

# Voices of English Department Students on Multicultural Values in an Indonesian Islamic Higher Education

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**Voices of English Department Students on Multicultural Values in an  
Indonesian Islamic Higher Education**

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**Abstract**

This study aims to explore multicultural education values in an Islamic higher education institution. This research focuses particularly on students' views on multicultural education values. This study aims to fill the absence of Islamic university students' voices on multiculturalism. This study draws from several concepts of multicultural education values using a multiple case studies approach. The data for this investigation is gained through semi-structured interviews and is analyzed through a systematic approach. The result of the study shows that there are new themes appear in this research. These themes extend the existing multicultural values proposed and identified in the earlier studies. This study has both pedagogical and social implications.

**Keywords:** Multicultural values, Islamic institution, students, English.

## Introduction

The issue of multicultural education has become a global interest among researchers and practitioners in the field of education and multiculturalism. The themes are the interest of global researchers such as critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2015), the power of dialogue from past, present and future (Sleeter, 2018), language culture and identity (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2019), reimagining multicultural education vision and possibilities (Nieto, 2017) and awareness of multicultural education in the current age (Tonbuloglu, Aslan, & Aydin, 2016). These researchers have established the importance of investigating multicultural education. With the limitation of the research within the Indonesian context, the theme of multicultural education is worthy of further study.

The research of multicultural education with the Indonesian context particularly within the area of English language education has been explored by several researchers. For example, Shafa, Basri, Abduh, and Patak (2020) have explored multicultural instruction for English language teaching in an Indonesian Islamic higher education. Other researchers have studied language and culture in bilingual education contexts (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2018) and academic culture within the higher education milieu (Azis & Abduh, 2019). Among these studies, they focus on the perceptions of lecturers and educators. As a consequence, none of them have been concerned about the voices of learners on multicultural education, and literature on these issues has been scarce. Therefore, this paper depicts the voices of learners of English who study in the English Education Program in Islamic higher education.

## Multicultural education values

The study used a concept of multicultural education by the National Advisory and Coordinating Committee on Multicultural Education (NACCME) of Australia (1978), Department of Education Victoria (1997), and Department of Education, Employment and Training (2001). The basic principles of multicultural education have been established since the recognition of multicultural Australia. National Advisory and Co-ordinating Committee on Multicultural Education (NACCME) of Australia (1987, p. 24) identifies three basic principles of multicultural education, which are: 1) issues of equality of access and participation for ethnic minorities; 2) intercultural understanding, and 3) maintaining identity.

### *Equality*

Equality in education is the basic concern of multicultural education policies (NACCME 1987). NACCME (1987) further explains that equality refers to not only the equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes (achievement and performance as average outcomes across the group) but also to a broadly inclusive curriculum, which provides equity to all students to enhance their potential. According to Brady and Kennedy (2003), equality is ‘an acceptance and even celebration of difference: all students are equally valued and this includes valuing their difference.’ (p. 30). Therefore, it requires a specific curriculum response. For example, multiculturalism is integrated into the music education curriculum (Quadros, 1999).

Antonios (2000, p. 18) suggests that equality refers to “fairness-where everyone is equal and should be treated the same. However, treating people the same does not always mean you are being fair”. It means that equality is not only a matter of treating people equally but importantly is to be fair. What Antonios meant here is that schools need to take into account students’ differences (in culture, language, education, ability/disability, and that sometimes these differences call for special treatment or affirmative action).

<sup>1</sup> Authors such as Canen and Canen (2002) also mention that equality links to equal opportunities, which protects minorities from discrimination and unequal cultural relations. Kandola and Fullerton (1998 cited in Canen and Canen, 2002) affirm that 'equal opportunity' entails a focus on discrimination; a recognition of the issues of minorities; and the legitimation of positive action. In this context, principals, for example, should aim to understand the sensitivity of cultural diverse perspectives, and promote the representation of cultural and ethnic minorities' in the staffing of schools.

### *Intercultural understanding*

Intercultural understanding is also essential in implementing multicultural education. The report of NACCME (1987) states: "Intercultural education is concerned on one level with the acceptance and understanding of differences between individuals and groups and is regarded as one of the most important conditions for a democratic society. However, it is not an education just for ethnic minorities, but for all members of society who have to learn to live with cultural groups different from their own and understand their way of living. The prime object of learning to live with difference, and through mutual understanding and equality of respect, is social solidarity, that is, the need to preserve the moral order and unity of society" (p.26).

In other words, intercultural understanding is an essential underpinning of a democratic society where solidarity, social justice, and equality of respect are the foundation values. Barrera (1999) states that intercultural understanding is concerned with appreciating and accepting cultural diversity and respecting human dignity and universal human rights.

