



Multiculturalism as a Character Education Strategy in Responding to Social Conflict and Challenges to National Integration in Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia, as a multicultural nation, faces serious challenges marked by the increasing prevalence of identity-based social conflicts, intolerance, and social polarization, which have contributed to the weakening of national integration. This condition indicates that the management of diversity cannot rely solely on symbolic or repressive approaches, but requires educational and sustainable strategies. This article aims to analyze multiculturalism as a character education strategy in responding to social conflicts and the challenges of national integration in Indonesia. The study employs a qualitative approach using library research methods through critical analysis of academic literature, research findings, and relevant policy documents. The findings reveal that multicultural-based character education plays a strategic role in fostering tolerant attitudes, strengthening social cohesion, and cultivating an inclusive national identity without negating local identities. When systematically integrated into curricula, school culture, and learning practices, multiculturalism functions as a preventive approach to social conflict and serves as a foundation for sustainable national integration. This article contributes to the enrichment of character education studies by positioning multiculturalism as a strategic framework contextualized to Indonesia's socio-cultural realities in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Multiculturalism; Character Education; Social Conflict; National Integration; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the countries with the highest levels of diversity in the world, characterized by the presence of more than 1,300 ethnic groups, hundreds of local languages, and a plurality of religions, belief systems, and cultural expressions that coexist within a single national entity. This multicultural reality is not merely a sociological characteristic but also a historical foundation of the formation of the Indonesian state, which is rooted in the spirit of unity in diversity as reflected in the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Scholars emphasize that Indonesian society has, from its inception, constituted a plural society that has never been homogeneous, either culturally or ideologically (Azra, 2019; Parekh, 2006). From this perspective, diversity represents a form of social capital with the potential to enrich social dynamics, strengthen social cohesion, and foster the development of an inclusive and democratic society when it is managed in a just manner and with multicultural awareness (Putnam, 2007; Banks, 2015).

Nevertheless, diversity also carries the potential for conflict when it is not accompanied by adequate value frameworks and social mechanisms (Anyanwu et al., 2025). A growing body of recent research indicates that pluralism that is not constructively managed may trigger social fragmentation, intolerance, and identity-based conflicts, particularly in contexts marked by socio-economic inequality and the politicization of differences (Hadiz, 2016; Mietzner, 2020). It is important to emphasize that pluralism is not a new phenomenon in Indonesian national life; however, the challenges associated with it have become increasingly complex in the twenty-first century. Globalization, the rapid flow of digital information, and the strengthening of identity politics in the public sphere have transformed patterns of social relations, such that conflict is no longer confined to physical spaces but has expanded into virtual spaces through hate speech and disinformation (Lim, 2022; Nugroho & Syarif, 2021). These conditions underscore that the management of diversity in Indonesia cannot rely solely on inherited historical values, but instead requires new strategies that are more systematic, reflective, and sustainable.

Over the past two decades, the dynamics of social conflict in Indonesia have exhibited increasingly complex and multidimensional tendencies. Conflicts are no longer driven solely by economic factors or competition over resources, but are increasingly intertwined with identity-based issues related to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA) (Erdogan et al., 2026). Numerous studies demonstrate that intolerance and identity-based exclusivism have intensified, particularly during periods of electoral politics and in relation to sensitive religious issues (Mietzner, 2020; Hadiz, 2016). This condition illustrates how cultural and religious identities are frequently mobilized as political instruments, thereby weakening social cohesion and amplifying the potential for horizontal conflict within a pluralistic society.

The development of digital technology has also transformed the landscape of social conflict in Indonesia. Social media has become a new arena for the dissemination of disinformation, hate speech, and intolerant narratives that reinforce identity polarization. Research by Lim (2022) demonstrates that social media algorithms create echo chambers that narrow users' perspectives and deepen social fragmentation. Conflicts that were previously localized can now rapidly escalate into national issues through digital virality. In this context, social conflict not only threatens social harmony but also poses a serious challenge to national integration and the stability of Indonesian democracy in the twenty-first century.

National integration in contemporary Indonesia faces challenges that are far more complex than in earlier periods. Integration can no longer be sustained solely through ideological

symbols, slogans of unity, or formal state-centered approaches (Kara, 2025). Globalization and the openness of information flows have brought local identities into contact with diverse global discourses, including transnational ideologies that do not always align with Indonesian national values (Azra, 2019). Under these circumstances, national integration requires the substantive internalization of values rather than merely declarative commitments. Another significant challenge is the strengthening of radicalism, exclusivism, and a crisis of tolerance, particularly among younger generations.

