

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

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Keyword

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of the ethnographic approach in multicultural education at the elementary school level. This approach is used as strategy to bring student closer to cultural diversity through experiential learning. The research was conducted in several elementary school in the Cikarang area using a descriptive qualitative method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis. The findings show that the ethnographic approach encourages students to understand and appreciate cultural differences through direct interaction with the social environment. Multicultural values developed during the learning process include tolerance, curiosity toward other cultures, and pride in each student's own cultural identity. However, the implementation of this approach faces challenges, such as a lack of teacher training in ethnographic methods and limited time for its integration into classroom activities. Therefore, this study recommends specialized training for teachers and the systematic integration of the ethnographic approach into the curriculum to strengthen multicultural education at the elementary level.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the fundamental foundation for shaping the character, identity, and civilization of a nation. In Indonesia, education plays an important role in creating a just, civilized, and cultured society (Muthi'ah Lathifah & Yakobus Ndonga, 2024). Through quality education, the younger generation is expected to grow into individuals who are critical, creative, and tolerant of differences, as well as capable of making positive contributions to national development (Hartono et al., 2024). However, the challenges of implementing multicultural education at the elementary level require a more contextual and student-centered approach

One of the educational approaches relevant to addressing the diversity of Indonesian society is multicultural education. According to Abdillah et al. (2023), multicultural education plays an important role in shaping students' character so that they can act democratically, uphold human values, and appreciate diversity in their surroundings. This education encourages students to understand, internalize, and apply the values of democracy, humanism, and pluralism, both within and beyond the school environment. Multicultural education aims to develop students' understanding of cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity by integrating the values of unity in diversity into learning practices at the elementary level (Wirianty, 2023).

In addition, within the framework of Pancasila, multicultural education also serves to reduce discrimination and stereotypes as well as to strengthen tolerance and social inclusivity in society (Rasyid et al., 2024). At the elementary education level, schools play a crucial role as the initial foundation for fostering multicultural attitudes. Through contextual and relevant learning,

students are encouraged to develop an open mindset, respect differences, and enhance their awareness of living harmoniously in diversity (Hartono et al., 2024).

Various previous studies have examined multicultural education from the perspectives of curriculum, educational policy, and its general implementation. Mulyana (2019) they show that the national curriculum tends not to accommodate local cultural diversity, thereby risking the marginalization of minority groups. Sutrisno (2020) they reveal that cultural stereotypes and prejudices still often occur in the school environment, hindering harmony among students. Meanwhile, Nugroho (2021) highlight the unequal access to education for marginalized communities and indigenous peoples, which has implications for unequal learning opportunities in a multicultural context.

However, most of these studies still focus on the macro policy aspects and the general implementation of multicultural education. Few studies have examined in depth the dynamics of social and cultural interaction in the classroom through a qualitative ethnographic approach, particularly in the context of art education in elementary schools. In fact, the classroom is a highly potential arena for understanding how multicultural values are shaped, negotiated, and applied in practice by students and teachers in their daily lives.

This is the basis for conducting this research. The ethnographic approach, as a qualitative method, holds great potential for revealing cultural dynamics and social practices in educational settings more authentically (Hanifah et al., 2025). Furthermore, this approach also provides a contextual depiction of multicultural practices in school life. Interactions between individuals, students' ways of thinking, as well as the habits and cultural symbols that develop in schools can be mapped holistically. It shows that ethnography is capable of revealing the hidden dimensions of school culture through direct observation of social behavior. Meanwhile, Ananda & Albina (2025) emphasize that this approach can demonstrate how multicultural values are formed through natural social interaction processes in the classroom. In line with the findings of Darliana et al. (2024) the ethnographic approach in elementary school learning has been proven to provide space for students to express their culture while also fostering an inclusive and democratic learning environment.

