

The Role of General Education in Fostering Multicultural Awareness in Students in the Era of Globalization

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ABSTRACT

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Globalization has a significant impact on people's social, cultural, and educational lives. One of the main challenges in the world of education is the increase in intercultural interaction which has the potential to cause conflict if it is not accompanied by good multicultural understanding and attitude. General education has a strategic role in instilling multicultural values in students from an early age. This article aims to examine the role of general education in fostering multicultural awareness in students in the era of globalization. The research method used is a literature study by analyzing various relevant scientific literature, such as books, journal articles, and education policy documents. The results of the study show that general education contributes greatly to forming attitudes of tolerance, mutual respect, and awareness of diversity through the integration of multicultural values in the curriculum, learning strategies, and school culture. Thus, general education is an important foundation in building an inclusive and harmonious society in the midst of global diversity.

Keywords: General education, multicultural, globalization, tolerance

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has become an inseparable phenomenon in the life of modern society. Advances in information, communication, and transportation technologies have significantly accelerated interactions among individuals and groups originating from diverse cultural, religious, linguistic, and social value backgrounds. These developments have profound implications for the field of education, particularly in preparing students to live harmoniously within increasingly pluralistic societies. On the one hand, globalization facilitates the broad exchange of culture, knowledge, and perspectives; on the other hand, it also carries the potential to generate social tension and conflict when not accompanied by adequate multicultural understanding and inclusive attitudes (OECD, 2020).

Indonesia represents a nation characterized by an exceptionally high degree of diversity. This diversity is reflected in the coexistence of various ethnic groups, religions, races, customs, and languages within a single national framework. Diversity is deeply embedded in the nation's philosophical foundation, emphasizing unity amid difference as a core national value. Nevertheless, social realities indicate that diversity may also become a source of tension, manifested in intolerance, discrimination, and social conflict involving students and broader communities. Such conditions suggest that the internalization of multicultural values through educational processes has not yet reached an optimal level (Arifin & Susanto, 2021).

Education plays a strategic role in shaping students' perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors toward diversity. Educational processes extend beyond the mere transmission of knowledge to include the cultivation of character, moral reasoning, and social competencies essential for coexistence in diverse societies. Within this context, general education serves as a critical vehicle for systematically and sustainably fostering multicultural awareness. General education aims to develop learners as holistic individuals who possess social sensitivity, tolerant attitudes, and a sense of civic responsibility in pluralistic environments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Multicultural awareness can be understood as an individual's capacity to recognize, appreciate, and accept cultural differences as an inherent social reality. This awareness encompasses cognitive understanding of diversity, affective openness toward others, and behavioral competence in engaging equitably with diverse groups. Developing multicultural awareness from an early stage is essential to fostering empathy, reducing prejudice, and preventing discriminatory attitudes in social interactions (OECD, 2021).

General education possesses characteristics that are highly relevant to the development of multicultural awareness. Through subjects such as civic education, social studies, and character education, students are introduced to values of humanity, democracy, social justice, and respect for diversity. These values align closely with the principles of multicultural education, which emphasize equity, inclusivity, and respect for human rights as foundational elements of democratic societies (Banks & Banks, 2020).

In the era of globalization, the challenges associated with multicultural education have become increasingly complex. The rapid and unrestricted flow of information through digital media frequently exposes students to content that may reinforce stereotypes, spread misinformation, or promote intolerance. Students who lack sufficient multicultural awareness are particularly vulnerable to such influences. Consequently, general education is required to respond to global dynamics by integrating digital literacy with multicultural perspectives within instructional practices (UNESCO, 2021).

Globalization also demands that students develop global competence, defined as the ability to communicate, collaborate, and interact effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. These competencies extend beyond academic knowledge to include attitudes of openness, tolerance, and mutual respect. General education plays a pivotal role in equipping students with such competencies through contextual learning experiences grounded in multicultural values (Reimers, 2020).

Despite its importance, the implementation of multicultural education within general education settings continues to face various challenges. These challenges include limited teacher understanding of multicultural concepts, curricula that lack inclusivity, and school cultures that do not consistently support the development of tolerant attitudes. As a result, multicultural values are often conveyed at a theoretical level without being deeply internalized in students' daily behaviors and interactions (Arifin & Susanto, 2021).

