

Culture and Education: An Analysis of Concepts, Characteristics, and Social Dynamics in the Indonesian Context

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the nature of culture and education within the context of the social dynamics of Indonesian society. A literature review method was used to analyze the concepts of culture, cultural inheritance, the distribution of ethnic diversity, and the dynamics of social change. The results of the study indicate that culture is a system of values and meanings that develop through inheritance and social interaction between generations. Social dynamics in Indonesia have a significant impact on the education system, creating both challenges and opportunities for change. Education functions as a mechanism of social control and a strategic instrument in maintaining tolerance and building national character. Understanding cultural diversity and strengthening multicultural education are key to preventing conflict and strengthening national integration. This study not only presents theoretical concepts of the nature of education and culture but also links them to social dynamics, the Indonesian context, and the implications of culture for education. This research provides a conceptual foundation for developing education policies that are responsive to Indonesia's social dynamics and cultural diversity.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia faces complex challenges in managing social dynamics amidst its high ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2020 showed that Indonesia has more than 1,340 ethnic groups and 652 distinct regional languages. This diversity has the potential to lead to social conflict if not properly managed through appropriate education. Between 2019 and 2022, 3,549 cases of social conflict were recorded in Indonesia, with 42% of these being triggered by a lack of understanding of cultural differences (Polhukam, 2022).

The urgency of this research is reinforced by the rise in cases of intolerance among students. A survey by the Center for Islamic and Community Studies (PPIM) at UIN Jakarta showed that 38.4% of students and 29.7% of teachers tend to be intolerant of religious and cultural differences (Admin, 2022). This situation demonstrates a gap between educational theory and practice. Theoretically, education should be a means of instilling the values of diversity and tolerance. However, in reality, the education system has not been able to produce a generation that values cultural diversity. This indicates that the multicultural education implemented so far is not based on a deep understanding of the nature of culture itself.

Several studies have examined the relationship between culture, education, and social dynamics from various perspectives. Bazzi et al. (2019) studied social and economic integration, analyzing how intergroup contact can foster national integration in Indonesia. However, their focus was limited to economic aspects without a thorough examination of the role of education. From the perspective of social tolerance, Sanjaya (2022) discussed ethnic diversity and social tolerance in Indonesia, but did not integrate a pedagogical perspective on how education can manage this diversity. Supriyanto & Wahyudi (2017) examined the individual psychological aspects of character education, focusing on the character of tolerance. However, their analysis emphasized the individual psychological aspects rather than the broader socio-cultural dimensions. Tilar (2015) also studied multicultural education, discussing critical pedagogy as a strategy for addressing social conflict, but did not integrate an anthropological perspective on the nature of culture in depth. Zamroni (2011) examined democratic education in a multicultural society, but his analysis emphasized the political aspects rather than the cultural dimensions.

Most research focuses on separate aspects such as social tolerance, economic integration, or the technical implementation of multicultural education. However, less frequently discussed is how the three dimensions—the nature of culture, social dynamics, and the function of education—are interrelated and can be integrated into a coherent analytical framework to produce a truly effective educational model. Previous research has tended to separate theoretical studies of culture from practical applications in education, leaving a limited understanding of why multicultural education has not been optimally successful.

The novelty of this research lies in three things. This research integrates three dimensions that have been studied separately: the nature of culture, social dynamics, and the function of education into a single, comprehensive and systematic analytical framework. This research does not only discuss cultural theory or educational practice separately, but also shows how a deep understanding of the nature of culture is an important foundation for designing education that is responsive to Indonesia's social dynamics. This research provides a theoretical explanation of why existing multicultural education has not been optimal, namely because it is not based on a comprehensive understanding of the nature of culture as a system of values that lives and develops in society.

Thus, this study aims to analyze the nature of culture and its relevance in developing education that is capable of managing the social dynamics of contemporary Indonesia. Through integration From an anthropological, sociological, and pedagogical perspective, this research is expected to provide a conceptual basis for the development of more effective educational policies in instilling the values of diversity and preventing social conflict.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review method to analyze the nature of culture and its relevance to education in addressing the social dynamics of Indonesian society. This method was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive synthesis of various theoretical perspectives and empirical findings scattered throughout the scientific literature.