Based on this, the present study aims to describe how the ethnographic approach is used in the practice of multicultural education in elementary schools, as well as how this approach helps foster tolerance, empathy, and appreciation for cultural diversity. The main questions of this research are: how is the ethnographic approach implemented in multicultural education in elementary school art classes, and how does this process shape students' attitudes of tolerance and inclusivity? The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of inclusive and contextual learning strategies in elementary schools, particularly in the context of Indonesia's multicultural society.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of describing the implementation of the ethnographic approach in multicultural education at the elementary school level. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with classroom teachers, and documentation of school curricula and programs. The research subjects included art teachers and principals from several elementary schools in the Cikarang area. Purposive sampling was used to select informants with experience and in-depth understanding of art education practices.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, which involved open coding, categorization, and interpretation based on art education and curriculum theories. Thematic analysis was chosen because it aligns with the ethnographic approach, which focuses on uncovering the meanings behind students' cultural experiences in learning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study is expected to provide a concrete overview of the role of art education and offer strategic recommendations for the development of more meaningful art learning.

RESULTS

This research was conducted in two elementary schools in the Cikarang area, purposively selected for having students with diverse cultural backgrounds, including Javanese, Sundanese, Betawi, and migrants from outside Java. Data were obtained through classroom observation, interviews with five classroom teachers and two school principals, as well as document analysis of teaching modules and proyek penguatan profil pelajar Pancasila (P5). Based on the data analysis results, four main themes were identified that form the framework for implementing the ethnographic approach in multicultural education. These four themes are visualized in the following diagram to illustrate the interconnection between the elements of the research findings.

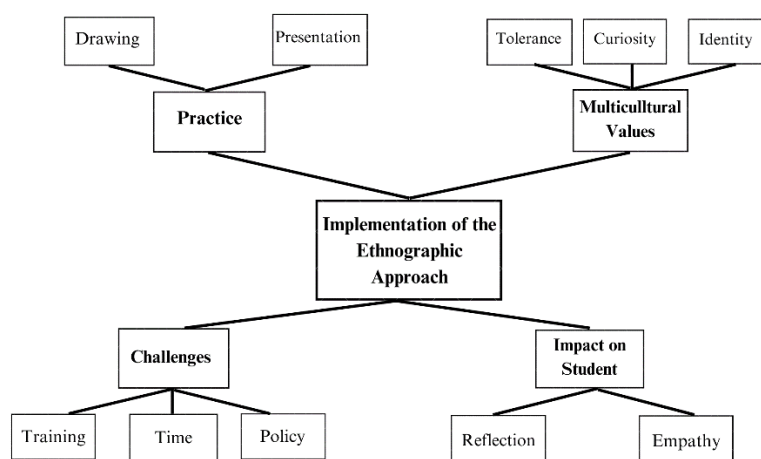


Figure 1. Thematic diagram of the research findings

1. Ethnographic Approach Practices in Learning

The observation results show that some teachers have indirectly implemented the ethnographic approach, particularly in environment-based P5 (Project to Strengthen the Profile of Pancasila Students) learning. At SDN Pasirsari 03, the fourth-grade teacher assigned students to describe their respective family traditions and present them in groups. Through this task, students became acquainted with different traditions, such as selamatan, ngunjung, and traditional foods from various regions. *"We asked the children to share about the traditional foods in their homes. Some talked about gudeg, while others mentioned rendang..."* (Teacher at SDN Pasirsari 03)



Figure 2. Group representatives presenting their respective family traditions

Meanwhile, at SDN Sukaresmi 06, the art and culture teacher asked students to draw traditional clothing or traditional houses based on their family backgrounds. The drawings were displayed in the classroom, and student representatives explained the

meanings of the cultural symbols. This activity encouraged the exploration of cultural identity and enhanced cross-cultural awareness among students.



Figure 3. Students drawing their respective family's traditional clothing and traditional houses

2. Emerging Multicultural Values

From these ethnography-based learning activities, it was found that students demonstrated the development of the following multicultural values:

- a. Cultural tolerance: Students became more open to accepting the customs and cultures of their peers.
"They used to make fun of their friends' food, but now they are more interested and ask each other questions." (Teacher at SDN Sukaresmi 06)
- b. Curiosity about other cultures: Students actively asked questions about regional languages, traditional foods, and unique family traditions of their classmates.
"I was happy when I was asked to share about the selamatan tradition in my family because my friends also got to know and appreciate our culture." (Fourth-grade student)
- c. Pride in cultural identity: Students began to show positive attitudes toward their own origins, such as wearing traditional clothing during cultural presentations.
"The children now appreciate their friends' cultures more; in the past, they often mocked food or accents, but now they share stories and laugh together." (Teacher at SDN Sukaresmi 06)

