

Multiculturalism in History Learning: Students' Experiences at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta

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Abstract

Ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity is a distinctive characteristic of Indonesia that can serve as both a strength and a challenge in maintaining social cohesion, particularly in schools where stereotypes, subtle discrimination, and prejudice often disrupt student interactions. This study aims to describe students' experiences in understanding, internalizing, and practicing multicultural values through history education, as well as to assess the role of schools as transformative spaces for shaping inclusive identities. The research employed a qualitative approach with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method, focusing on students' subjective interpretations of their learning experiences. The participants consisted of 20 students from grade XI and XII at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta as the main subjects, supported by three history teachers, the principal, and teaching documents such as syllabi, lesson plans, and textbooks. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and validated through triangulation, member checking, and audit trails. The findings indicate that students perceive multiculturalism not merely as the recognition of differences but as an active attitude of tolerance, empathy, and collaboration in daily life. History teachers play a pivotal role by employing multivocal strategies that incorporate contributions from diverse groups into the historical narrative, enabling students to feel their identities are acknowledged within the nation's history. Nevertheless, challenges remain in the form of stereotypes and subtle discrimination, particularly related to dialects and cultural practices, which require continuous pedagogical interventions and inclusive school policies. This study highlights that history education plays a strategic role in fostering students' critical awareness, social solidarity, and inclusive identity in a multicultural society.

Keywords:

history education; inclusive identity; multiculturalism

Abstrak

Keberagaman etnis, budaya, dan agama merupakan ciri khas bangsa Indonesia yang dapat menjadi kekuatan sekaligus tantangan dalam menjaga kohesi sosial, termasuk di lingkungan sekolah yang kerap memunculkan stereotip, diskriminasi ringan, maupun prasangka yang mengganggu interaksi siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan pengalaman siswa dalam memahami, menghayati, dan mempraktikkan nilai-nilai multikultural melalui pembelajaran sejarah serta menilai peran sekolah sebagai ruang transformatif bagi pembentukan identitas inklusif. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) yang berfokus pada pemaknaan subjektif siswa terhadap pengalaman belajar mereka. Subjek penelitian terdiri dari 20 siswa kelas XI dan XII SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta sebagai partisipan utama, tiga guru sejarah,

kepala sekolah, serta dokumen pembelajaran berupa silabus, RPP, dan buku ajar. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian divalidasi dengan triangulasi, *member checking*, dan audit trail. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa memaknai multikulturalisme bukan sekadar pengakuan atas perbedaan, melainkan sebagai sikap aktif berupa toleransi, empati, dan kerja sama dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Guru sejarah berperan penting melalui strategi multivokal yang menghadirkan kontribusi berbagai kelompok dalam narasi sejarah, sehingga siswa merasa identitas mereka diakui dalam sejarah bangsa. Meski demikian, masih terdapat hambatan berupa stereotip dan diskriminasi ringan, terutama terkait logat dan kebiasaan budaya tertentu, yang menuntut intervensi pedagogis berkelanjutan serta dukungan kebijakan sekolah yang inklusif. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan sejarah berfungsi strategis dalam membangun kesadaran kritis, solidaritas sosial, dan identitas inklusif siswa di masyarakat multikultural.

Kata Kunci:

identitas inklusif; multikulturalisme; pendidikan sejarah



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Introduction

Indonesia, as a plural nation, constantly faces challenges in maintaining social cohesion amid its cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. This plurality is a distinctive feature of Indonesia, inherited since the country's founding, as reflected in the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Diversity can serve as a source of strength if well managed, but it also holds the potential to spark conflict if neglected (Hoon, 2013; Tilaar, 2004). In the context of globalization, the flow of information and increased social mobility further amplify the dynamics of diversity while also generating new challenges for sustaining social harmony (Parekh, 2000). Hence, multicultural awareness becomes a vital prerequisite for the creation of a peaceful, harmonious, and inclusive society (Banks, 2008; Gorski, 2009).