A number of studies indicate that some secondary school and university students exhibit ambivalent attitudes toward national values and pluralism, and even demonstrate intolerant tendencies toward different groups (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2021). The weak internalization of Pancasila and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* in everyday life has rendered national integration an urgent structural and cultural issue that must be addressed in a systematic manner. In responding to social conflict, the state has thus far tended to rely on conventional approaches that are repressive, legalistic, and security-oriented. While such approaches may be effective in containing conflict in the short term, they often fail to address the deeper cultural and ideological roots of the problem. Various cases show that law enforcement unaccompanied by educational efforts may instead perpetuate feelings of injustice and social distrust (Klinken & Berenschot, 2018).

Moreover, conflict management policies have often been reactive and temporary in nature, emerging only after conflicts occur and lacking sustainable preventive strategies. The limited use of educational and preventive approaches has resulted in the recurrence of similar conflicts in different forms and contexts (Lee, et al., 2024). This condition indicates the existence of both a research gap and a policy gap in the management of diversity, while simultaneously opening space for alternative approaches that are more holistic and long-term oriented, particularly through education. Multiculturalism offers a strategic framework that is highly relevant for responding to the complexity of conflict and the challenges of national integration. Multiculturalism should not be understood merely as the recognition of diversity, but as a normative and practical paradigm that emphasizes justice, equality, inclusivity, and intercultural dialogue (Parekh, 2006; Banks, 2015). From this perspective, diversity is viewed as a reality that must be consciously managed through policies and education oriented toward social harmony.

In the Indonesian context, multiculturalism has strong ideological relevance to the values of Pancasila and the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Mariyono, 2024). The values of humanity, unity, and social justice serve as the normative foundations for the development of an inclusive multicultural society. Therefore, multiculturalism in Indonesia does not aim to eliminate identities, but rather to nurture differences within a just and civilized national framework (Tilaar, 2012). Character education constitutes a strategic medium for the sustainable implementation of multicultural values. Through education, values such as tolerance, empathy, respect for diversity, and social responsibility can be internalized from an early age. Educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping students' perspectives on diversity through curricula, school culture, and dialogical and reflective learning practices (Lickona, 2018; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). Multicultural-based character education thus functions as a long-term preventive strategy against social conflict.

To date, studies on multiculturalism and character education in Indonesia have tended to be addressed separately and in a largely normative manner. There remains a limited body of research that explicitly positions multiculturalism as a character education strategy for responding to social conflict and the challenges of national integration in a contextualized way.

This article seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the dynamics of social conflict in Indonesia, examining multiculturalism as a character education strategy, and formulating conceptual implications for the development of education and public policy. The contribution of this article is expected to enrich the scholarly discourse on character education, offer a conceptual framework of multiculturalism grounded in the Indonesian context, and provide relevance for academics, educators, and policymakers in strengthening national integration.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research design. The qualitative approach is chosen because the primary objective of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of social conflict, the challenges of national integration, and the role of multiculturalism as a character education strategy within the Indonesian context. Library research enables researchers to comprehensively analyze ideas, concepts, and scholarly findings through a systematic review of relevant and credible academic sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The data sources consist of secondary data obtained from academic books, reputable national and international journal articles (indexed in Scopus and SINTA), research reports, and official government policy documents related to character education, multiculturalism, social conflict, and national integration. The literature analyzed is primarily drawn from publications within the last five to ten years to ensure relevance to Indonesia's twenty-first-century social context. Sources are selected purposively based on the authors' authority, the reputation of publishers or journals, and the substantive relevance to the focus of the study.

Data collection is conducted through a systematic literature search using academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and accredited national journal portals. The keywords employed include multiculturalism, character education, social conflict, national integration, and Indonesia. The collected literature is then screened to eliminate duplication and to ensure direct relevance to the research questions.

Data analysis is carried out using qualitative content analysis techniques. The analytical stages include: (1) organizing the data and categorizing major themes, (2) interpreting key concepts and arguments from each source, (3) comparing and synthesizing ideas to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in perspectives, and (4) drawing analytical and reflective conclusions. The analysis is conducted critically to produce a comprehensive understanding of the position of multiculturalism as a character education strategy in responding to social conflict and the challenges of national integration.

