

## Cultivating Moral Values and Diversity for Early Childhood: A Contextual Approach of Multicultural Education

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**Abstrak:** Penanaman dasar-dasar nilai moral dan keberagaman pada anak adalah suatu hal penting dilakukan sejak tahap perkembangan usia dini. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan bagaimana guru mengenalkan aspek-aspek pendidikan multikultural pada anak. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif dalam bentuk studi kasus dengan tujuh orang guru sebagai responden. Data diperoleh melalui teknik observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi dan kemudian dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis tematik yang terdiri dari tiga langkah yang direkomendasikan oleh Miles dan Huberman, yaitu reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dalam mengenalkan keberagaman, guru memberikan keteladanan kepada anak, mengintegrasikan materi tentang keberagaman budaya dalam kurikulum pembelajaran, menggunakan metode dan media pembelajaran yang menarik, mengajak anak mengunjungi tempat bersejarah dan tempat ibadah, mengadakan kegiatan dan merayakan hari besar yang berkaitan dengan keberagaman budaya, serta mengadakan kegiatan ekstrakurikuler untuk mengenalkan keberagaman budaya. Artikel ini diharapkan dapat memberikan implikasi yang signifikan bagi praktik pendidikan untuk pengembangan profesional berkelanjutan untuk membekali guru dengan keterampilan dan pengetahuan yang diperlukan untuk secara efektif mengajar dan memberi contoh keragaman dan inklusi dan lembaga pendidikan untuk memprioritaskan pengembangan dan implementasi kurikulum yang mencerminkan dan merayakan keragaman budaya.

**Kata Kunci:** *anak; cara guru; pendidikan multikultural*

**Abstract:** Cultivating the foundations of moral values and diversity in children is important from an early developmental stage. This article aims to explain how teachers introduce aspects of multicultural education to children. This research uses a qualitative research design in the form of a case study with seven teachers as respondents. Data were collected through observation, interview, and documentation techniques and then analyzed using thematic analysis consisting of three steps recommended by Miles and Huberman, namely data reduction, data presentation, and inference. The results showed that in introducing diversity, teachers provide role models for children, integrate material about cultural diversity into the learning curriculum, use interesting learning methods and media, invite children to visit historical sites and places of worship, hold activities and celebrate holidays related to cultural diversity, and hold extracurricular activities to introduce cultural diversity. It is expected that this article will have significant implications for educational practice, for ongoing professional development to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively teach and model diversity and inclusion, and for educational institutions to prioritize the development and implementation of curricula that reflect and celebrate cultural diversity.

**Keywords:** *children multicultural education; teacher efforts*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is renowned for its cultural diversity, encompassing a multitude of ethnic, cultural, customary, linguistic, and religious variations. Consequently, the motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," which translates to "diverse, yet unified," serves to accommodate these differences, thereby establishing Indonesia as a multicultural nation. Diversity is an extraordinary wealth of the nation; therefore, it is imperative that diversity be accepted, included, and utilized as a tool to unify the nation. This diversity is frequently employed as a means of dividing national unity and integrity. It is imperative that all members of society respect and appreciate each culture without differentiating between one culture and another. Consequently, children must be taught about multiculturalism from an early age, with the aim of introducing cultural diversity. The simultaneous introduction of other cultures and one's own culture can assist children in uniting similarities and appreciating differences without emphasising the weaknesses or strengths of one or the other. (Awaludin, 2023)

It is very necessary to introduce cultural diversity to early childhood, because they are the ones who will continue the relay of the nation's struggle in the future, and early childhood is a time when children have a high absorption capacity so it is better to introduce various cultures from an early age. By introducing differences and backgrounds to children, providing an understanding that each child has a different background can prevent negative prejudice towards other people (Azzahra et al., 2023) In addition, an educational environment that provides appropriate multicultural experiences for children can develop feelings of safety, comfort, and positive acceptance in children and can prevent child abuse (Singha & Singha, 2023)

The initial stage of formal education that children will experience is early childhood education. In this setting, educators play a pivotal role in fostering an understanding of cultural diversity and instilling attitudes of respect and acceptance of differences, without imposing judgments on individual differences. This is particularly crucial in institutions with a diverse student population, where cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds may vary. A teacher in such an environment must cultivate a positive and inclusive attitude, treating all students equally and without bias. (Glock et al., 2019).

