

# Analyzing Classroom Diversity and its Contribution to Multicultural Education in Indonesia

**Arbin Janu Setiyowati**

Department of Guidance and Counseling  
State University of Malang, Indonesia  
arbin.janu.fip@um.ac.id

**Henny Indreswari**

Department of Guidance and Counseling  
State University of Malang, Indonesia  
henny.indreswari.fip@um.ac.id

**Irene Maya Simon**

Department of Guidance and Counseling  
State University of Malang, Indonesia  
irene.maya.fip@um.ac.id

**Abstract:** Ideally, the learning process within the classroom should be able to accommodate the diversity, both from the perspective of students and teacher. According to the point of view of diversity, a learning process which considers individual diversity will become a basis for multicultural awareness growth. The teacher plays an important role in the growth of cultural academic climate in the classroom. This paper describes the diversity within the classroom and its contribution to multicultural education.

**Keywords:** diversity, education, multicultural

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that consists of various ethnic groups, cultures, tribes, and religions so that Indonesia can simply be called a multicultural society. However, on the other hand, the multicultural reality is faced with the urgent need to reconstruct Indonesia's national culture which can become an integrating force that binds all ethnic and cultural diversity. Pluralism must be found in every community. Therefore, in schools, the values of friendship and fellowship, tolerance, and being able to adjust to various differences must be instilled. The process of education in this direction can be pursued with multicultural education.

Multicultural education is the process of cultivating a way of respect, sincerity, and tolerance for cultural diversity that exist in the midst of a pluralistic society. The main purpose of multicultural education is to help students develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function, both with themselves, in other micro-cultural environments and in the global community (Banks, 2001).

Multicultural education is expected to generate flexible mental of future generation in order to deal with possible social conflict within society. Schools play an important role in instilling multicultural values in students from an early age. From the beginning, if they have values of friendship and fellowship, tolerance, love peace, and respect for differences, then these values will be reflected in their daily behavior since it will be formed in their personality. If it is successfully possessed by the young generation, then the future social circumstance can be predicted to be relatively peaceful and appreciative.

Multicultural education is an effort that has the same goal as learning in general. It aims at building a whole human being in all aspects of life. Multicultural education cannot be separated from the general learning in school. Learning ideally helps students to recognize, acknowledge and appreciate diversity. School diversity can be found starting from the

classroom setting. The class is a representation of individuals with religious diversity, ethnicity, mindset and behavior, and diversity in socioeconomic status (Setiyowati et al., 2018). For this reason, learning in the classroom is required to be able to accommodate and serve the diverse characteristics and needs of students.

The facts show that classroom learning does not recognize and facilitate existing diversity. Efforts to equalize the treatment and ability of participants in learning in class make most students frustrated and fail to show a full representation of them. This condition obstructs the ability of participants to develop optimally and encounter obstacles in their social relations. This is in line with Walto et al. (2014) that in culturally diverse situations, sometimes it is full of racist attitudes.

Therefore teachers have an important role in dealing with a cultural and multicultural sensitivity of values, and in changing attitudes about race and culture in the school system (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). The teacher becomes an important figure who must be present and wise in addressing the diversity that exists in his or her class. Teachers cannot view and place themselves as the only source of learning for students. However, the teacher must play a role as a facilitator in learning that provides opportunities for students to build their own knowledge based on their experiences.

## II. DIVERSITY IN CLASSROOM

A teacher will always face students who are different from each other. No student in the class has an identical trait and characteristic. It is possible that there are one or two people who seem to have almost the identical trait and characteristic. But in reality, if we observe carefully between them, there are certainly different.

The differences that we can observe are not just physical differences but also differences in psychological aspects, learning styles and culture. This diversity needs to be well recognized by the

teacher so that the teacher can design learning that accommodates all the interests of students and generate a positive and conducive learning climate. The following explanation elaborates the diversity that can be found in the classroom.

#### **A. Religion Diversity**

The social structure of Indonesian society is characterized by a diversity of religion adhered to by its people. The diversity of religions and beliefs in Indonesia is also reflected in the religious practices and beliefs embraced by rural tribes in Indonesia.

Students come to school with their respective religious attributes. For this reason, teachers are expected to be sensitive in recognizing the diversity of religions in the classroom and helping students to be able to accept the diversity that exists around them.

#### **B. Ethnic Diversity**

The existence of different ethnic and racial diversity in Indonesia should divide the community and create conflict with each other. In history, there were many stories regarding the occurrence of inter-ethnic conflict in Indonesia such as what was happened in West Kalimantan 1933 and in Sampit, Central Kalimantan, in late 2000, there were riots between Madurese and Dayaks that caused many casualties. Discrimination treatment also often occurs in schools, for example, children with certain ethnicities are often bullied because they are considered different from their friends.

#### **C. Language Diversity**

Language is a human means for communicating and interacting with one another. However, its development language does not only function as a mean for communicating but the language is also able to enter wider areas of politics, social and culture. In recent society, it is easy to feel that a certain group is better than other groups because of the language they use which creates discrimination against the languages that are used by a certain group of people.