3. Challenges in Implementation

Several challenges in implementing the ethnographic approach in elementary schools include:

- a. Lack of teachers' conceptual understanding of the ethnographic approach.
"We have never had specific training on ethnography, so it's only based on experience." (Teacher at SDN Sukaresmi 06)
- b. Limited instructional time.
"It's difficult to have outdoor activities because the time is limited and the curriculum is packed." (Teacher at SDN Pasirsari 03)
- c. Lack of school policy support. Some principals admitted that multicultural activities have not yet become a main focus of the school's work program.

This indicates that the implementation of the ethnographic approach relies heavily on the personal initiative of teachers and has not yet become part of a systematic policy within the school environment.

4. Impact on Students' Understanding of Diversity

Student reflections and interviews revealed an increased awareness of the cultural diversity around them. A fourth-grade student stated, *"I used to think everyone was the same as me, but now I know my friends have different ways of worship and different foods."*

This shows that the ethnographic approach can lead students to deeper and more meaningful learning experiences while also fostering inclusive character in their social interactions.

DISCUSSION

The ethnographic approach in education serves not only as a tool for examining cultural dynamics in the classroom but also as a means of shaping learning experiences that are contextual and relevant to students' lives. In the context of multicultural education, in line with the findings of Darliana et al. (2024), the ethnographic approach in elementary school learning has been proven to provide space for students to express their culture while fostering an inclusive and democratic learning environment. This approach is able to reveal various cultural aspects that are often not accommodated in the formal curriculum. Thus, the ethnographic approach serves as a bridge between theory and practice in multicultural education.

1. Analysis of Findings Based on Theoretical Review

Field findings indicate that the ethnographic approach, although not yet implemented systematically, has made a tangible contribution to shaping students' multicultural attitudes. This is in line with the opinion of Rosaliza et al. (2023), who states that the ethnographic approach allows students to directly experience cultural interactions and understand the values that exist within their communities.

Furthermore, Nugroho (2023) emphasizes that learning based on socio-cultural exploration can enrich students' understanding of realities beyond textbooks. The findings of this study reinforce this view by showing that students experienced increased empathy and cultural awareness through activities such as interviewing community members and exploring family traditions.

However, the challenges identified are also in line with previous research, Suwarna (2022) which states that the lack of teacher training and the inflexibility of the curriculum are major obstacles in delivering inclusive and culturally based education.

2. Implications of the Research Findings

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the ethnographic approach in multicultural education can be an effective strategy for developing students' open-minded character and appreciation for differences. Therefore, several implications can be drawn:

- a. For teachers, training or workshops on the ethnographic approach should be provided so they can design culturally experiential learning in a structured and meaningful way.
- b. For schools, integrating multicultural activities into school programs and the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)* will strengthen students' learning experiences.
- c. For policymakers, it is important to allow flexibility within the curriculum to enable approaches like this to be implemented without overburdening teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the ethnographic approach has significant potential in supporting the implementation of multicultural education in elementary schools. Through experiential learning activities such as exploring local culture, interviewing community leaders, and presenting family traditions, students can develop attitudes of tolerance, curiosity about other cultures, and pride in their cultural identity.

However, the implementation of this approach in the field still faces several challenges, including limited teacher understanding of ethnographic concepts, restricted instructional time, and minimal policy support from schools. Nevertheless, positive initiatives have been observed from teachers who have begun integrating the ethnographic approach into thematic learning in a contextual manner.

Therefore, adequate training for teachers, institutional support from schools, and the development of a more flexible and inclusive curriculum are needed to enable this approach to be applied effectively and sustainably. This study provides an initial contribution to examining ethnography-based learning practices in the context of multicultural education in elementary schools and is expected to serve as a reference for developing learning strategies relevant to the socio-cultural realities of Indonesia's diverse society.

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