Effective multicultural education requires a holistic approach that integrates curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and supportive school environments. Teachers play a central

role as agents of change in fostering multicultural awareness among students. Through modeling inclusive behavior, facilitating open dialogue, and employing participatory learning methods, teachers can create classroom environments that respect diversity and promote positive social interaction (Gay, 2020).

General education also contributes to strengthening students' national identity within the context of globalization. Developing multicultural awareness does not imply diminishing national identity; rather, it enhances students' understanding of diversity as a source of national strength. Through this perspective, students are expected to engage with global cultures while maintaining a strong sense of belonging and responsibility as citizens (OECD, 2021).

Based on the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that general education plays a crucial role in fostering multicultural awareness among students in the era of globalization. General education functions not only as a medium for knowledge acquisition but also as a platform for character formation and the development of social attitudes that value diversity. Accordingly, examining the role of general education in promoting multicultural awareness remains highly relevant in addressing contemporary educational challenges.

This article aims to conceptually examine the role of general education in fostering students' multicultural awareness. By identifying key roles and strategies, this study seeks to provide insights into approaches that can strengthen multicultural values within educational practices, ultimately contributing to the development of a tolerant, inclusive generation capable of navigating global dynamics.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with the library research method. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the concept, role, and contribution of general education in fostering multicultural awareness in students, based on theoretical studies and previous research findings. Literature studies are carried out by examining various relevant written sources, both in the form of scientific books, national and international journal articles, seminar proceedings, and official documents of education policies related to general education, multicultural education, and globalization.

Data collection is carried out through systematic literature search using academic databases such as Google Scholar, Garuda, and other scientific journal portals. Keywords used in searches include "general education", "multicultural education", "multicultural awareness", and "globalization of education". The selected literature is the sources that have direct relevance to the research topic and are published by credible authors and institutions. After the selection process, the selected literature is classified based on the theme and focus of the study to facilitate the analysis process.

Data analysis was carried out using content analysis techniques. Each literature source is read in depth to identify key concepts, key findings, and expert views on the role of general education in the development of multicultural awareness. The data that has been analyzed is then synthesized by comparing and relating various existing perspectives, so that a comprehensive and systematic understanding is obtained. This analysis process is carried out repeatedly to ensure consistency and depth of interpretation of the data studied.

The validity of the data in this study is maintained through triangulation of sources, namely by comparing information obtained from various types of literature and different authors. In addition, the researcher also checked the relevance and suitability of the theoretical context with the conditions of education in Indonesia. With this method, it is hoped that the results of the research can provide a valid conceptual picture and can be used as a basis for thinking in the development of general education practices that are oriented towards strengthening the multicultural awareness of students in the era of globalization.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the literature review show that general education has a very significant role in fostering multicultural awareness in students, especially in the midst of increasingly complex globalization dynamics. General education is understood as an educational process that not only emphasizes the mastery of academic knowledge, but also on the formation of attitudes, values, and character of students so that they are able to live harmoniously in a pluralistic society. In this context, public education serves as a strategic means to instill the values of tolerance, social justice, and respect for cultural differences.

One of the key findings of this study is that the integration of multicultural values in the general education curriculum is a key factor in shaping students' multicultural awareness. An inclusive and responsive curriculum that allows students to understand social realities more broadly. Through learning materials that display various cultural, historical, and social perspectives, students are encouraged to see differences as something natural and of positive value. This is in line with the view that a multicultural curriculum can reduce prejudice and increase empathy between individuals.

In addition to the curriculum, the learning process in general education also plays an important role in fostering multicultural awareness. Dialogical and participatory learning provides space for students to express opinions, share experiences, and learn to respect other people's perspectives. Social interaction that occurs in the classroom is an effective learning medium to instill the value of tolerance and mutual respect. Thus, general education not only conveys multicultural concepts theoretically, but also internalizes them through daily learning practices.

The role of teachers in general education is very central in this process. Teachers not only act as material presenters, but also as role models in attitude and behavior. The results of the study show that teachers who have a good multicultural understanding tend to be able to create an inclusive and conducive learning environment. Teachers who are fair, open, and respectful of differences will set a real example for students of how to behave in a diverse society. Therefore, the multicultural competence of teachers is one of the determining factors for the success of general education in fostering multicultural awareness.