This is influenced by the use of language in electronic media such as television. In some television shows, there is labeling in certain languages or dialects that distinguish social status. For example, the Javanese, Madurese and Betawi dialects are identified with the language of suburban people with low social statuses such as domestic maid, street food vendors and people who live in villages. This, of course, is imitated by students who continually obtain the exposure through a television program.

#### **D. Gender Diversity**

Gender is the role, nature, and behavior of people in everyday life (for both women or men). In fact, these roles, traits, and behaviors are strongly influenced by assumptions regarding what is appropriate for women or men to take or do. Vice versa, it is also influenced by the parameter of what should not be taken or done by women and men in everyday life. The differences in treatment also often

occur in schools. For instance, a teacher employs a softer tone of language when talking to female students than to a male one. Whereas, the teacher's role is very strategic in building students' awareness to uphold the same rights and build anti-discriminatory attitudes.

#### **E. Academic Ability Diversity**

Humans are born with different abilities. Some are born physically different such as diffable person who is blind, deaf, and others. There are also non-physical differences such as mental disorders and low intelligence levels. This difference in ability can lead to discrimination and reduce individual rights to someone who has different abilities.

This will provide obstacles for them to carry out their activities and participate in the community. Differences in students' academic abilities are things that cannot be avoided in learning. Like it or not, the teacher must design learning that accommodates the diversity of academic abilities so that each student can develop optimally.

#### **F. Learning Styles Diversity**

Each student has distinctive characteristics and is always different from other students whether in physical form, behavior, nature, and learning style. Learning style is the way a person absorbs, manages and processes information or knowledge obtained. Every student will use his or her own way to interpret the information or knowledge obtained. Therefore, the understanding, thoughts, and views of one student with others can be different, even though the two students grow up in the same conditions and environment, and receive the same treatment.

Students with visual learning styles prefer to follow illustrations, read instructions, observe pictures, review events directly, and etc. This is very influential on the selection of methods and learning media that predominantly activate the sense of sight. Learners who are auditorial type easily learn the material presented in the form of sound (lecturing method of learning), as soon as the teacher explains students will quickly receive the lesson material. Besides, the discussion activities or by employing any recording means will easily make students receives the learning topic.

Individuals who are kinesthetic type are easy to learn the material in the form of writings, movements, and difficult to learn the material in the form of sound or illustration. In addition, kinesthetic learning is related to practice or by having experience learning directly. Through the introduction of each student's learning style, the teacher can analyze the diversity that occurs in the classroom during the learning process and can find out the potential that exists among students.

#### **G. Social Status Diversity**

Every single country will always face social problems. Including Indonesia, the most common social problem which exists in Indonesia is a social gap problem. Within the society of Indonesia, the gap

between rich and poor society is inevitable. This raises various social groups in society. There are three types of social class that exist in Indonesia. An upper-class group is a group of people who have more income sources. The middle-class community group is people who have a fixed income which at least meets the basic daily needs. The lower class community is a group of people who do not have a fixed income and cannot meet their needs.

From the reality that exists, upper-class groups usually tend to be more powerful. For example, students who come from the upper-class group are often treated differently from students who come from the lower class. Whereas, students who come from lower middle social status tend to be rejected in social interaction so that they often get bullying treatment. Therefore, the teacher has a fundamental role in developing the attitude of students who care and are able to appreciate different social classes.

### **III. LEARNING WHICH ACCOMODATES DIVERSITY**

Students who attend a lesson in school are from different background, they have different needs, and they also have different aspirations as well as different cultural understanding. Hence, it is expected for all teachers or instructors to consider that all students are the same and any differences within each student should not be a reason for discriminating them. Differences are important aspects that must be considered for a fair treatment in the classroom.

The difference between students requires a curriculum that accommodates differences. The designed curriculum must take into account the importance of different students, even for students who have the same possible characteristics; it does not have to be assumed that they need the same curriculum.

The curriculum in the context of diversity can be interpreted as a principle that uses cultural diversity of students in developing the philosophy, mission, goals, and curriculum components as well as the learning environment of students so that students can use their personal culture to understand and develop various expected insights, concepts, skills, values attitude and morality. The curriculum is expected to take a role as a basis for establishing recognition of diversity in schools.

The curriculum that is designed in such a way as to accommodate the diversity of learners will help teachers and education personnel to do more for some groups and individuals than others so that certain needs of all students can be met. This is similar to what Sharma (2014) expressed, which reveals the importance of respecting students „cultural ideas and cultural differences, which can affect students“ learning.

Each subject is given in class ideally has characteristics as a lesson that provides a meaningful learning experience to each student. The learning experience obtained by students will help students to develop their knowledge and understanding regarding themselves and their environment as a whole. It

requires an attempt to conduct complete reorientation of subjects such as mathematics so that it focuses more on the experiences of students rather than objective and discrete elements of discipline understood by experts.