This study utilized 27 scientific literatures consisting of 8 international journal articles, 12 accredited national journal articles, 5 theoretical reference books, and 2 research reports from official institutions (BPS and PPIM UIN Jakarta). The literatures were selected based on four criteria: relevance to the topics of Indonesian culture, education, and social dynamics; source credibility in the form of articles from journals accredited with at least Sinta 3 or indexed by Scopus; the novelty of the information with publication priority for the last 10 years (2015-2025); and adequate analytical depth.

The research was conducted in five stages. The first stage was a literature search through academic databases (Google Scholar, SINTA, Garuda) using the keywords "culture," "multicultural education," "social dynamics," and "Indonesian ethnic diversity." The second stage was a literature selection based on established criteria, from 64 initial literatures, 27 literatures were selected that met the requirements. The third stage was an in-depth reading and recording of important information related to the concepts of culture, cultural inheritance, ethnic diversity, social dynamics, and the role of education. The fourth stage was a content analysis by grouping information into main themes, then integrating various perspectives to build a comprehensive understanding. The fifth stage was an interpretation of the results in the context of

Indonesian social dynamics and the formulation of implications for the development of multicultural education.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, which involves comparing information from various literature sources to ensure the consistency of findings. Each important statement was verified through at least two different sources. The analysis process was repeated to ensure no important information was missed and to deepen understanding of the relationships between the concepts studied.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Concept and Characteristics of Culture

From an analysis of eight literatures discussing the concept of culture, it was found that culture is understood as a complex system of symbolic meaning. Geertz (1973) defined culture as a web of meaning woven by humans themselves, where cultural analysis is not an experimental science seeking universal laws, but rather an interpretive science seeking meaning. This interpretive approach emphasizes *thick description* or in-depth descriptions that not only record observed behavior, but also reveal layers of meaning behind the action in its social context.

Cai (2024) emphasized that Geertz's contribution lies in shifting the epistemological paradigm of social science, from explaining behavior based on universal principles to interpreting meaning through cultural context. This finding demonstrates that Indonesia's diverse culture cannot be understood solely through statistical categorization or surface descriptions, but rather requires a deep understanding of the meaning systems embraced by each cultural group. An analysis of six literatures on cultural inheritance reveals that cultural transmission is a fundamental mechanism in the continuity of culture. Kalish et al. (2007) demonstrate the importance of cultural transmission as a system of inheritance that develops in human populations through mechanisms such as *diffusion chain* which transmits behavior and knowledge between individuals and between generations.

Boyd & Richerson (1985) developed the theory of multiple inheritance (*dual inheritance theory*) which explains that culture and genetics are two systems of inheritance that influence each other, with culture having variability, transmission, and selection equivalent to the principles of biological evolution. Nettle (2020) cautions that the analogy between cultural and genetic inheritance is idealized and must be understood with caution.

In the Indonesian context, Elvandari (2020) found that cultural inheritance is an intergenerational transfer activity aimed at preserving past cultural values and the sacredness of traditional arts through structured social mechanisms. Marianto et al. (2019) demonstrated that traditional educational institutions effectively integrate character values (religion, mutual cooperation, and nationalism) into the younger generation through local cultural practices. Sudrajat (2020) found that culture as a

habitus can support economic development if supported by strong social capital, indicating that cultural inheritance is not only important for identity but also has implications for socio-economic development.

2. Distribution and Diversity of Ethnic Groups in Indonesia

A review of seven literature studies on Indonesia's ethnic diversity yielded comprehensive findings on its characteristics and impacts. Statistics Indonesia (BPS) data (2020) shows that Indonesia has over 1,340 ethnic groups with 652 distinct regional languages. Ananta et al. (2015) noted that the distribution of ethnic groups has unique characteristics influenced by history, migration, and colonialism, with urbanization and industrialization driving ethnic mixing, expanding the space for cultural interaction.

Bazzi et al. (2019) revealed that the mechanism *intergroup contact* Transmigration programs have positively contributed to national integration, demonstrating increased use of the Indonesian language, inter-ethnic marriages, and the adoption of an "Indonesian" national identity in transmigration areas. These findings indicate that well-facilitated inter-ethnic contact can strengthen national cohesion. Sanjaya (2022) found a paradox: although levels of social trust decreased with increasing ethnic diversity, levels of tolerance actually increased. This finding suggests that interethnic interactions can strengthen attitudes of social openness despite declining interpersonal trust in diverse societies.