School culture also has a great influence on the development of students' multicultural awareness. School as a second social environment after the family is an important space for students to learn to live together in diversity. Schools that instill the values of democracy, equality, and social justice in their daily policies and practices will encourage the formation of a positive multicultural attitude. School activities such as national and cultural holiday commemoration ceremonies, extracurricular activities, and cooperation programs between students from different backgrounds are concrete means to strengthen multicultural values.

In the era of globalization, general education is also required to be able to respond to global challenges related to the flow of information and global culture. Digital media and social media provide broad access to a wide range of information, but at the same time bring the potential for the spread of intolerance and discrimination. The results of the study show that general education has an important role in equipping students with critical thinking skills and digital literacy, so that they are able to filter information and are not easily influenced by negative content. With this approach, general education contributes to building multicultural awareness that is adaptive to global developments.

Further discussion shows that multicultural awareness developed through general education does not conflict with the strengthening of national identity. On the contrary, understanding diversity actually strengthens students' sense of nationality. By understanding that Indonesia consists of various ethnicities, religions, and cultures, students will have a sense

of belonging and responsibility for the unity of the nation. Public education plays a role in instilling inclusive national values, where differences are seen as wealth, not as threats.

However, this study also found various challenges in the implementation of multicultural education through general education. One of the main challenges is the limited understanding and readiness of educators in integrating multicultural values consistently in learning. In addition, a dense and academic achievement-oriented curriculum often leaves limited space for the development of students' affective and social aspects. Another challenge is that there is still a school culture that does not fully reflect the values of inclusivity and equality.

To overcome these challenges, systematic efforts are needed to strengthen multicultural-based public education. The development of a more flexible and contextual curriculum is one of the solutions so that multicultural values can be optimally integrated. In addition, improving teacher competence through training and professional development oriented to multicultural education is indispensable. Teachers need to be equipped with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support the creation of inclusive learning and respect for diversity.

This discussion also emphasized that general education has great potential as a means of preventing social conflicts in the future. By instilling multicultural awareness from an early age, students are expected to be able to develop an attitude of empathy, dialogue, and peaceful problem-solving. These attitudes are an important provision for students in facing increasingly complex social life in the era of globalization. General education, in this case, contributes not only to the development of the individual, but also to the creation of a harmonious and just society.

Overall, the results and discussion show that general education plays a strategic role in fostering multicultural awareness in students through an inclusive curriculum, participatory learning, a professional teacher role, and a supportive school culture. In the midst of the current of globalization, general education is an important foundation in shaping a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also socially and culturally mature. Therefore, strengthening multicultural-based public education needs to be a priority in the development of the national education system.

CONCLUSION

General education has a very strategic role in fostering multicultural awareness in students in the era of globalization. Through general education, students are not only equipped with academic knowledge, but also with social, moral, and humanitarian values necessary to coexist harmoniously in a diverse society. The integration of multicultural values in the general education curriculum allows students to understand cultural, religious, and social diversity as a reality that must be valued and upheld. A dialogical and participatory learning process, supported by the role of teachers who are professional and multiculturally insightful, is an effective means of internalizing attitudes of tolerance, empathy, and social justice.

In addition, an inclusive and democratic school culture also strengthens the development of students' multicultural awareness. A school environment that respects differences provides a real experience for students in practicing multicultural values in daily life. In the midst of globalization and the rapid development of information technology, general education also plays an important role in equipping students with critical thinking skills and digital literacy to be able to respond to differences and influences of global culture wisely. Thus, general education contributes to shaping a generation that not only has academic competence, but also a strong social and cultural awareness.

Therefore, strengthening multicultural-based public education needs to be a major concern for educators, educational institutions, and policy makers. This effort is expected to be able to create students who are tolerant, inclusive, and have character, so that they can play an

active role in maintaining the unity and harmony of society in the midst of global diversity and challenges. General education has a very strategic role in fostering multicultural awareness in students in the era of globalization. Through general education, students are not only equipped with academic knowledge, but also with social, moral, and humanitarian values necessary to coexist harmoniously in a diverse society. The integration of multicultural values in the general education curriculum allows students to understand cultural, religious, and social diversity as a reality that must be valued and upheld. A dialogical and participatory learning process, supported by the role of teachers who are professional and multiculturally insightful, is an effective means of internalizing attitudes of tolerance, empathy, and social justice.

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