Schools play a central role in instilling multicultural values, as education is not merely intended for the transfer of knowledge but also for shaping attitudes, character, and social consciousness (Tilaar, 2004; Banks, 2015). History education, in particular, holds a strategic position in equipping younger generations to understand the roots of national plurality, reflect on Indonesia's historical journey in managing diversity, and foster tolerance and a spirit of unity (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Wulandari, 2020). Through history lessons, students can learn how Indonesians, since the nationalist movement, have struggled to transcend ethnic, religious, and regional divides in their pursuit of independence. Thus, history functions as both a medium of collective reflection and a vehicle for cultivating multicultural awareness (Sleeter & Grant, 2009).

Multiculturalism should not be understood merely as the passive acknowledgment of differences, but as a conscious and active effort to construct inclusive spaces that nurture dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect (Gorski, 2009; Nieto, 2010). In the context of education, multiculturalism implies more than coexistence — it demands students' active participation in developing intercultural understanding and social empathy. According to Banks (2015), multicultural education should encourage learners to engage critically with differences, to coexist peacefully with individuals of other religions, ethnicities, and languages, and to

remain open to reciprocal value exchange. Such an approach aligns with the goal of preparing students as reflective and globally minded citizens.

Research in Indonesia has emphasized the importance of multicultural education as a tool for preventing intolerance, strengthening social cohesion, and cultivating critical awareness among the younger generation (Haryanto & Zuhri, 2025; Wibowo, 2018; Suparlan, 2002). These studies generally discuss multiculturalism as a normative ideal within the educational system — highlighting policies, curriculum integration, or teacher attitudes — but they rarely explore how students themselves experience and internalize multicultural values within the learning process. At the international level, studies by Sleeter & Grant (2009) and Gay (2010) show that multicultural education can foster inclusive identities and help students appreciate diversity in everyday life. However, these works are often situated within Western schooling contexts, where the challenges of multiculturalism are framed around race and ethnicity, rather than the complex intersections of religion, culture, and regional identity found in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, the reality of diversity in Indonesian schools reveals persistent challenges. Several studies (Hoon, 2013; Wibowo, 2018) report that stereotypes, discrimination, and intolerance remain prevalent, often manifesting through subtle microaggressions, social segregation, or the marginalization of minority cultures. This indicates that the formal integration of multicultural values into the curriculum has not yet translated into meaningful behavioral change among students. The gap between policy and practice suggests that students' understanding of multiculturalism may remain superficial—limited to tolerance as rhetoric rather than lived experience. Therefore, there is a need for research that investigates how multicultural values are actually understood, negotiated, and embodied by students within specific subjects such as history education.

This research addresses that gap by situating multicultural understanding within the context of history education, a discipline inherently linked to identity, memory, and collective belonging. Previous studies, both local and international (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Gay, 2010), have emphasized that history education should be multivocal—that is, inclusive of diverse narratives and perspectives. However, these studies often focus on curriculum content or textbook analysis. The present study extends this discourse by examining the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of students themselves through a phenomenological approach. By analyzing how students interpret, discuss, and reflect upon historical learning experiences in a multicultural school environment, this research captures the subjective dimension of multicultural understanding that is rarely explored in previous works.

Moreover, the setting of this study — SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta — offers a distinctive social microcosm that enhances the novelty of the research. The school's demographic composition reflects Indonesia's plural reality: students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds including Javanese, Betawi, Batak, Minangkabau, Sundanese, Chinese, Bugis, and Papuan communities, and represent multiple religions such as Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Within a single classroom, students of three or more religious backgrounds frequently interact and collaborate. This demographic diversity transforms the school into a living laboratory for multicultural practice, where differences are not abstract concepts but everyday experiences negotiated through friendship, collaboration, and classroom interaction.