Multicultural education is a response to the growing diversity of school populations, as well as the demand for equality for every group. While broadly multicultural education includes all students without distinguishing groups such as gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social literature, and religion. Therefore, with the introduction of cultural diversity, early childhood can be more familiar with its own culture and can learn multicultural attitudes or mutual respect and acceptance of differences without feeling superior to one another. (Harahap & dkk, 2022)

Many cultural variations can be introduced to early childhood, for example introducing a diversity of ethnicity, race, religion, customs, and so on. By introducing various cultures from an early age, it is hoped that it will foster a sense of love for the country and a sense of belonging among students.

Widya Dharma Kindergarten is under the auspices of early childhood education located in Banjarmasin which has students with cultural diversity, such as religion, ethnicity, and race. Based on the results of observations and interviews, this kindergarten has students from five different religious backgrounds and various ethnic backgrounds (Banjar, Dayak, Jawa, China, and East Nusa Tenggara). Widya Dharma Kindergarten is also a multilingual school, this school introduce more than one language to children. They introduce English, Mandarin beside Bahasa Indonesia as instructional language. So, children with different cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds can attend to this school.

The role of educators in introducing cultural diversity to children is of paramount importance. This is because it allows children to gain an understanding of their own culture, including aspects such as prayer practices, religious celebrations, traditional foods, traditional games, folk songs, and others. Furthermore, it fosters respect for differences between cultures. This is particularly relevant in the context of Widya Dharma Kindergarten Banjarmasin, where the children in Group B are of diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, multicultural education for these children is an intriguing topic worthy of further investigation.

Mardiati (2022) has also explore about multicultural education for young learner, but she focused about cultivating an attitude of tolerance, while the research conducted by the researchers was about introducing cultural diversity in Paud Widya Dharma Banjarmasin. (Supiyah et al., 2021) also discussed learning or introducing cultural diversity in early childhood. The difference is that the research conducted was only in one kindergarten, namely Widya Dharma, whereas in the journal the research was carried out in kindergartens throughout Sungai Raya District. Based on the explanation above, the aim of this research to explain how teachers introduce multicultural education aspects to children at Widya Darma Kindergarten.

## **METHODS**

The objective of this study is to describe the manner in which teachers introduce multicultural education to children at Widya Darma Kindergarten. Consequently, this study employs a case study methodology and qualitative research methods. This research was conducted at Widya Dharma Kindergarten in Banjarmasin, where the students hail from diverse backgrounds. They come from five different religious backgrounds, speak various languages, and belong to five distinct ethnic groups (Banjar, Dayak, Jawa, China, and East Nusa Tenggara). This school is an ideal setting for research on the introduction of multicultural education, as it offers a rich tapestry of cultural and linguistic diversity.

The subjects of the study were seven teachers from Widya Dharma Kindergarten Banjarmasin, specifically those teaching in class B. The research object was multicultural education for children. Multiculturalism in this context refers to the ways in which teachers can facilitate understanding and encourage children to coexist and respect differences in ethnicity, customs, and religion. The data collection techniques employed in this research included systematic observation, structured interviews, and documentation in the form of lesson plans, printed media, teaching and learning activities, and photographs. The data was collected over a period of two months, from August 28th to September 25th. Once all the data has been presented, based on the results of the observations, interviews, and documentation carried out by the researcher, the next step is to carry out an analysis of all the data. The process of data analysis is the systematic search and organization of the results of interviews, notes, and materials collected in order to increase understanding of the collected data and enable the presentation of what is found. The data obtained was then analyzed using thematic analysis, which consists of three recommended steps by Miles and Huberman: data reduction, data presentation, and concluding.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Widya Dharma Banjarmasin School is a continuation of the MA HUA school which was the pioneer of three language schools in Indonesia. Widya Dharma School Banjarmasin

is located on Jl. Bandarmasih Comp. DPR No.4 Rt.31 South Belitung Village, West Banjarmasin District Banjarmasin City, South Kalimantan Province.