Pepinsky et al. (2020) highlight that urbanization in the context of ethnic diversity has accelerated Indonesian's emergence as the primary language in both cities and villages, marking a significant linguistic shift that could strengthen national integration, despite raising concerns about the preservation of regional languages. Sukanto (2017) emphasizes that Indonesia's cultural diversity is reflected in the different languages, customs, arts, and belief systems found in each region, yet remains united through the values of Pancasila as the foundation of national identity.

Dynamics and Social Change in Society

An analysis of five literatures on social dynamics yields the understanding that social dynamics is the process of transition or change within a community, whether rapid or gradual. Dynamics encompasses constant movement, strength, development, and adaptive skills within the environment. Rivenka et al. (2023) define dynamics as the behavior of individuals/groups that significantly and directly influence other individuals/groups in reciprocal interactions.

Sinambela et al. (2025) identified that social dynamics occur due to acculturation, assimilation, geographic and environmental changes, and conflicts of interest. Fadhilah et al. (2025) added that the driving factors of social dynamics and change are globalization, technological developments, and urbanization. The findings indicate that social dynamics have a significant impact on education. Population transmigration not only affects demographic composition but also has consequences for socio-cultural interaction patterns and local education systems. The processes of

acculturation and assimilation can run harmoniously and enrich local diversity, but can also trigger conflict if not managed properly.

3. The Role of Education in Facing Social Dynamics

A review of eight pieces of educational literature yielded a comprehensive understanding of education's strategic role. Nurfuadi et al. (2022) define education as a mechanism for transforming the behavior and attitudes of individuals/groups in an effort to become fully human through teaching and training. Gunawan (2015) added that education is a conscious, structured, and planned effort to create learning conditions so that students actively develop their spiritual, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor potential.

Wahab et al. (2021) emphasized that the fundamental goal of education is to "humanize" humans, emphasizing that education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but rather a process of transformation that elevates humans from primitiveness to complete humanity. Nurfuadi et al. (2022) detailed that the goal of education is to shape humans who believe in God, are intelligent, healthy, have noble morals, are humanistic, have feelings, have willpower, are wise, can control their desires, are socially responsible, cultured, and have morals.

The function of education in the context of social dynamics is very strategic. Nurfuadi et al. (2022) identified education as having the function of bringing about social change/dynamics, including the preservation and reproduction of culture, developing cultural analysis, cultural assimilation, improving the economy, and increasing opportunities for a better standard of living. Sanwil (in Wahab et al., 2021) outlined six main functions of education: (1) instilling discipline; (2) introducing the outside world; (3) cultivating good behavior and attitudes; (4) developing social and communication skills; (5) honing skills and creativity; and (6) preparing humans to be useful in the future.

PPIM UIN Jakarta data (2022) shows that 38.4% of students and 29.7% of teachers tend to be intolerant of religious and cultural differences, indicating the urgency of multicultural education. Data from the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs recorded 3,549 cases of social conflict in Indonesia from 2019 to 2022, with 42% triggered by a lack of understanding of cultural differences, reinforcing the importance of education as a conflict prevention tool (Polhukam, 2022).

4. Integration of Cultural and Educational Concepts: A Theoretical Perspective

A deep understanding of the nature of culture is an important foundation for developing education that is responsive to social dynamics. Geertz's (1973) concept of culture as a system of symbolic meaning is strongly relevant to the function of education. Geertz stated that "*man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning*" (Geertz, 1973). This interpretive perspective changes the way we understand culture, no longer

simply describing visible phenomena, but rather deeply understanding the socio-cultural context behind them.

Cai (2024) reinforces Geertz's view by explaining that Geertz's important contribution lies in shifting the perspective of social science, from explaining behavior based on generally accepted principles to interpreting meaning through specific cultural contexts. This shift in perspective broadens the understanding of how education should be designed. Education can no longer be understood as the process of imparting uniform knowledge to all students. Instead, education must consider the diverse cultural contexts of each learner. This aligns with the definition of education according to Nurfuadi et al. (2022), namely the mechanism or process of transforming the behavior and attitudes of individuals and groups of people in an effort to become fully human through teaching and training. Thus, this study emphasizes that behavioral transformation must be interpreted within the specific cultural context of the learner, rather than imposed with uniform universal standards.

