

# The Implementation of Multicultural Education at Senior High Schools:

## A Case Study

Nyayu Khodijah\*, Sukirman, Amalia Hasanah

UIN Raden Fatah Palembang

Palembang, Indonesia

\*nyayukhodijah\_uin@radenfatah.ac.id

**Abstract**—This research aims to get the complete understanding and comprehensive data about the implementation of multicultural education at one of senior high schools in Palembang. The data were collected by observing, interviewing, and documenting. The data analysis used was descriptive qualitative analysis. The results showed that the school was the portrait of a multicultural society and had implemented the concept of multiculturalism. However, it was not implied in the curriculum. The ideas are togetherness, openness and respecting one another. School conducts efforts by giving a chance to whole students from all ethnicities and religions to get opportunities in joining the program. The learning process in the classroom was conducted democratically. It would create a comfortable condition as the effect of the implementation of the same treatment to whole students. Hence, the usage of teaching materials was not based on a book from the publisher. It was used to enlarge students' understanding to develop students' ability to evaluate, comprehend, and appreciate diversity.

**Keywords**—multicultural education, reformation of education

### I. INTRODUCTION

Research on multiculturalism has been conducted for more than fifteen years in Indonesia. The research conducted previously mostly focused on the problems of the implementation of multiculturalism at school [1], such as Tilaar [2] which mentioned Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity) that was not fully implemented at school [2]. Raihani [1] also conducted a study about unclear vision to teach students about multiculturalism. Study conducted by Listia, Arham, and Gogali [3] which investigated the school curriculum that left behind the teaching of multiculturalism concepts and values [3]. From those researches mentioned above, it could be stated that multiculturalism was not fully taught and was even not mentioned in the curriculum.

The population of Indonesia consists of hundreds of ethnic groups, some of which are the largest people living in a province or more, such as Javanese ethnicity, which covers 41% of the whole population of Indonesia [4]. However, there

are also ethnic groups who only live in a few villages and sub-districts. They have different religions and beliefs. The Government of the Republic of Indonesia officially only recognizes six religions, namely Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism [4]. Thus, Indonesia is a country whose population is plural in terms of ethnicity, culture, language and religion.

Managing diversity is not an easy matter. On the one hand, the religious community as a component of the nation tries to maintain its identity and fight for its aspirations. On the other hand, they are also required to contribute to strengthening the harmony and integrity of the nation [5]. In this regard, wisdom and maturity are needed among religious communities to maintain a balance between group interests and national interests.

On the other hand, failure in managing diversity will only cause significant collisions. If the variety of cultures, languages, customs and traditions, as well as religious beliefs, is "mismanaged," it will cause terrible clashes in the form of conflicts between religions, ethnicities, races, and groups (ideology) [6]. In several parts of the archipelago, such as West Kalimantan, Maluku, Papua, and other areas, the collision took a very high cost of human lives. Togetherness and the energy of tolerance between communities which previously served as a tapestry in the interaction of cultural diversity, through the same determination and vision to develop Indonesia that can prosper the social gathering in it, immediately experiences disharmony that threatens the existence of Indonesia.

From the above line of thought, diversity will produce two things at once: first, it can enrich the treasure of culture or civilization; second, it can cause tension (conflict) if the community members do not live in a pluralist society. For this reason, it is necessary to build critical awareness to develop plurality-based multiculturalism insights. In multiculturalism, recognition and understanding of plurality is done by allowing culture, including religious beliefs between communities, to grow and develop under their identity. However, it does not close the space for existing changes in accordance with the challenges and contexts of the era it is facing

Education is a significant effort to raise awareness to appreciate diversity. In this framework, educational institutions can be used as a "window" as well as a test case to see and test the extent to which multiculturalism awareness grows [1]. In academic institutions, especially educational institutions that accommodate students with heterogeneous backgrounds, it can be ascertained that the people in them (teachers, students, leaders, administrative staff, etc.) are faced with demands to develop multicultural awareness.

The multicultural education approach in the teaching and learning process is based on democratic principles or values, to respect cultural diversity. Multicultural education aims to: (a) learn basic academic skills, (b) gain knowledge of the historical and social realities of society to understand racism, sexism and poverty, (c) overcome tension and fear of differences that lead to misunderstanding due to culture and conflict between cultures, (d) respecting cultural differences between people and seeing differences in an egalitarian model, and (e) understanding the cultural diversity of nations and the interdependence of countries in the world [7].