Based on the facts that have been obtained in the field through observations, interviews, and documentation regarding the efforts made by schools and teachers in introducing multicultural education to early childhood at the Widya Dharma Kindergarten Banjarmasin, it can be explained that teachers play a very important role in introducing cultural diversity to children. From the results of observations made, the researcher found several efforts made by the teachers of Widya Dharma Kindergarten Banjarmasin to introduce diversity to children which the researcher will describe as follows:

### **Providing Role Models for Children to Appreciate and Respect Cultural Diversity**

Be a role model by accepting, appreciating, and respecting other languages and cultures. Guiding the learning process and behaviour of children so that they understand social norms and values that apply in society. This mentoring process is accompanied by providing examples, because children learn by imitation and educators are examples or models for children (Puspita, 2013). Children who are exposed to successful individuals from various cultural backgrounds are more likely to view diversity as an asset rather than a barrier. Furthermore, role models from underrepresented groups can serve as inspiring examples, demonstrating that individuals from all backgrounds can achieve success. (Karunanayake & Nauta, n.d.)

However, the selection and portrayal of role models can present potential drawbacks. If role models are not representative of the full spectrum of diversity, children may form narrow or inaccurate perceptions of what "success" or "achievement" looks like (Aish et al., 2018) (Bećirović & Bešlija, 2018). Additionally, if role models are not portrayed in a nuanced, multidimensional way, children may develop oversimplified or stereotypical understandings of different cultures (Aish et al., 2018). In conclusion, providing diverse role models for children can be a valuable tool in promoting cultural understanding and respect. However, it is crucial to ensure that the selection and portrayal of role models is thoughtful, balanced, and combined with broader efforts to address systemic challenges.

From what the author has observed, the teachers at the Widya Dharma Kindergarten School always provide examples and habits for children. Apart from children who have different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. The teachers at Widya Dharma Kindergarten Banjarmasin also have different backgrounds and their tolerance is very strong. The school deliberately put 2 teachers from different ethnicities, religions, and cultures in each class. This aims to ensure that children can see the differences that exist in their teachers and can use them as examples and role models in terms of tolerance, respect, and respect for differences.

*“We have different ethnic, culture and religion background, but we always live together and side by side in harmony, so children can see and learn from that”*



Figure1. Teachers give examples about how to pray based on each child's religion

Apart from that, when starting to learn how to pray before the activity starts based on each person's beliefs is the first thing to explain to children. The teacher models attitudes and ways of praying according to the teachings of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism and explains that the way of praying for each religion is different, but the teacher also teaches that all have the same aim of praying to God. However, during the introduction to worship activities, each child who adheres to a different religion will be separated and guided by their respective religious teachers. This activity is usually held on Fridays.

### **Integrating Multicultural Educational Materials into the School Curriculum**

The introduction of multicultural education based on local cultural values from the early childhood education level is very important so that children can recognize the diversity around them (Suri & Chandra, 2021). Therefore, integrating multicultural education into learning programs aims to ensure that children understand that differences are natural and exist in their life environment and must be accepted well and with full respect.

One of the primary advantages of integrating multicultural educational materials is the potential to cultivate cultural awareness and respect among students. By exposing students to diverse perspectives and experiences, educators can challenge dominant narratives and promote an appreciation for cultural pluralism. This, in turn, can help students develop the empathy and critical thinking skills necessary to navigate an interconnected world. (Sengupta et al., 2020) However, the implementation of multicultural education is not without its challenges. Integrating these materials into existing curricula can be a complex and resource-intensive process, requiring significant investments in teacher training, curricular development, and instructional materials. Additionally, there are concerns that the superficial inclusion of multicultural content, without a deeper examination of systemic inequities, may perpetuate the very problems it seeks to address. (Sengupta et al., 2020)

From the data obtained, the author saw that teachers at Widya Dharma Kindergarten Banjarmasin included cultural diversity material in learning, but it did not always include it in core activities. Teachers introduce diversity by telling stories and providing explanations about diversity. When the themes and sub-themes are by the diversity introduction material, then the teacher will include the material in the core activities. For example, when the theme of learning is about natural phenomena. The teacher begins the activity by asking the children questions and answers about what natural phenomena exist in Indonesia and continues by explaining to the children that several areas in Indonesia are prone to natural disasters, such as mountainous areas prone to landslides, and coastal areas prone to landslides. tsunami, then the teacher teaches children to help each other and help other people who are in trouble without differentiating between religion, ethnicity, and culture.

*“Besides provides an example and teaches children to respect each other's differences, we also integrate material about multicultural in teaching material. For example, when teacher explain about natural disaster, tsunami.*

*the teacher teaches children to help each other and help other people who are in trouble without differentiating between religion, ethnicity, and culture”*

Apart from integrating multicultural material in each theme or material, teachers also introduce diversity when the themes and sub-themes are in accordance with the diversity introduction material, then the teacher will include the material in the core activities.