Data credibility is ensured through source triangulation by comparing diverse perspectives across different bodies of literature to minimize interpretive bias. In addition, the study applies the principle of reference traceability by citing primary and up-to-date sources. Accordingly, the findings are expected to demonstrate strong academic validity and relevance for the development of character education discourse and multicultural policy in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Dynamics of Social Conflict in Indonesia from a Multicultural Perspective

Social conflict in contemporary Indonesia exhibits patterns that are increasingly dominated by identity-based issues, particularly those related to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA). Numerous studies emphasize that such conflicts cannot be

understood merely as differences in beliefs or cultural practices, but rather as the result of social and political constructions that instrumentalize identity as a means of mass mobilization (Mietzner, 2020; Hadiz, 2016). In a multicultural society such as Indonesia, cultural and religious identities occupy a highly sensitive position, as they are closely intertwined with historical experiences, collective emotions, and power relations. When identities are politicized without being balanced by values of tolerance and social justice, horizontal conflict becomes difficult to avoid and has the potential to erode social cohesion and a shared sense of nationhood.

In addition to identity factors, socio-economic inequality plays a significant role in the escalation of social conflict. Unequal access to economic resources, education, and political power often intensifies feelings of injustice among certain groups, which are subsequently expressed through identity-based sentiments (Klinken & Berenschot, 2018). In this context, SARA-based conflicts frequently function as a form of “symbolic language” through which unresolved structural grievances are articulated. Social conflict theory interprets this phenomenon as a consequence of unequal resource distribution, in which dominant groups tend to preserve the status quo, while marginalized groups seek recognition and justice through various forms of resistance, including identity-based conflict (Coser, 1956).

The dynamics of social conflict in Indonesia have also undergone significant transformation in line with the development of digital technology (Hafel, M, 2023). Conflicts that were previously local and territorial in nature have increasingly shifted into digital spaces through social media, enabling the rapid and widespread dissemination of intolerant narratives, hate speech, and disinformation. Lim (2022) demonstrates that social media algorithms create echo chambers that reinforce identity polarization and narrow the space for intergroup dialogue. In this context, social conflict is no longer solely a matter of direct interaction between individuals or groups, but is also produced and reproduced through digital mechanisms that are difficult to control (Earl, et al., 2022). This transformation underscores that twenty-first-century social conflict possesses new dimensions that require more adaptive and value-based approaches to conflict management.

From a multicultural perspective, social conflict in Indonesia can be interpreted as a failure to manage diversity in a just and inclusive manner. Multiculturalism views diversity as a social reality that demands recognition, dialogue, and justice, rather than homogenization or the domination of one identity over others (Parekh, 2006; Banks, 2015). When these principles are not internalized within social structures and educational systems, conflict emerges as an expression of unresolved tensions. Therefore, analyzing social conflict within the framework of a multicultural society highlights the importance of a paradigm shift from reactive approaches toward preventive strategies that focus on values education, the strengthening of social cohesion, and the cultivation of multicultural awareness as the foundation of national integration.

2. Multiculturalism as a Normative and Strategic Framework

Multiculturalism is fundamentally a normative framework grounded in the recognition of diversity as an objective condition of modern societies. Scholars of multiculturalism emphasize that cultural, religious, and identity diversity is not merely a social

fact, but also carries moral and political demands to be treated justly and equally (Parekh, 2006). The core principles of multiculturalism include recognition of diverse identities, social justice in the distribution of rights and resources, inclusivity within the public sphere, and intercultural dialogue as a mechanism for addressing differences (Banks, 2015). From this perspective, multiculturalism rejects the logic of domination by one group over others and underscores the importance of social relations based on mutual respect and equality.

It is important to distinguish multiculturalism from other concepts that are often conflated with it, such as pluralism and assimilationism. Pluralism generally emphasizes the coexistence of different groups within a shared social space, but does not necessarily address issues of structural justice and power relations among groups. Assimilationism, by contrast, tends to require minority groups to conform to the dominant culture, thereby potentially erasing distinct cultural identities (Kymlicka, 2012). Multiculturalism emerges as a critique of both approaches by asserting that social integration need not be achieved through homogenization, but rather through the recognition and protection of differences within a framework of shared values.