While previous Indonesian studies on multicultural education (Suparlan, 2002; Wibowo, 2018) have predominantly focused on teacher roles or policy implementation, this study introduces an experiential and interpretive dimension by investigating how students personally construct meaning from their interactions in history learning. It explores how classroom discussions on topics such as nationalism, independence, or social justice allow students to reflect on their own identities and privileges, as well as their attitudes toward others. This micro-level exploration provides an essential complement to the macro-level policy studies that dominate the literature.

Furthermore, the study integrates multicultural theory (Banks, 2008; Gorski, 2010) with learning theory frameworks, particularly Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991). By doing so, it advances a theoretical synthesis that conceptualizes multicultural history education not only as value transmission but as a transformative learning process. Students' understanding is examined through Wiggins and McTighe's six dimensions of understanding — explaining, interpreting, applying, perspective-taking, empathizing, and self-reflecting — allowing the research to map how each cognitive and affective dimension contributes to multicultural awareness. This integrative analytical model represents a methodological innovation in the study of multicultural education in Indonesia.

At a practical level, the research also contributes to the ongoing discussion about how schools can become sites of democratic learning (Banks, 2008). In this framework, schools function as social laboratories that enable students to experience multicultural values through daily interactions, rather than through formal instruction alone. The findings from SMAS Tunas Markatin demonstrate that multicultural practices — such as collaborative group work, interfaith dialogue, and inclusive extracurricular activities — serve as authentic learning environments where students internalize values of equality and empathy. This shifts the focus of multicultural education from the curriculum to the lived social culture of the school.

Hence, the novelty of this study lies in its phenomenological exploration of students' lived experiences and reflective understanding of multicultural values through history learning in a plural urban school context. It contributes new empirical evidence to the Indonesian educational discourse by revealing how multicultural values are not merely taught, but experienced, interpreted, and redefined by students within an authentic, diverse setting. The integration of multivocal historical pedagogy and transformative learning frameworks offers a fresh lens for reimagining history education as a catalyst for inclusive citizenship in Indonesia's multicultural society.

In summary, this study fills a crucial gap in the existing literature by moving beyond theoretical and policy-level discussions of multicultural education toward an in-depth understanding of students' experiential learning processes. It provides not only conceptual contributions to the discourse on multicultural education but also practical insights for teachers and policymakers seeking to cultivate reflective, empathetic, and socially responsible learners capable of sustaining Indonesia's plural democracy.

However, initial findings also suggest the persistence of subtle stereotypes and discriminatory behaviors, such as mockery of accents, clothing styles, or religious practices. Although not dominant, these patterns indicate that the internalization of

multicultural values requires deliberate pedagogical interventions by teachers and supportive school policies oriented toward inclusion. Teachers—particularly history teachers—play a crucial role as facilitators who bridge students' understanding of diversity. By adopting a multivocal approach, teachers can introduce historical narratives that represent multiple groups, ensuring that students feel their identities are acknowledged and respected.

Employing an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, this study seeks to explore students' subjective experiences in understanding and internalizing multicultural values through history education. This approach is relevant because it emphasizes the interpretation of meanings that students construct from their learning experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The study differs from previous research, which has primarily focused on policy or curriculum aspects, by centering students' perspectives as the key actors in the process of multicultural education.

Thus, the primary objective of this research is to provide an in-depth and nuanced description of students' lived experiences in internalizing multicultural values through history education. Specifically, it seeks to understand how historical learning processes shape students' perspectives on diversity, equality, and social justice, as well as to assess the extent to which schools can serve as transformative spaces for the development of inclusive identities. Theoretically, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on multicultural education in Indonesia by offering a phenomenological perspective that highlights students' meaning-making processes—an aspect that has been largely overlooked in previous research. Practically, it provides valuable insights for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers in designing history learning models and educational programs that are more inclusive, reflective, and responsive to cultural diversity.

The urgency of this study lies in its relevance to the current educational and sociocultural context in Indonesia. Despite the nation's longstanding commitment to pluralism, issues of intolerance, prejudice, and ethnocentric bias continue to surface in schools, reflecting a gap between the ideals of multicultural education and classroom realities (Hoon, 2013; Wibowo, 2018; Widodo, 2021). History education, which ideally serves as a vehicle for fostering unity in diversity, often remains confined to factual memorization and nationalistic narratives that neglect the plural and contested nature of the past (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Widodo, 2021). Consequently, students may fail to develop empathy and critical awareness regarding social inequalities and cultural differences.