In practice, in society, multicultural education experiences several variants in its approach, although in principle, there are several main concepts, including ethnicity, minority, macro-culture, and racism [8]. To find out about the practice of multicultural education in schools, it is necessary to do an in-depth study of the concept, movement, and process. This study aims to obtain complete, in-depth, and comprehensive data and information on: (1) multicultural conditions that exist in schools; such as ethnic and religious differences and social interactions that are formed, and (2) the concept, the educational reform movement, and the multicultural education process implemented by schools so that all students from all ethnic and religious groups have equal opportunities in learning.

Multicultural education is a view, an educational reform movement, and a process whose main objective is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female student, students with disabilities, and students who are members of different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups will have equal opportunities to learn and excel in school [9]. To successfully implement multicultural education, schools need to be conceptualized as a social system [10]. Therefore, each of the primary school variables, such as culture, the strength of relationships, curriculum and learning materials, as well as attitudes of school staff, must be changed to allow schools to support educational equality for students from various socio-cultural groups.

Thus, there are at least three things covered in multicultural education, namely: views or concepts, educational reform movements, and processes. Multicultural education is related to the idea that all students - with their gender, social class, and ethnic, racial and cultural characteristics - should have equal opportunities to learn in school. Another essential view in multicultural education is that some students, due to their

factors, have a better chance of studying in school because of the advantages they have over other students.

Some characteristics of school institutions systematically ignore equal educational opportunities for some groups of students. For example, because female students perform lower than male students in mathematics and science, they have less opportunity to participate in class discussions and are less encouraged by teachers to participate, so female students often remain silent during the learning process. Apart from gender differences, differences in social class, ethnicity, and religion can also affect student academic achievement if schools do not provide equal treatment.

Multicultural education is also a reform movement that seeks to transform schools and other educational institutions so that students of all social classes, gender, race, culture and religion have equal opportunities to learn [1]. Multicultural education is not limited to curriculum changes but involves changes throughout the school environment. All variables of the school environment must be transformed in such a way as to enable equality of opportunity in learning to be achieved properly. Ramsey states that multicultural education affects every phase and aspect of learning, both curriculums, learning materials, and learning activities [11].

Multicultural education is also a process whose goals are never fully realized. Equality education, like freedom and justice, is an ideal that is felt by humanity but has never been fully achieved. The problems of racism, sexism, and discrimination against people who are in need will remain even though we have tried our best to eliminate them. Hence, multicultural education is seen as a continuous process which main objective is to improve student academic achievement [9].

## II. METHODS

This research was conducted at Kusuma Bangsa High School, Palembang, South Sumatra. The school was selected based on the consideration of having ethnic and religious diversity and having quite a lot of achievements. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach with case study approach. Yin [12] clarifies that case study is utilized in certain situations to have some contributions of knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and other related phenomena [12]. These approaches and methods were chosen with consideration to gain a deep understanding of the characteristics and social phenomena of the school.

The data collection techniques used were observation, interviews, and documentation study. Observations were made to explore data about the school situation and the learning process carried out. Interviews were used to gather data about concepts, the educational reform movement, and the multicultural education process. Documentation studies were carried out on all document sources that can provide data and information about school conditions. Documentation studies are also carried out to collect school documents, such as establishment documents, curriculum, and others. The data

analysis technique used is a qualitative descriptive analysis technique, with the stages (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, (3) data interpretation, and (4) concluding.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Multicultural Conditions at Kusuma Bangsa High School

The Kusuma Bangsa High School has a vision of "Forming People with Integrity," with the following indicators: a) religious obedience, high nationality, intellectual, cultured, high moral, physical development of students, and able to compete globally. While the missions are: a) to organize a pleasant learning atmosphere and encourage student creativity, b) to provide opportunities to serve fellow citizens, c) to develop leadership traits, to be aware of the rights and obligations as citizens, d) to encourage self-discipline and integrity, and e) to train a sense of responsibility and a sense of belonging.

Currently, there are 369 students in this school, consisting of 164 boys (44.44%) and 205 girls (55.56%) divided into 33 study groups, with details of 10 classes for grade 10, 11 classes for grade 11, and 12 classes for grade 12. Based on their religion, the majority of students are Muslim, as many as 266 people (72.09%), the remaining 57 students (15.45%) are Buddhist, 23 students (6.23%) are Catholic, 22 students (5.96%) are Protestants, and only 1 student (0.27%) is Hindu.

The number of teachers teaching in this school are 35, consisting of 19 (54.29%) male and 16 (45.71%) female. All teachers (100%) have the status of permanent teachers and have met the minimum educational qualifications, at least bachelor degree S1 or D4, in the relevant field of the subject being taught. From the status of certification, as many as 14 (40%) teachers have received teacher certificates.

From the religion side, the majority of teachers at the school are Muslim, as many as 14 (40%) teachers, the remaining 8 (22.86%) are Catholics, 7 (20%) are Buddhist, 5 (14.29%) are Christian, and only 1 person (2.86%) is Hindu. In the school leadership structure, the principal is Catholic, and the deputy head for curriculum, facilities, and student affairs, respectively, are Buddhist, Christian and Catholic.