*“When the learning theme is related to introducing cultural diversity, such as the theme of my country, I love Indonesia, we also include the material in the core activities. Then at the peak of the theme, usually for religious diversity, we take the children to the prayer room to introduce how friends from different religions worship. That's how we introduce cultural diversity to children”*

### **Using Interesting Learning Methods and Media**

Using learning methods and media in the learning process is mandatory for teachers to carry out interesting learning in the classroom. Learning methods for early childhood should be challenging and fun, involving elements of play, movement, singing, and learning (Tanu, 2018). Meanwhile, learning media is used to support teaching processes or activities so that the material discussed can be understood by students well and can also help teachers in the process of delivering lesson material (Rupnidah & Suryana, 2022). Choosing the right learning media can motivate children to learn so that it can facilitate understanding in children, besides that children also feel happy and enjoy every learning process (Hasanah, 2021).



Figure2. One of the teaching media in which students are asked to match the picture of traditional houses and traditional clothes

Teachers at Widya Dharma Kindergarten Banjarmasin always use interesting learning methods in introducing cultural diversity to children. The teachers use playing, storytelling, and direct practice methods to introduce cultural diversity. Apart from that, they also use learning media during the learning process to introduce cultural diversity, such as using figure media, animated videos based on each religion, traditional games, regional musical instruments, and regional clothes. Teachers play a very important role in choosing learning methods and media that are appropriate to the material to be taught so that students can understand and comprehend what the teacher is conveying (Glock et al., 2019).

*“... we use visual media, traditional games, regional musical instruments, regional clothes too. For example, where does this musical instrument come from...? where does this traditional clothing come from...? well, that's all. Then we can encourage our child to play his musical instrument even though he can't yet. "Occasionally we also invite children to watch videos related to learning material, most of the videos we watch are also*



*animated videos, so that they are appropriate to the child's age and the child can be more interested in watching."*



Figure 3. Christian children are watching religious animated films

### **Visiting Historical Places and Worship according to Their Respective Religions**

Visiting historical places and places of worship with children is one of the efforts that teachers and schools can make to introduce cultural diversity to children. Widya Dharma Kindergarten Banjarmasin visits to historical places such as museums and places of worship according to their respective religions a program that continues to be carried out every year.

*"... usually we visit museums, but every year the program is different, maybe this year it's going to a museum, next year will be another place..."*

Visiting historical and religious places means visiting directly objects that are appropriate to the activity material being discussed in the child's life environment. These activities are carried out outdoors or indoors to see, hear, feel, and directly experience various situations or events in the environment (Saputra, 2018). While visiting historical places and sites of worship can offer profound spiritual and cultural experiences, there are also potential drawbacks that should be considered. One significant challenge is the management of large numbers of visitors at sites that may not be equipped to handle significant tourist traffic, especially children (Chianeh et al., 2019).

### **Holding Activities related to Cultural Diversity.**

In the modern education, the question of whether to celebrate various religious holidays in kindergarten classrooms has been a subject of ongoing debate. While some advocate for the inclusion of such observances as a means of fostering cultural awareness and respect, others raise concerns about the potential for exclusion and the separation. (Resnick, 2007)

Proponents of celebrating religious holidays in kindergarten argue that it provides an opportunity for young children to learn about the customs, traditions, and beliefs of their peers. This exposure can help cultivate a sense of empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for diversity, which are crucial skills for navigating an increasingly globalized world (Landsman & Lewis, 2023). Widya Dharma Kindergarten Banjarmasin always holds activities related to cultural diversity such as Kartini Day, Teacher's Day, and other major holidays. Widya Dharma Banjarmasin Kindergarten usually holds events such as art performances, carnivals or art competitions, and Kartini Day.

At arts performances, children will usually perform something related to art such as dancing, playing traditional musical instruments, and so on. During art performances, children are usually asked to wear traditional clothing that suits the dance that will be performed. Just like competitions that are contested are not much different from performing arts. The competitions that are held also include cultural elements so that children. By holding events like this, it is hoped that children will be able to learn about the cultural diversity that exists in Indonesia and its environment.