In this regard, this research is urgent and significant as it addresses the need to reorient history education toward more reflective, dialogical, and transformative practices. By exploring how students experience and interpret multicultural learning within a real school context, the study sheds light on how educational spaces can actively cultivate inclusive citizenship in a plural society. Furthermore, its findings contribute to the broader academic discourse on how multicultural education can function not merely as policy rhetoric but as a lived pedagogical practice that empowers students to engage critically and empathetically with diversity in their everyday lives.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method, which seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of students' subjective experiences in internalizing multicultural values through history education. IPA was selected because it allows researchers to explore how individuals make sense of their lived experiences within specific social and cultural contexts (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is particularly relevant to educational research as it does not merely describe phenomena but interprets the meanings embedded within them, making it suitable for examining students' experiences in diverse school settings (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Shinebourne, 2011). The research design was descriptive-qualitative, intended to provide a comprehensive picture of how students, teachers, and school leaders understand and implement multicultural values in history education. The study involved three categories of subjects: primary participants, supporting informants, and documents. The primary participants were twenty students from grades XI and XII at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta who had taken history lessons related to cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. Supporting informants included three history teachers and the school principal, who were directly involved in designing and supervising educational activities. Research documents consisted of syllabi, lesson plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran* or RPP), and textbooks used in class. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique in which individuals are chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2014). This technique was appropriate for phenomenological inquiry as it ensured the inclusion of participants with rich and meaningful experiences relevant to multicultural education (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research process began with obtaining permission from the school administration and establishing preliminary communication with teachers and students to explain the purpose and scope of the study. Preliminary classroom observations were conducted to gain familiarity with the social dynamics and the learning environment. The main stage of data collection involved semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The interview protocol was designed to be open-ended and flexible, allowing students to share their reflections and experiences freely and to articulate their understandings of multiculturalism in their own words (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Observation guidelines were used to record intercultural interactions between students and teachers during history lessons, while document analysis was conducted to examine how multicultural perspectives were represented in instructional materials such as syllabi, lesson plans, and textbooks (Bowen, 2009). Data from interviews, observations, and documents were then compared and integrated to build a comprehensive understanding of how multicultural values were understood and enacted in the school context.

Data analysis followed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework proposed by Smith et al. (2009), which consists of a series of iterative and reflective processes. The researcher first engaged in repeated readings of interview transcripts and observation notes to develop deep familiarity with the data. Initial notes were made to highlight significant expressions, emotional tones, and key concepts. These were then synthesized into emergent themes that captured the core meanings of participants' experiences. A cross-case analysis was subsequently

conducted to identify overarching patterns while preserving the uniqueness of each participant's narrative. This analytical process was cyclical and interpretive, ensuring that the final insights represented a balance between empirical evidence and theoretical reflection (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Through this interpretive process, the analysis sought to reveal how students constructed meaning from their historical learning experiences and how these experiences contributed to their understanding and internalization of multicultural values.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were applied. Source triangulation was used by comparing data obtained from multiple sources—students, teachers, the principal, and documents—to strengthen the consistency and reliability of interpretations (Denzin, 2012). Member checking was conducted by presenting summarized findings and preliminary interpretations to participants for feedback and confirmation, ensuring that the interpretations accurately represented their intended meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, an audit trail was maintained, systematically documenting each stage of the research process, including interview transcripts, observation notes, coding decisions, analytic memos, and theme development, thereby allowing for transparency and accountability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These procedures enhanced both the rigor and transparency of the study, ensuring that the findings were credible and grounded in participants' authentic voices.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research. All participants were informed about the objectives of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained from the school administration, teachers, and students. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms were used in all reports and publications. The researcher maintained reflexivity during the research process, recognizing that personal background and prior experiences might influence interpretation and analysis. This reflexive stance helped minimize bias and ensured that interpretations were grounded in participants' lived realities rather than researcher assumptions. Through these rigorous methodological and ethical procedures, the study aimed to generate credible, contextually rich insights into how students experience multicultural learning through history education. Ultimately, this approach enabled the research to highlight the transformative potential of history instruction in fostering tolerance, empathy, inclusivity, and social cohesion within a multicultural school environment.