Within the context of the nation-state, multiculturalism occupies a strategic position as a paradigm for managing diversity that is consistent with democratic principles and human rights. A multicultural state is not expected to adopt a merely superficial neutrality toward difference, but rather to actively formulate policies that ensure equality and social inclusion (Modood, 2013). In the Indonesian context, multiculturalism finds strong resonance in the values of Pancasila and the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which have long affirmed unity in diversity. Accordingly, multiculturalism does not contradict national identity, but instead strengthens it through the just and civilized management of difference (Tilaar, 2012; Azra, 2019).

Furthermore, multiculturalism should be understood as a practical social and educational strategy, rather than solely as a normative discourse. As a strategy, multiculturalism serves as a foundation for national integration by fostering a collective awareness that diversity constitutes a source of strength rather than a threat. Integration built through a multicultural approach is inclusive and sustainable, as it is rooted in the internalization of values such as tolerance, dialogue, and social justice (Banks, 2015). In the Indonesian context, strengthening multiculturalism as a strategic framework is a crucial prerequisite for achieving robust national integration amid the social dynamics and global challenges of the twenty-first century.

3. Character Education from a Multicultural Perspective

Character education is an educational approach aimed at shaping students' personalities in a holistic manner through the internalization of moral, social, and civic values. Lickona (2018) emphasizes that character education encompasses the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Within a multicultural society, the core values of character education extend beyond honesty, responsibility, and discipline to include tolerance, empathy, justice, and respect for diversity (Ridwan, et al., 2026). Accordingly, character education holds strategic relevance in fostering citizens who are not only morally grounded at the individual level, but also socially and culturally sensitive.

The relationship between character education and the management of diversity has become increasingly significant amid the rise of identity-based social conflicts (Silverman, et al., 2023). Character education functions as an instrument for cultivating multicultural awareness, defined as the capacity of individuals to understand, accept, and appreciate differences as an integral part of shared social life (Banks, 2015). Numerous studies indicate that weak character education oriented toward the values of diversity contributes to the growth of intolerant and exclusionary attitudes, particularly among younger generations (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2021). Therefore, character education cannot be separated from the broader agenda of managing diversity in a just and sustainable manner.

The urgency of character education is further intensified by the current crisis of tolerance, marked by the proliferation of hate speech, social polarization, and radicalism in the public sphere, including within educational environments (Hatim, et al., 2025). The digital era has accelerated the circulation of values that contradict the principles of diversity, thereby presenting new challenges for educational institutions in maintaining their social function as spaces for values-based learning. In this context, character education from a multicultural perspective is viewed as a primary medium for the internalization of tolerance and intercultural dialogue (UNESCO, 2017). Education that neglects the character dimension risks producing individuals who are academically competent but socially and morally fragile.

Schools and higher education institutions play a strategic role as agents of social transformation in the implementation of multicultural-based character education (Aziz, 2026). Through curricula, institutional culture, and inclusive learning practices, educational institutions can serve as safe spaces for dialogue, reflection, and intercultural learning. Multicultural character education thus functions as a preventive approach to social conflict by instilling the values of diversity from an early stage and fostering a collective awareness of the importance of peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society (Tilaar, 2012; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). This approach underscores that education is not only responsible for advancing intellectual development, but also for safeguarding social cohesion and harmony.

4. Strategies for Implementing Multicultural-Based Character Education

The implementation of multicultural-based character education requires the systematic integration of multicultural values into the curriculum. This integration goes beyond merely adding content on diversity; it involves the formulation of learning objectives, instructional materials, and assessment practices that contextually instill the values of tolerance, justice, and inclusivity (Banks, 2015). A diversity-sensitive curriculum encourages students to understand the social realities surrounding them, develop cross-cultural empathy, and build critical awareness of social issues (Catagnus, et al., 2025). In this way, the curriculum functions as a strategic instrument for the sustainable internalization of multicultural values.

In addition to the curriculum, strengthening school culture and fostering an inclusive academic climate are essential prerequisites for the success of multicultural character education. A school culture that respects differences, upholds dialogue, and rejects all forms of discrimination shapes meaningful learning experiences for students. Research indicates

that an inclusive school climate significantly contributes to students' tolerant attitudes and openness toward different groups (UNESCO, 2017). Therefore, character education is not confined to classroom instruction but is also reflected in social interactions, institutional policies, and the everyday practices of the school community.