Lippmann (1977) in the book *The aim is understanding; Educational techniques for a multi-cultural society* concludes that intercultural understanding in education is designed to improve inter-group relations that further the aims of: "recognition of human dignity and the right of others to hold beliefs and values discrepant from one's own; the achievement of attitudes towards people from other groups of fair-mindedness, respect for feelings, and some measure of empathy and friendliness; and learning to accept differences with interest and pleasure, as an enrichment of one's own life and understanding rather than an assumption of inferiority on the part of the different" (p. 62). In this context, intercultural understanding is a way of understanding human dignity and a way of empowering positive relationships among multicultural communities.

A recent study by Tilbury & Henderson (2003) shows that intercultural understanding in education aligns with the terms of "equality, participation, peace, respect, reconciliation, and co-operation" (p. 89). Intercultural understanding in education also provides the possibilities of 'interchange values, knowledge/expertise, arts/sciences, and a broader understanding of different cultures, religions, and human values' (Pattnaik, 2004).

Intercultural understanding is based on an understanding of culture in schools. Barrera et al (2003) suggests that culture diversity can not be adequately affirmed if culture itself is not first understood. Therefore, understanding other cultures can be done through intercultural education, which emphasizes how one student understands another student's culture through, for example, celebration of culture and cultural festivals (Grundy, 2004).

### *Maintaining identity*

Developing culture and ethnic identity is important to help people understand the differences. Maintaining cultural identity provides a basis for genuine understanding and choice, more than simply advocacy of assimilation or conversation (NACCME, 1987). Students' cultural

background and identity as suggested by Grundy (2004) should be acknowledged and even celebrated as a part of school multicultural policies.

Multicultural education encourages students to maintain and celebrate their cultural and ethnic identities. The Victorian Multicultural Policy, for example, intends to “promote respect by all cultures for all cultures, one that allows Australians the freedom to maintain and celebrate their languages and cultures within a socially cohesive framework of shared values, including respect for democratic process and institutions, the rule of law and acknowledgment that English is the nation’s common language” (Department of Education Victoria 1997, p. 8).

### **Methodology**

The study was an interpretive multiple case study (Yin, 2009) using semi-structured interviews. The paper describes a case study investigating the perspectives and experiences of voices of learners of English who study in the English Education Program in an Islamic higher education institution. The multiple case study here is the multiple individuals as participants in this research. The transcripts of the interviews and the contents of the findings were sent back to participants for them to check that they were satisfied with the contents. Therefore, there were opportunities for them to make changes. This was also to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2006).

Eleven student participants were voluntarily involved in this research. They provided a consent form for participation in this research. The participants in this research are coded with Participant one (P1). The data is analyzed using the framework of Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) of systematic analysis approach.

### **Findings**

#### *Appreciating diversity and identity*

Appreciating diversity and human existence is one of the most important themes that appeared in this study. Respecting diversity is the essence of multicultural values that are embraced by students in the English department of an Islamic University, due to it is part of their journey of life and shows the quality of human beings. Participants comment below:

|    |  |
|----|--|
| P4 | Because everyone has a different culture and identity, we must appreciate other cultures and identities so that we are also appreciated, and also humans must life socialize   |
| P5 | So that other countries can also appreciate our culture as well.   |
| P3 | so why not respect each other’s differences when it is a valuable thing that could happen in your journey of life  |
| P6 | in my point of view, firstly every culture is created to improve the quality of human life, Therefore, any activity which aims to "humanize human beings" as identities should be respected even if it's done in different ways  |
| P7 | Because each culture has norms, identities, and values, and certainly different people have different cultures, so we can't force others to be like us.  |
| P9 | Because our culture is not the only one that exists in this world. For me, all the differences are unity like sandals; no one would use only left-sandals or only right left and right are different but united. Besides, all people love color TV rather than black-and-white TV; the more colorful the better. |

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P10      Respect for cultural differences mean we respect other people as a human being and make other humans human

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*Respecting cultural differences to avoid conflict*

Not only appreciate but also respect cultural differences can avoid the physical and physiological tension among different ethnic backgrounds. One of the reasons is that if someone does not respect the differences, it will tend to negative claims and assumptions about other cultures. Also, it helps to maintain the stability and harmony of people's lives and the sustainability of the cultures. Participants urge below:

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P7      We must respect the cultural differences because in our country we have a diverse culture. But the difference is not a barrier to interact with each other. We must respect the culture of others even though it is different from our culture. Because if we respect their culture then they will respect our culture as well

---

P9      We have to respect cultural differences because Cultural differences have many noble values that can foster the values of togetherness

---

P1      Because other cultures have different habits with our culture and we have to respect it. And it's not mean our culture is better than other culture, so we have to accept the differences between us to avoid conflict between us

---

P10     To ensure the prosperity of human beings without conflict. Unrespecting to cultural differences will lead to negative claims of other culture

---

P8      Because every human being is born with a culture of each and so that our culture can be appreciated also by others than we also have to appreciate other cultures and I think this is stability, if we are too fanatical towards the outside culture, it is not recommended because it can lead to conflict.