Results and Discussion

Diversity of Student Backgrounds

The diversity of students at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta is reflected in their varied ethnic and religious backgrounds, ranging from Javanese, Betawi, Batak, Sundanese, Minangkabau, Chinese, Bugis, to Papuan, and including adherents of Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Based on classroom observations, this diversity is not merely a statistical figure in demographic data but a living social reality manifested in everyday interactions, both within academic spaces and extracurricular activities. This condition positions the school as a microcosm of Indonesia's plural society. As Banks (2008) suggests, multicultural schools function as social laboratories in which students can learn to appreciate differences through direct experience.

Interviews revealed that students do not perceive diversity as an obstacle but rather as a source of social learning. One student stated that they were accustomed to learning traditions from peers of different cultural and religious backgrounds. Students' participation in the celebration of religious holidays outside their own faith demonstrates that tolerance can be practiced concretely, beyond cognitive understanding. Such interfaith interactions within schools play an important role in strengthening social solidarity and reducing prejudice, as reflected in the practices observed among students in this school.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. One student admitted having experienced stereotyping due to their accent. Although acceptance eventually followed, this experience illustrates that social inclusion requires time and collective awareness. Gorski (2009) emphasizes that stereotypes and discrimination can be reduced through consistent inclusive pedagogy, while other studies highlight that prejudices often inherited from families or the media tend to be carried into schools—underscoring the crucial role of teachers as social mediators who must create equitable spaces for interaction.

Understanding the Concept of Multiculturalism

Findings from this study reveal that students at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta possess a nuanced understanding of multiculturalism—one that extends beyond a superficial acknowledgment of diversity toward an active commitment to mutual respect, cooperation, and social harmony. Through both classroom interactions and personal reflections, students demonstrated that multiculturalism is not merely an abstract concept taught through textbooks, but a lived value embodied in their daily relationships. During interviews, several students expressed that class groupings were never based on religion or ethnicity. One student (R.) remarked, “When we work in groups, our teacher never divides us based on religion or region. We just mix naturally, and everyone contributes. What matters is how we can work together, not where we come from.” This statement encapsulates an experiential understanding of multicultural coexistence—an idea aligned with Sleeter and Grant's (2009) framework, which views multicultural education as a process that shapes inclusive identities capable of functioning productively within plural societies.

This perspective aligns with Banks's (2015) notion of multicultural citizenship, which emphasizes that education should prepare students to participate in a globally diverse world with a sense of justice and mutual respect. The students' collective attitude demonstrates that multicultural values can be effectively internalized when embedded in authentic social practices rather than moralistic instruction. These findings reinforce Nieto's (2010) argument that multicultural education must go beyond awareness toward transformation, enabling students to connect their lived realities with the principles of inclusion and equality. The daily interactions at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta—where collaboration transcends ethnic or religious boundaries—exemplify this transformation in practice.

Classroom observations also indicated that cross-group interactions occurred organically, with minimal evidence of social segmentation. Students displayed an ease in communicating across cultural boundaries, and the diversity within groups was treated as an asset rather than a barrier. For instance, in one observed history project, students from Betawi, Batak, and Chinese-Indonesian backgrounds worked together to produce a visual timeline of Indonesia's independence movement. Rather

than disagreements over historical interpretation, discussions were dominated by mutual respect and curiosity about each other's regional histories. As student (D.) reflected, "I learned that heroes came from everywhere. Before, I only knew those from Java, but now I see that every region fought for independence." This quote highlights how multicultural engagement can deepen students' appreciation for national diversity, echoing Barton and Levstik's (2004) assertion that inclusive history teaching must incorporate multiple perspectives to prevent the homogenization of the national narrative.