This finding complements previous views that viewed culture as merely a collection of unchanging rules or cultural heritage objects. This study emphasizes that culture is a system that continuously evolves through social interaction and shared meaning. Consequently, multicultural education is not sufficient simply to teach about diversity through cultural festivals or traditional food. Education must delve deeper, namely understanding the systems of meaning held by various cultural groups.

5. Cultural Inheritance Mechanisms and Their Implications for Curriculum Design

Cultural inheritance is a more complex process than simply transferring information from older to younger generations. Boyd & Richerson (1985) developed a theory of dual inheritance, explaining that cultural development has its own distinct but interconnected dynamics from biological development. They define that "*culture is information capable of affecting individuals' behavior that they acquire from other members of their species through teaching, imitation, and other forms of social transmission*" (Boyd & Richerson 1985). This definition emphasizes that culture is not merely a passively received inheritance, but rather active information that shapes behavior through various social means.

Kalish et al. (2007) strengthened Boyd and Richerson's concept by showing that repeated learning reveals inductive biases in human thinking. Their research explains how cultural knowledge and practices change as they are passed between individuals and generations. What's interesting about this finding is that the process of cultural inheritance is not automatic or certain, but rather influenced by prevailing ways of thinking and social selection within a society.

In the Indonesian context, the findings of Marianto et al. (2019) provide concrete evidence that traditional educational institutions are capable of instilling character values such as religiosity, mutual cooperation, and nationalism in the younger

generation through local cultural practices. These findings support Boyd and Richerson's theory of cultural inheritance, which argues that the instillation of values does not occur automatically but rather through structured social mechanisms. Elvandari (2020) adds that the inheritance system is an intergenerational transfer activity aimed at preserving past cultural values and the sacredness of traditional arts.

Nettle (2020) notes a significant limitation in understanding cultural inheritance. He explains that cultural inheritance differs from genetic inheritance. Cultural inheritance is more flexible, can occur horizontally (between peers), and can skip generations, unlike genetic inheritance, which is vertical (from parent to child) and inevitably occurs. An important implication of this distinction is that educational curricula must be designed not only for vertical learning from teacher to student but also to facilitate horizontal learning between students and learning from various cultural sources outside of school.

Sudrajat (2020) adds a new dimension by explaining the relationship between culture as *habitus* and economic development. This finding broadens the understanding that culture not only needs to be preserved as an identity but also has a real impact on the social and economic development of society. Education must be able to pass on cultural values while developing the ability to adapt to economic changes. This aligns with the function of education proposed by Nurfuadi et al. (2022), namely to bring about social change or dynamics that encompass preservation and reproduction.

6. The Paradox of Diversity: Challenges and Opportunities for National Integration

This study reveals an interesting phenomenon in the dynamics of ethnic diversity in Indonesia. Sanjaya (2022) found that although the level of social trust (*social trust*) tends to decrease with increasing ethnic diversity, the level of tolerance actually increases. This seemingly contradictory phenomenon can be explained through the theory of intergroup contact (*intergroup contact theory*). Bazzi et al. (2019) provide concrete evidence of how intergroup contact can foster national integration. Their research shows that interacting with diverse ethnic groups through a transmigration program significantly increases the use of Indonesian, interethnic marriages, and acceptance of national identity. These findings support the contact hypothesis, which states that direct interaction between ethnic groups, when properly facilitated, can reduce prejudice and promote social harmony.

This study also uncovered greater complexity. The decline in social trust in highly diverse societies indicates underlying tensions that need to be managed. Sanjaya (2022) explains that tolerance is not always positively related to interpersonal trust, as tolerance can be passive (allowing differences), while trust requires active and in-depth interaction. This definition is crucial for the design of multicultural education: education should not stop at passive tolerance but should instead build active trust through meaningful cross-cultural collaboration.

Pepinsky et al. (2020) add a linguistic dimension to the discussion of national integration. They found that urbanization in a context of ethnic diversity accelerates the use of Indonesian as a lingua franca, even in rural areas. This phenomenon indicates a significant language shift that strengthens national integration, but also raises concerns about the preservation of regional languages. These findings create a dilemma for education: how to strengthen national integration through the national language without sacrificing the richness of Indonesia's 652 regional languages (BPS, 2020). Sukanto (2017) proposed a solution: that Indonesia's cultural diversity can be united through the values of Pancasila, which serve as the foundation of national identity. However, this study found that integration through Pancasila values requires concrete implementation in educational practice, not simply slogans or memorization.