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of teachers are Javanese as many as 13 (37.14%) teachers, the remaining 8 teachers (22.86%) are the Chinese descent, 8 teachers (22.86%) are native of South Sumatra, 3 teachers (8.57%) are from Batakese, 1 teacher (2.86%) Sundanese, 1 teacher (2.86%) Balinese, and 1 teacher (2.86%) is from Kalimantan region. In terms of age, 6 teachers (17.14%) were less than 30 years old, 11 teachers (31.43%) were 31-40 years old, 12 teachers (34.29%) were 41-50 years old, and 6 teachers (17.14%) are more than 50 years old. Judging from the socioeconomic conditions, most of the teachers belonged to the upper-middle class.

There are 5 employees, consisting of 3 (60%) male and 2 (40%) female, all of whom are permanent employees of the

foundation. Judging from their religion, the majority of employees at the school are Catholic, namely 3 people (60%), the remaining 1 person (20%) is Muslim, and 1 person (20%) is Buddhist. Judging from their ethnicity, most of the employees are Javanese, which amounts to 3 people (60%); the rest are from ethnic groups in South Sumatra and of Chinese descent, 1 person each (20%).

Based on the data above, it can be said that there is a wide range of cultural diversity in the Kusuma Bangsa High School in terms of students, teachers, and employees, both from the religion and cultural background. This school is unique in comparison to other schools in Palembang. However, many achievements have been obtained by Kusuma Bangsa High School, including being the 3rd runner-up in the 2019 city-level FLS2N competition, winning a silver medal at the 2019 National Science Olympiad (OSN) in Biology in Manado, and winning 1st place in 2019, also MDP Accounting Challenge Rank 1 competition in 2018.

#### B. Application of Multicultural Education at Kusuma Bangsa High School

1) *Multicultural Concept.* In responding to the existing differences, the schools' residents develop the concepts of togetherness, openness, and mutual respect. Togetherness can be established because all individuals in school know what is happening in their schools, including religious activities carried out by certain religious groups. Openness is created when every individual wants to convey his aspirations without having to feel afraid of being blamed. Mutual respect can be made when each group gets to know the culture of the other group.

These concepts are applied in the relationships which exist among the school community. For example, in the month of Ramadan, when all Muslims observe fasting, the school for a whole month shortens the study time from 45 minutes/hour to 30 minutes/hour so that they can go home early. In addition to each religious group be able to carry out its religious activities freely, there are also religious activities of certain religious groups that are held together. For example, a "halal bi halal" event is explicitly held by involving all school members even though, in practice, it is only ceremonial forgiveness in the schoolyard.

2) *Education Reform Movement.* The school has made various concrete efforts to provide equal opportunities for all students from all ethnic and religious groups to obtain equal educational opportunities. Such as by implementing a democratic climate in schools. This climate allows students to participate in learning activities in class and teachers pay attention to all students without discrimination. Besides, students are also given the broadest possible opportunity to ask questions both inside and outside class hours if they experience difficulties in lessons. It is not uncommon for students and teachers to talk while standing outside the classroom during recess. Also, the school also holds many

extracurricular activities. All students are given the same opportunity to participate in all these activities. However, students are only allowed to join one extracurricular activity, so it will not interfere with the student learning activities.

3) *Multicultural Education Process*. All educational processes carried out at Kusuma Bangsa High School are guided by the Education Unit Level Curriculum, which contains the national curriculum and local content, and is equipped with a foreign curriculum (Cambridge), especially in Mathematics and English lessons. The curriculum was implemented in 2006 but was not fully implemented. It was only in 2007 that it was fully implemented. The use of this curriculum is based on the consideration that this school is being prepared to become an International Standard School.

Judging from the subjects taught, it seems that the difference with other schools is only in local content, of which the history of South Sumatra is given to grade X, geography of South Sumatra is given to students who take natural science major at grade XI and XII, and accounting is given to students who take social major grade at grade XI and XII. However, substantially the material taught for each of these subjects is adjusted to the foreign curriculum.

The presentation of lessons in superior classes is carried out in a bilingual manner, especially in Mathematics and Natural Sciences subjects and English. Besides, there is one day a week, which is Wednesday, where all students and teachers are required to communicate in English both inside and outside the classroom.

In the educational process that takes place in this school, both inside and outside the classroom, there is no discrimination against one ethnicity or religion. Even the school facilitates religious activities for all school members. For example, every Friday where all-male Muslim school members carry out Friday prayers, the school provides adequate rest time, and to fill vacancies for others at the same time are also facilitated to carry out worship at a different place.