The atmosphere of mutual respect observed in these group settings supports Gay's (2010) concept of culturally responsive teaching, which posits that classroom interactions grounded in cultural awareness promote more inclusive and participatory learning climates. Teachers at SMAS Tunas Markatin appeared intentional in designing group projects and discussions that emphasized cooperation and dialogue. Rather than positioning diversity as a challenge to overcome, they treated it as a foundation for collaborative inquiry. This aligns with Dewey's (1938) idea of education as a social process, where knowledge emerges through interaction and shared experience. Similarly, Freire (1970) emphasized dialogic pedagogy as the means through which learners and teachers co-construct meaning and develop critical consciousness. In this context, the history classroom became a dialogic space where students collectively constructed understanding about identity, nationhood, and justice.

The role of teachers as multicultural facilitators was particularly significant. Teachers intentionally integrated inclusive narratives into lessons by introducing historical figures and events from different regions and communities. For example, during a lesson on the national movement, the teacher included stories about Frans Kaisiepo from Papua, Martha Christina Tiahahu from Maluku, and Sultan Hasanuddin from South Sulawesi. This diverse representation was met with visible enthusiasm. One student (L.) commented, "When I heard about Frans Kaisiepo, I felt proud because people from Papua were also part of the nation's struggle. It's like our story is finally told." This statement reflects the empowering role of representation in fostering a sense of belonging. Epstein (2009) similarly observed that students' engagement increases when curricular narratives reflect their own identities and experiences. By acknowledging contributions from various ethnic and regional groups, teachers validate students' identities and challenge the implicit hierarchy within dominant historical narratives.

This inclusive pedagogical approach corresponds with the multivocal model of history education, which emphasizes diverse voices in interpreting the past (Carretero, Asensio, & Rodríguez-Moneo, 2012). The inclusion of local and regional heroes allows students to see themselves as active participants in the ongoing narrative of the nation, reinforcing the integrative consciousness of Indonesian pluralism. In this framework, history learning becomes a medium for national cohesion—one that bridges local identities with collective memory. As a result, students no longer perceive history as a static record of dominant figures but as a dynamic and participatory story in which every group contributes.

From an affective standpoint, students demonstrated empathic awareness—a form of emotional engagement that transcended cognitive understanding. Many expressed feelings of sadness, admiration, and respect when discussing historical injustices or acts of solidarity among different groups. For instance, student (A.)

reflected, “When we studied the 1998 riots, I felt sad because people were attacked just because they were Chinese. It made me think about how we should treat each other better now.” Such reflections indicate the presence of historical empathy, a core dimension of historical understanding as conceptualized by Wineburg (2001) and Levstik & Groth (2005). These scholars argue that understanding history entails not only intellectual interpretation but also the ability to emotionally situate oneself in another’s experience. This capacity for empathy is essential in building moral and civic awareness, particularly in multicultural societies.

This affective learning process aligns with Phillion, He, and Connelly’s (2005) argument that narrative and experiential approaches to multicultural education help students internalize tolerance through lived experiences. At SMAS Tunas Markatin, history lessons often included narrative-based assignments, such as writing reflective essays or conducting interviews with family members about interethnic experiences. These tasks allowed students to explore their own cultural roots while appreciating others’. The reflection journals collected from students further illustrated the transformative impact of such learning. One journal entry read: “Learning about the struggle of women in Indonesia’s independence made me realize how gender also matters in history. It’s not only about men with weapons, but also women who fought with ideas and courage.” This insight resonates with Banks’s (2008) theory of transformative citizenship education, which advocates for developing citizens who are critically aware, empathetic, and socially responsible.