Dialogical, reflective, and contextual learning strategies represent pedagogical approaches that are particularly relevant to multicultural-based character education. Dialogical learning enables students to share perspectives and experiences, while reflective approaches assist them in interpreting differences critically and empathetically. In the Indonesian context, contextual learning that links multicultural values to students' local realities has proven to be more effective in fostering awareness of diversity (Tilaar, 2012). Nevertheless, the implementation of these strategies faces various challenges, including limited educator capacity, curricular overload, and cultural resistance to change.

Teachers and lecturers play a central role as key actors in multicultural character education. Beyond pedagogical competence, educators are expected to possess cultural sensitivity and demonstrate moral exemplarity in responding to diversity. The successful implementation of character education also depends heavily on synergy among schools, families, and the broader community. A social environment that consistently promotes the values of tolerance and inclusivity will reinforce the process of value internalization within educational institutions (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). Accordingly, multicultural-based character education constitutes a collective endeavor that requires cross-sectoral commitment to prevent social conflict and strengthen national integration.

5. The Implications of Multiculturalism for National Integration

Multicultural-based character education has a significant impact on the formation of tolerant and inclusive attitudes among students. Numerous studies indicate that the internalization of multicultural values, such as respect for diversity and cross-cultural empathy, contributes to a reduction in prejudice and social stereotyping (Banks, 2015; UNESCO, 2017). In the Indonesian context, multicultural character education plays a crucial role in fostering young people's awareness that diversity constitutes an integral component of national identity. The tolerant attitudes cultivated through this educational process serve as a psychosocial foundation for the development of harmonious social relations within a pluralistic society.

Furthermore, multiculturalism contributes directly to the strengthening of social cohesion, defined as a society's capacity to live together in solidarity despite differences in cultural backgrounds and identities. Social cohesion depends not only on shared values, but also on the ability of society to manage differences in a just and dialogical manner (Putnam, 2007). Multicultural character education enhances social cohesion by nurturing mutual trust and cross-group solidarity. From this perspective, multiculturalism functions as both a structural and cultural integration strategy that bridges the interests of individuals, groups, and the state.

The relevance of multiculturalism becomes increasingly evident for Indonesian youth living amid the forces of globalization and digitalization. Young people are exposed to diverse global narratives that often conflict with national values and the principles of diversity. Without a strong multicultural foundation, youth are at risk of experiencing identity

crises and becoming susceptible to exclusivism or radicalism (Azra, 2019; PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2021). Multicultural-based character education assists young people in developing an inclusive national identity, in which local and cultural identities are not erased but integrated within a broader national framework.

Within the national framework, multiculturalism underscores that national integration is not a static condition, but an ongoing process that requires the continuous maintenance of shared values and collective commitment. Healthy integration enables the strengthening of national identity without negating diverse local and cultural identities. The multicultural approach is consistent with the principles of Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, which conceptualize unity as the outcome of managing differences rather than enforcing uniformity (Tilaar, 2012). Accordingly, multiculturalism is not merely a short-term solution to social conflict, but a long-term strategy for safeguarding the unity and national integration of Indonesia in the twenty-first century.

6. Challenges and Limitations in the Implementation of Multiculturalism

Although multiculturalism is normatively recognized as an ideal approach to managing diversity, its implementation in Indonesia continues to face various structural obstacles. At the policy level, the integration of multicultural values into the education system has not yet been fully articulated in operational terms within curricula and educational regulations. Curricula often position diversity-related values as normative content without clear and measurable indicators for implementation. In addition, limitations in human resource capacity particularly the shortage of educators with multicultural competence constitute a serious constraint in translating these values into effective pedagogical practice (Banks, 2015; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

Cultural barriers also represent a significant factor hindering the effective implementation of multiculturalism. In certain social contexts, resistance to multicultural values emerges in the form of conservatism and identity-based exclusivism, whether grounded in religious or ethnic affiliations. Such attitudes are often reinforced by religious or ideological narratives that frame difference as a threat to the purity of group identity (Hadiz, 2016). Under these conditions, multiculturalism is frequently misconstrued as cultural relativism or as a challenge to traditional values, thereby provoking rejection at the community level.

The challenges of implementing multiculturalism become increasingly complex in the era of digitalization and globalization. Social media and digital platforms, on the one hand, facilitate cross-cultural interaction, yet on the other hand also serve as fertile ground for the spread of hate speech, disinformation, and exclusionary ideologies. Lim (2022) argues that social media algorithms tend to reinforce polarization and narrow the space for intergroup dialogue. This situation demonstrates that conventional multicultural strategies that fail to adapt to digital dynamics risk losing their relevance in addressing contemporary social conflicts.

