistic philosophical principles, namely unity. This principle has a very deep and broad meaning and value for harmony and wholeness. The formulation of this motto is an effort so that this nation can live in harmony. The principle of diversity is based on the idea of the diversity of languages, traditions, culture and religion from the homeland of Sabang to Marauke. This culture is what characterizes the nation's tolerant attitude and awareness of diversity, so that its people are easily accepted in many circles in the nation and the world.

The development of a Multicultural Education learning model based on Indonesian character is expected to produce outcomes that are able to answer the challenges of the times. The better the quality of a nation's education, the better prepared the country is to compete on the global stage. Therefore, multicultural education needs to pay attention to Indonesian ideology as a reference for learning so that character can be embedded in the minds of every student. Apart from that, education is also expected to be able to solve life problems in society.

The increasing amount of education in Indonesia does not make society lower middle class, especially the increasing enthusiasm for sending their children to school. This is because the higher a school child's education, the more reluctant the child is to help their parents work, for example working in the fields, at the market and other activities. This arises because of their inaccuracy in responding to educational problems in society in everyday life. This is because the national curriculum is understood as a fixed price, so that diversity is not touched, because educators do not only look at the curriculum and study the school environment. So culture, local wisdom and character gradually fade.

### **Implementation of Multicultural Education Based on Indonesian Character**

Talking about multicultural education, especially in early childhood, you should pay attention to many aspects starting from the multicultural education paradigm, teaching methods, and learning strategies so that the concepts and principles of multicultural education are conveyed well. Apart from that, multicultural education in early childhood can be carried out by: 1) developing a curriculum that is designed and implemented which prioritizes assertive self-concept and self-understanding, being able to feel and understand other parties in understanding diversity. Another thing that is also important is how to avoid developing into ethnocentric (attitudes or views that originate from one's own community and culture) and intolerance. By developing a non-ethnocentric attitude, hatred and conflict can be avoided as

much as possible. 2) Emphasizes an integrative, comprehensive and conceptual curriculum that can be integrated into all aspects of learning. 3) Emphasizing affective and cognitive aspects according to the 2013 curriculum, emphasizing character education by developing a learning process based on a scientific approach.

## CONCLUSION

Multiculturalism education must be applied in the learning process through a habituation process. Multicultural learning is carried out by forming patterns of thought, attitudes, actions and habits so that national Indonesian awareness emerges. The Indonesian character includes: awareness of pride as a nation, independence and courage as a nation, awareness of honor as a nation, awareness of fighting colonialism, awareness of sacrificing for the sake of the nation, awareness of the nationalism of other nations, and regional awareness towards nationality. The realization of this Indonesian character has become a strong foundation as a characteristic of strong Indonesian people. This Indonesian strength is a great energy to become Indonesia as a great nation in the midst of the world's nations. A great nation can only be realized through strong human character. This Indonesian character through multiculturalism education is one of the hopes for a great Indonesia in the future

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**Data Availability Statement:** The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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