Empirical evidence from this research suggests that when students are provided with opportunities to engage in critical reflection, they begin to link historical understanding with moral responsibility. This is supported by Mezirow’s (1991) theory of transformative learning, which posits that reflection on one’s assumptions and social position leads to changes in perspective and behavior. Students’ discussions about discrimination in the past often led to personal reflections on fairness and equality in their school environment. As one student (S.) noted, “If we discriminate in school, it means we repeat history’s mistakes. We must be better.” Such comments demonstrate how historical learning can evolve into moral learning, bridging the past and present in students’ ethical reasoning.

Teachers at SMAS Tunas Markatin appeared aware of this transformative potential and designed classroom experiences that encouraged self-reflection. Group discussions were often followed by guided questions such as “What would you have done in that situation?” or “How does this relate to our society today?” This reflective dialogue fostered a culture of openness where students could express opinions without fear of judgment. It also reflected Freire’s (1970) dialogic pedagogy, where learning becomes an act of liberation rather than memorization. In such spaces, historical knowledge serves as a means for developing empathy, critical awareness, and civic commitment—all central to multicultural education.

The findings also reveal that school culture played a critical role in sustaining multicultural values beyond the classroom. The school’s extracurricular programs—such as drama performances, choir groups, and sports teams—were intentionally structured to mix students from various backgrounds. Teachers and advisors ensured that teams were diverse, promoting equal participation. Observations during school events confirmed that cooperation among students transcended ethnic and religious divisions. This cultural inclusivity aligns with Berry’s (2017) model of mutual intercultural relations, which highlights how everyday social interactions contribute

to the internalization of multicultural values. Through consistent exposure to diverse social networks, students learn to navigate differences with empathy and respect.

In linking these findings to the broader literature, this study demonstrates that multicultural history education can act as a vehicle for identity formation and civic engagement. Banks (2015) contends that multicultural education fosters “the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to participate effectively in a democratic and pluralistic society.” The behaviors observed at SMAS Tunas Markatin—collaboration, respect, and critical dialogue—are concrete manifestations of these democratic dispositions. Moreover, Merry (2013) argues that equality in multicultural education requires more than inclusive content; it requires egalitarian classroom relationships that affirm all students’ voices. The history teachers’ dialogical methods at the school reflect this ideal, ensuring that every student’s perspective contributes to the collective learning process.

Comparing these findings with previous studies, it becomes evident that the integration of multicultural principles into history education enhances both cognitive understanding and affective engagement. Carretero et al. (2012) noted that history classrooms that engage multiple perspectives help students understand the complexity of national identity formation. In Indonesia, similar conclusions were drawn by Wulandari (2020), who found that contextual history learning strengthens national awareness and tolerance among high school students. The current study extends this scholarship by providing phenomenological evidence of how these processes unfold in students’ lived experiences—showing that multicultural history education not only teaches diversity but enables students to feel and practice it.

Ultimately, the data point toward a model of transformative multicultural learning where cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions are interwoven. Cognitive understanding arises through inclusive content and critical inquiry; affective engagement develops through empathy and reflection; and behavioral transformation emerges through daily social practice. Together, these elements illustrate that multiculturalism in history education is not an add-on or supplementary topic—it is the foundation of a democratic pedagogy that connects historical consciousness with moral responsibility. The experiences of students at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta affirm that when history is taught through inclusive, dialogical, and reflective methods, it becomes a living instrument for peace, social cohesion, and the cultivation of plural identities in a diverse nation.

Interpretation of Multicultural Historical Events

Students at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta interpreted historical events as reflections of contemporary multicultural life. They connected the independence struggles involving diverse ethnic and religious groups with their own everyday experiences of cooperation in school. One student’s participation in a friend’s religious celebration illustrates how historical memory informs inclusive social attitudes. This resonates with Sleeter and Grant’s (2009) view that multicultural education builds inclusive identities by encouraging students to think beyond ethnic, cultural, or religious boundaries. Banks (2015) likewise emphasizes that multicultural history teaching enables students to connect the past with contemporary social challenges, fostering deeper cross-cultural understanding.