7. Contemporary Social Dynamics and Educational Responsiveness

This study shows that contemporary social dynamics are driven by three main factors: globalization, technological development, and urbanization (Fadhilah et al. 2025). Sinambela et al. (2025) expand on this understanding by explaining that cultural dynamics and social change in modern society occur due to acculturation, assimilation, geographic and environmental changes, and conflicts of interest. The complexity of these factors creates new challenges for the education system.

Ananta et al. (2015) noted that the process of urbanization and industrialization encourages ethnic mixing, which expands the space for cultural interaction. This process creates a third cultural space (*third culture*) where new norms and values emerge from intercultural negotiations. Rivenka et al. (2023) complement this understanding by stating that dynamics are the behavior of individuals or groups that can significantly and directly influence other individuals or groups in reciprocal interactions. This concept emphasizes that social change does not occur in a straight line but rather through continuous negotiation and adjustment. Empirical data demonstrates the failure of the education system to address these dynamics. The Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs recorded 3,549 cases of social conflict in Indonesia between 2019 and 2022, with 42% of these cases being gender-based. This is triggered by a misunderstanding of cultural differences (Polhukam, 2022). This finding contradicts the ideal function of education (Wahab et al., 2021), namely developing social and communication skills and fostering positive behavior and attitudes.

More worryingly, data from the PPIM UIN Jakarta shows that 38.4% of students and 29.7% of teachers tend to be intolerant of religious and cultural differences. This finding indicates that the problem of intolerance is not only present in the general public, but has also penetrated the education system itself. Gunawan (2015) states that education is a conscious, structured, and planned effort to realize learning conditions through the learning process so that students actively develop their potential spiritually, cognitively, affectively, and psychomotorically. However, empirical data shows a gap between the ideals of education and the reality of its practice.

This gap can be explained through the concept of "humanizing humans" proposed by Wahab et al. (2021), namely, education as an effort to elevate humans from primitive traits to complete humanity. The failure of education to instill tolerance indicates that the "humanization" process has not been effective. The education system still focuses on the cognitive aspect (knowledge transfer) without sufficiently developing the affective (attitudes and values) and psychomotor (real-life practice of tolerance).

8. Convergence of Findings: An Integrative Model of Multicultural Education

From all the studies above, it can be concluded that effective multicultural education requires the integration of three dimensions: a deep understanding of the nature of culture, a structured mechanism for cultural transmission, and responsiveness to contemporary social dynamics. This integrative model expands on conventional approaches that tend to be partial and superficial. Tilar (2015) emphasized that critical pedagogy is relevant to the development of educational science in Indonesia because it can dismantle structures of injustice and build critical awareness of social realities. This perspective aligns with the study's findings that education cannot be neutral toward social injustices arising from intercultural misunderstandings. Education must actively facilitate intercultural dialogue and build critical awareness of stereotypes and prejudice.

Zamroni (2011) added a democratic dimension to multicultural education. He argued that democratic education in a multicultural society must develop citizens' abilities to participate in collective decision-making while respecting diversity. This finding broadens the function of education from merely passive tolerance to active participation in democratic life. Supriyanto et al. (2017) provided a practical operationalization by developing a tolerance character scale encompassing three aspects: peace, respect for differences, and individual awareness. These three aspects can serve as a measurable and evaluable framework for developing a multicultural education curriculum. Thus, this study not only presents a theoretical concept but also provides concrete direction for the development of multicultural education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion a review of 27 scientific literatures shows that effective multicultural education requires a deep understanding of culture as a system of meaning that continues to develop through social interaction. Cultural inheritance does not occur automatically, but rather through a structured social process that instills national character values. In Indonesia, with 1,340 ethnic groups and 652 regional languages, well-facilitated intergroup interaction can strengthen national integration. This research contributes to integrating three dimensions: the nature of culture, cultural inheritance, and social dynamics within a single, coherent analytical framework. It

also finds that while tolerance is increasing, social trust is actually decreasing. These findings suggest that multicultural education.

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