*“Often, especially during big holiday celebrations, Kartini's Day and so on, when there is a carnival, children are usually asked to wear clothes from various regions, usually we also hold art performances, so there we usually perform regional dances, then the children are also asked to wear clothes. customs from various regions.”*

### **Celebrating Religious Holidays**

Like celebrating activities related to cultural diversity, celebrating religious holidays is also carried out to introduce children to the fact that each religion has different ways of celebrating holidays, or they are important in each religion. For example, when children of Chinese or Chinese descent celebrate Chinese New Year. The school introduces the art of lion dancing “Barongsai” and then each child will be given an “angapo” which will then be given to the lion dancer. Teachers have a very important role in ensuring that every religion has holidays and good values that must be passed on to every adherent (Sari et al., 2021). In this way, it is hoped that children can appreciate differences and have tolerance between religious communities.

*“We also held and celebrate religious holiday, such Chinese, Muslim and Cristiani. Then children know every religion has different way to celebrate their holidays”*

### **Organizing Extracurricular Activities to Introduce Cultural Diversity**

Schools provide facilities to support the introduction of cultural diversity by holding extracurricular activities for children. This can help children to know more about cultural diversity, especially those in their environment. There are three extracurricular activities at school, namely dancing, music, and painting. Maulida et al., (2021) explains that extracurricular activities at school also play a role in introducing culture to children. Therefore, extracurricular activities need to be considered in every school.

*“For arts performances, we usually train through extracurricular activities which are held every Friday after religious lessons. We have extracurricular music, dance, painting, according to children's interests and talents, so with this extracurricular we train children for performances on the big holidays.”*





Figure 4. Teacher teaches children traditional dance

Introducing cultural diversity through extracurricular activities can be a valuable way to broaden students' perspectives and foster greater understanding and appreciation for different cultures. Extracurricular activities can provide a platform for students to engage with and learn about unfamiliar cultural traditions, customs, and perspectives, which can challenge preconceptions and promote cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration (Romanov & Zavertyayeva, 2020)

One key advantage of using extracurricular activities to promote cultural diversity is the opportunity for more hands-on, interactive learning experiences. Students can directly immerse themselves in cultural practices, rather than simply reading about them in a textbook. This type of experiential learning has been shown to have a greater impact on developing intercultural competence and multicultural awareness (Karim et al., 2021).

However, there are also potential drawbacks to relying too heavily on extracurricular activities for cultural diversity education. One concern is that these activities may be viewed as supplemental or optional, rather than being fully integrated into the core curriculum. This could risk relegating cultural diversity to the margins, rather than making it a central part of the educational experience (Ginosyan et al., 2020).

### **Inviting Children to Sing Folk Songs to Introduce Regional Culture.**

Folk songs are one of Indonesia's rich cultural heritages that must be protected. With this, teachers play a very important role in introducing and inviting children to sing folk songs as part of the diversity that exists in Indonesia so that folk songs in Indonesia are not lost (Dharmalau & Nurlaela, 2021). From interviews conducted by researchers, teachers at the Widya Dharma Kindergarten invited children to sing folk songs to introduce them to the cultural diversity that exists in Indonesia. As time progresses, songs or songs for children are very rarely found. It is often found that young children sing adult songs that are not appropriate for their age (Najiha et al., 2024).

*“Yes, we even sing it every day, we also sing various songs, such as regional songs, national songs as well as Indonesia Raya, Tanah Air ku and so on, so we also don't forget to introduce children to sing in English and Mandarin.”*

## **CONCLUSION**

It can be concluded that multicultural education can be introduced to young children in an appropriate manner, given their developmental stage and context. There are several methods employed by teachers at Widya Dharma Kindergarten Banjarmasin to

introduce cultural diversity to children. These include providing role models for children to appreciate and respect cultural diversity, incorporating material about cultural diversity into learning, and using learning methods and The media can be utilized as an effective means of introducing cultural diversity to children. This can be achieved by broadcasting programs that invite children to visit historical places and places of worship according to their respective religions, holding activities and celebrating holidays related to cultural diversity, and introducing cultural diversity to children by encouraging them to sing folk songs. The objective is to provide children with an understanding of cultural diversity and instill in them an attitude of multiculturalism. This should result in an attitude of mutual respect, appreciation, and acceptance of existing differences, and the avoidance of discriminatory behavior. Furthermore, by introducing diversity to children, it is hoped that children will become more familiar with the cultural diversity that exists in their country. This will foster a sense of love for their homeland and enable them to preserve the culture that exists in Indonesia. Given the importance of introducing multiculturalism to children, it is recommended that stakeholders and policy makers consider including it as teaching material in schools.

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