Classroom observations confirmed teachers’ efforts to link themes of unity in history with students’ present-day diversity. Discussions about figures from Java,

Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Papua were used to emphasize the importance of all groups' contributions to nation-building. Banks (2008) asserts that inclusive historical narratives are essential for students to understand diversity as a foundation of unity. Epstein (2009) similarly found that minority students feel more valued when their communities are recognized in historical narratives, thereby strengthening their sense of national belonging.

These findings echo international studies highlighting the role of historical reflection in cultivating multicultural awareness. Levstik and Groth (2005) note that multivocal history teaching fosters students' understanding of social justice in plural societies, while Carretero, Asensio, and Rodríguez-Moneo (2012) demonstrate that diverse historical representation strengthens inclusive civic identities and minimizes prejudice. Thus, students' interpretation of historical events at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta reflects not only an appreciation of the past but also transformative reflection that equips them with social skills for life in a multicultural society.

The Importance of Multiculturalism

Students understood tolerance not merely as a normative value but as a practical necessity for maintaining a conducive learning environment. Observations showed that they respected prayer times, adjusted behavior during peers' fasting, and even assisted in other religious events. Such practices embody empathy as a lived value, which Gorski (2009) identifies as central to advancing social justice. Merry (2013) similarly found that empathy in school contexts reduces prejudice and fosters more inclusive interaction spaces.

Teachers consistently contextualized historical events such as the Youth Pledge (*Sumpah Pemuda*) or the Proclamation of Independence within contemporary social realities. This approach has proven effective in fostering students' sense of nationalism and social cohesion. Epstein (2009) also found that students from diverse ethnic backgrounds develop a stronger sense of belonging when they perceive history as inclusive rather than dominated by a single group. Thus, history functions not only as a cognitive medium but also as a transformative tool for building inclusive attitudes.

Interviews showed that when misunderstandings arose, students preferred resolving them peacefully by reaffirming the importance of harmony in diversity. This reflects Banks' (2015) argument that effective multicultural education equips students with conflict resolution skills grounded in justice and equity. Berry (2017), in *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, also emphasized that multicultural interaction in schools fosters social competencies that enable students to manage differences productively without prolonged conflict.

By internalizing values of tolerance, empathy, and unity, students not only create a harmonious school environment but also prepare themselves to live within the broader complexities of diverse societies. Carretero, Asensio, and Rodríguez-Moneo (2012) underscore that multicultural history teaching plays a critical role in cultivating inclusive civic identities. Practices at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta therefore illustrate that history education serves a dual function: fostering national consciousness while simultaneously strengthening social competencies for peaceful coexistence in plural societies.

Conclusion

This study confirms that history education at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta plays a strategic role in internalizing multicultural values among students. The ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity within the school positions it as a social laboratory where students directly experience the practice of pluralism in everyday life. The findings reveal that students understand multiculturalism not merely as formal recognition of differences but as an active attitude reflected in mutual respect, cooperation, and peaceful management of diversity. Through a multivocal approach in history teaching, teachers successfully presented inclusive narratives that represent various groups, allowing students to feel that their identities are acknowledged within the nation's history. This reinforces the view that history can serve as a transformative medium—not only transmitting knowledge but also fostering students' critical awareness and social empathy.

Nevertheless, the study also identifies barriers in the form of stereotypes and mild discrimination, particularly regarding accents and certain cultural practices, which indicate that the integration of multicultural values requires sustained pedagogical interventions and supportive inclusive school policies. Accordingly, this research recommends three key measures: first, teacher training to strengthen inclusive pedagogical competencies; second, the development of a multivocal history curriculum that represents the contributions of all groups; and third, the reinforcement of school policies through consistent cross-cultural programs as a strategy to prevent prejudice. Future research may broaden the scope by exploring the role of families and community environments in supporting students' internalization of multicultural values. With systematic efforts, history education can further function as a strategic instrument to cultivate a generation that is tolerant, inclusive, and capable of sustaining social cohesion in Indonesia's multicultural society.

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