Also, to help students recognize and appreciate the differences that exist among the people around them, schools often facilitate social visit activities, for example, to an orphanage. The concept developed is to recognize differences, because by acknowledging the differences that exist with each other, it will be able to form an integrated human being, under the school's mission.

In the learning process in class, like the learning process in general, the dominance of the teacher is still firm. The method most used by teachers is lectures combined with a question, answer and discussion. Besides, in subjects that have a high level of difficulty, training methods are usually used.

What is different is that the relationship between teachers and students in this school is very close; there are almost no boundaries at all. For example, when the teacher explains, students can comment freely without fear of the teacher being offended. For instance, in biology subject, the teacher mentions

"blood groups MN", then a student asks: "What is MN for?" The teacher replied: "to make sure that you really ...". One student continued "human", and another student laughed. Students seem to learn casually but are full of enthusiasm for the lesson, and the tasks become fun. Things that are rarely found in other learning processes, such as students cheering, laughing, and singing if there are words that the teacher mentioned related to a song, all happened in the learning process at Kusuma Bangsa High School. According to one teacher, this is happening in this school where a democratic climate is built so that each individual has the freedom to express and convey their aspirations.

The democratic climate that was formed resulted in a warm and pleasant interpersonal relationship. Students can interact with the teacher, not only during class hours. Whenever and wherever students need, they could share their problems and aspirations, even at the front door of the teacher's room and standing up. Not only with teachers, students could also interact with school leaders and employees whenever they want. Likewise, the relationship between teachers and school leaders, almost all policies taken by schools were discussed in prior meetings with teachers, including in determining the academic calendar, religious activities, and actions against students who commit violations.

The teaching materials used at Kusuma Bangsa High School are not fixed on books published by certain publishers. However, teachers are given the broadest possible opportunity to use various books as a guide. Even for Science and English lessons, the teacher also uses English texts as a guide. The use of English is caused by this school is being prepared to become an International Standard School.

Based on the data above, it can be said that the school leaders and the foundation from the beginning of the school were fully aware of the cultural heterogeneity that exists in the school community. Therefore, in the school's vision of "forming people with integrity", two elements are forming people who are devout and civilized. Thus, all students are not only allowed to carry out religious activities that are followed by each and with their respective cultural backgrounds, but schools also encourage and even facilitate religious implementation, especially worship for all religions. According to one student, it is common for teachers of other faiths to also encourage students to perform worship according to their religion. For example, when all-male Muslim students are supposed to perform Friday prayers, there are teachers from other faiths who deliberately go around to each class-leading students to perform Friday prayers.

It can be said that the climate of democracy and togetherness that is formed in schools is able to give awareness to students that even though they are different in some ways, they are treated the same way so that they are able to achieve according to their fields of interest. This statement is supported by Raihani (2018) who mentioned that multicultural education is also a reform movement that seeks to transform schools and other educational institutions so that students of all social

classes, gender, race, culture and religion have equal opportunities to learn [1]. According to one student, the ethnic group that performs the most in this school is of Chinese descent, even though if you look at the composition of the number of students based on their ethnicity, they are a minority group. Likewise, when viewed from the religious group, even though Islam is the majority religion in this school, students who are religious minorities such as Christianity can also show their achievements.

In the learning process in the classroom, even though the teacher does not make specific efforts to help students learn and understand other cultures, the teacher's treatment of students without discrimination has allowed students to participate actively. This conclusion is in line previous research stated that multicultural education is seen as a continuous process which main objective is to improve student academic achievement [9]. Thus, although multicultural education in schools is not explicitly one of the subjects taught in schools and included in the curriculum which is in line with the previous research stated that multicultural education has been practiced by the situations and conditions at school [13].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Since its inception, Kusuma Bangsa High School has been open to all ethnic and religious groups. So, it can be said that Kusuma Bangsa High School is a portrait of a multicultural society in educational institutions that can exist and even get an achievement. In responding to the differences/heterogeneity of existing cultures and religions, the school community at Kusuma Bangsa High School develops concepts that support equality of treatment for all school members. The ideas generated are togetherness, openness, and mutual respect. Recognizing the existing heterogeneity of culture and religion, schools have made substantial efforts to provide equal opportunities for all students from all ethnic and religious groups to obtain equal educational opportunities. Although the multicultural education process that takes place at Kusuma Bangsa Palembang High School is not explicitly included as

one of the subjects in the curriculum, the democratic classroom learning process provides a conducive climate for efforts to provide equal treatment to all students. Besides, the use of teaching materials that are not fixated on books from specific publishers provides enrichment of insights to help students develop abilities to assess, understand, and appreciate diversity.

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