This, of course, will require a considerable shift in the thinking of subject teachers to build efforts to recognize diversity through subject vehicles. The main areas that need to be taken into account in an attempt at diversification are content, material, assessment criteria, methods and accessibility (Du Plessis & Bischoff, 2007).

Human beings are assumed to have a distinct and unique identity, history, environment, and life experience. Essentially, differences within each human being serve as important and paramount identity and it is an authentic depiction of the human being. Learning teaching process does not aim to make students can accomplish or even master as much as possible knowledge and skills or values.

However, it aims at encouraging and directing students to experience a process of obtaining knowledge, skills, or values as well as participating in the process in the classroom and school environment. Therefore, a teacher recently does not take a role as a central and sole actor within the learning process in the classroom. It is no longer believed that a teacher is a knowing-all actor.

The efficient and productive teacher is the one who is able to generate and manage a learning situation which encourages every single student to learn by employing his or her own unique way. The class is arranged not to obscure the personal identity of the student, instead, it discloses opportunity to each student to utilize them.

In multicultural education, there are dimensions that must be considered. According to Banks (1995), there are five interrelated dimensions of multicultural education, namely: (1) integrating various cultures and groups to illustrate fundamental concepts, generalizations, and theories in subjects; (2) bring students to understand cultural implications into a subject; (3) adapting teaching methods by learning students in order to facilitate academic achievement; (4) identify the racial characteristics of students and determine their teaching methods; and (5) train groups to participate in various activities, interact with all students and staff of different races and ethnicities to create an academic culture.

The challenge faced in the effort to implement learning that accommodates diversity is how to manipulate the class as a channel for real life and create simulations so that each student is experienced in learning the theory and compiling their own virtues in their lives. The teacher is no longer a center of knowledge that should be ready to give to students at any time. However, teacher nowadays should take a role as a dialogue partner who generates positive academic circumstance and as a partner of social interaction. Learning in class is structured as a real-life simulation which encourages students to experience a real-life interaction and place themselves as community members.

#### IV. TEACHER'S ROLE IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The concept of multiculturalism emphasizes the importance of looking at the world from different cultural reference frames and recognizing and appreciating the richness of various cultures within the country and within the global community. Multiculturalism emphasizes the need to create differences relating to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, limitations, and recognized social classes and all students are seen as valuable resources to enrich the teaching and learning process.

Therefore, it is expected that a teacher should be able to be democratic, meaning that in each of his or her behaviors, either his or her attitude and words are not discriminatory towards students who are different. The study conducted by Milner and Tenore (2010) show the responsiveness of cultural practices carried out by teachers in urban areas and how these teachers utilize questionnaires to control their own biases and assumptions. The findings of the study show the importance of the active role of the teacher to always improve the cultural awareness.

Regarding the respect for the religious diversity of students, for example, when the History teacher describes material that is related to religion involving several religions, the teacher should not take a side in certain religious groups involved in it. If the teacher sided with one of the religions involved in the conflict, then the analysis and explanation will be subjective, as a result, it can hurt the hearts of students who adhere to different religions, besides, it can also cause social conflict among students.

Regarding language diversity, the teacher must possess sufficient knowledge to deal with language diversity in the classroom and how to respect it. Such knowledge serves as a basic principle of the teacher to respect and take into account the differences between languages. Teachers should have high sensitivity to problems that involve the existence of language discrimination that occurs inside and outside the classroom.

For instance, if the majority of students make a fun of a certain student who has different dialect and accent while he or she talks in the classroom, the teacher should immediately take an action to prevent such discrimination. The teacher should explain to the entire students that the discrimination to certain language by laughing at it is an inappropriate attitude. More importantly, in academic circumstance, every single individual should respect any differences.

In class, every student has diverse academic abilities. Teachers must have good insight and understanding of the importance of anti-discrimination attitudes towards people who have different abilities. Teachers as the main director of students' awareness should always avoid discriminatory attitudes should be able to practice anti-discrimination discourse directly inside and outside the classroom.

The teacher must be responsive to the presence of discrimination related to the student's ability and provide understanding to students that all humans

have a disability. In addition, the teacher should provide students with an understanding of how they can manage these shortcomings into advantages.

Therefore, a systemic effort is needed to increase teachers' knowledge in teaching practice to be able to serve students from various cultural backgrounds and develop collaboration between schools and families (Cousik, 2015). Related to this, each teacher will have a variety of attitudes about multicultural and diverse strategies in achieving the goals of multicultural education through classroom teaching (Forrest et al., 2017).

#### V. CONCLUSION

The diversity which exists in the classroom generally is religion, ethnic, gender, language, academic ability, learning style, and socio-economic status. This diversity shows that each individual has unique and distinct characteristics, which distinguishes one from other individuals. The diversity found in class must be seen as a basic capital to foster awareness of each individual to recognize and appreciate differences.

Efforts to acknowledge and appreciate differences in class require teacher participation. Teachers must take a role as an agent of change that helps students to develop attitudes and behaviors that value diversity, through learning. Learning that accommodates diversity is the starting point of multicultural education in the school environment.

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