Another critical issue lies in the tendency for multiculturalism to be implemented in a normative and symbolic manner without substantive practice. Multiculturalism often remains at the level of slogans, ceremonial expressions, or policy documents, without being accompanied by meaningful structural and cultural transformation. This risk of normativity

creates a gap between discourse and practice, thereby undermining multiculturalism's effectiveness as a strategy for mitigating conflict and strengthening national integration (Modood, 2013). In such contexts, multiculturalism may devolve into a rhetorical concept that loses its transformative potential.

Therefore, strengthening policy frameworks and institutional commitment constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for the successful implementation of multiculturalism in Indonesia. The state and educational institutions must develop policies that not only recognize diversity, but also actively promote inclusive and equitable practices. Enhancing educator capacity, restructuring curricula in a contextualized manner, and monitoring discriminatory practices are strategic measures that must be undertaken on a sustained basis. With strong institutional commitment, multiculturalism can function as a concrete strategy rather than merely a normative discourse in maintaining social harmony and national integration.

7. Synthesis and Critical Reflection

The synthesis of the discussion indicates that social conflict in Indonesia cannot be understood as an incidental phenomenon, but rather as a manifestation of structural and cultural failures in managing diversity. Patterns of identity-based conflict, social inequality, and the transformation of conflict into the digital sphere demonstrate that the challenges of national integration are multidimensional in nature. Within this framework, multiculturalism emerges not merely as a normative concept, but as a strategic paradigm that offers an integrative approach combining identity recognition, social justice, and intercultural dialogue (Parekh, 2006; Banks, 2015). Multicultural-based character education thus becomes a key medium for translating this paradigm into sustainable social praxis.

A critical reflection on the implementation of multiculturalism in Indonesia reveals a persistent gap between discourse and practice. Although the values of diversity have been embedded within the state ideology, their internalization within the education system and public policy continues to face significant limitations. Character education often remains confined to normative and symbolic approaches, thereby limiting its effectiveness in substantively shaping tolerant attitudes and behaviors. This condition suggests that multiculturalism requires reinforcement at both the institutional and pedagogical levels in order to maintain its transformative capacity. Without consistent policy commitment and reflective educational practices, multiculturalism risks becoming a form of moral rhetoric incapable of addressing contemporary social conflict (Modood, 2013).

Therefore, the final reflection of this discussion underscores that national integration must be understood as a dynamic process that demands continuous strategic renewal. When positioned as a character education strategy, multiculturalism holds substantial potential to strengthen social cohesion and foster an inclusive national identity. However, this potential can only be realized through synergy among progressive policies, contextualized educational practices, and active community participation. Accordingly, multicultural character education should be viewed not merely as a pedagogical agenda, but as a long-term nation-building project aimed at sustaining social harmony and national unity in twenty-first-century Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This article asserts that social conflict and the challenges of national integration in Indonesia constitute multidimensional issues that cannot be resolved solely through repressive or symbolic approaches. Within a multicultural society, identity-based conflicts, social inequalities, and digital polarization indicate persistent failures in managing diversity in a just and sustainable manner. When understood as a character education strategy, multiculturalism offers a relevant normative and practical framework for addressing this complexity by emphasizing the values of recognition, tolerance, inclusivity, and intercultural dialogue.

The findings demonstrate that multicultural-based character education plays a strategic role in fostering tolerant attitudes, strengthening social cohesion, and cultivating an inclusive national identity without negating local identities. The integration of multicultural values into the curriculum, school culture, and instructional practices functions as a long-term preventive approach to social conflict. The main contribution of this article lies in positioning multiculturalism as a character education strategy that is contextualized within Indonesia's socio-cultural realities, thereby enriching the discourse on character education and national integration from a social-cultural perspective.

Based on these findings, the article recommends strengthening educational policies that explicitly integrate multicultural values into character education at all levels of education. Educational institutions should be supported through enhanced teacher capacity building, the development of contextualized curricula, and the creation of inclusive and dialogical academic environments. Furthermore, future research is encouraged to empirically examine the implementation of multicultural character education across diverse local contexts in order to strengthen the evidence base and to develop practice models that are adaptive to Indonesia's twenty-first-century social dynamics.

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