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P11     We have to respect cultural differences because we are not alone in this world. Almost all aspects of our daily life in which we interact have cultural diversity, such as religious beliefs, gender, ethnicity, race, education, work background

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*Respecting unity and identity in diversity*

The most significant value for people is to maintain the unity of diversity. It is for the sake of the nation and the world. Keeping the unity in diversity means keeping the nation and people inside the country to enjoy and taste the diversity of cultures that help them to create harmonious and sustainable lives. Participants in this study comment that:

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P6      I think why do we have to respect cultural differences because in Indonesian as our identity, we live with a variety of each region has its characteristics. So, respect for cultural differences means respecting the unity

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P8      Because we are created in different circumstances, so we need to respect the differences to keep our association and our identity.

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P11     Because by appreciating cultural differences we can remain united

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P7      Because our country is not only one culture and one identity. So we have to respect other cultures and other identities.

---

P12     Because if we respecting other cultures it means we participate in the unity of Indonesia. That is our national identities

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P9      Because we stay in Indonesia. In this country, there are so many cultures we have to respect each other to keep the unity in our country.

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### *Building harmonious and peaceful lives*

Building harmonious and peaceful lives is also the essence of multicultural values expressed by English department students. These values become a substantial drive for people who respect the diversity of cultures and ethnicities. Participants comment on the theme below:

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| P10 | We must realize that in life there must be differences and we must respect each other and appreciate that difference to form a harmonious life.   |
| P5  | Because if we respect the culture of others then they will also respect our culture so that the sense of brotherhood between fellow human beings can be harmonious  |
| P7  | Because It will keep our peace  |
| P2  | So, we can respect each other cultural differences and get to know each other   |
| P4  | By respecting cultural differences, it enables us to maintain life in peace and harmony by recognizing and having a tolerance sense that people are coming from different cultural background to make life in fruitful collaboration.   |
| P3  | we may not be selfish. we cannot push other people to like our culture and vise versa. when we respect other cultures from someone I'm sure that they will do it also. respect other cultures also can maintain world peace, no misunderstanding, no war again, because we respect other cultures.  |
| P6  | To create peace in our lives can live a peaceful life   |
| P8  | When someone can't respect cultural differences, then he/she will wave cultural biases such as ethnocentrism, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and racism. These cultural biases can destroy social's order. Also, someone who does not respect cultural differences will be regarded as a narrow-minded person and even will be isolated in his colleagues and jobs. |

### *Building reciprocal relationship*

Every person needs other people to live with and to work within the globalized challenging times. In building two ways of relationship, people need to understand each other. Understanding each other will lead to the establishment of a reciprocal relationship where every person understands the interest and the need of other people. Participants comment on this issue below:

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| P3  | that means that we respect each other, so that can make us have many friends or make us easier to interact with people from other cultural   |
| P9  | Because if we want to others respect our cultures, first we have to respect other cultures.  |
| P1  | because we are fellow human beings who have mutual respect   |
| P6  | We have to respect cultural differences because we are social people who need each other and have mutual respect   |
| P8  | Because I think everyone who lives in this world is the same.  |
| P10 | because only respecting cultural differences we can understand and share interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices to our culture and other cultures in doing communication and interactions so we can create a good relationship with other cultures |
| P5  | we can improve our communicative and interpersonal interactions and can facilitate the development of our intercultural relationships.   |

### *Open up opportunities to learn new things from other culture*

One of the essential pictures of the multicultural dimension expressed by participants is the willingness to open possibilities of learning new via the interaction with other people from other countries. Participants in this study comment that:

- 
- P12 Differences are unavoidable. Everyone has their way of expressing their selves through what they are accustomed to, I have my own custom/culture but that doesn't mean I will just embrace my culture to the point of being racist or narrow-minded to the cultures of others. In fact, in my opinion, cultural differences make everything special and will make social interaction more meaningful when we get to know one another differences. the key point is, we get to learn the positive impact of other cultures to the point our differences will become eye-opening and be a new insight that we haven't known before
- 
- P10 we have to respect, tolerate, understanding and appreciate cultural differences because it can give many advantages and new opportunities to learn new things and it makes our nation and country richer, stronger and better, spending time with diverse employees can break down communication barriers over the long-term so it can result from the effective communication
- 
- P11 and it can build a positive and progressive future because people from different cultures bring language skills, new ways of thinking, creative solutions to difficult problems, and negotiating skills. It is a journey of learning
- 
- P1 we live and live together with other people so that we have to open our heart and mind to respect
- 
- P6 Respect for other cultures is an important step to having new experiences and learning about the world
- 
- P3 Because to be respected by others (in here cultural differences), we should respect them first. Besides, we may get much information and learn more by accepting every cultural difference.
- 

#### *Building better intercultural dialogue*

Finally, the inter-relationship and connection with people from different cultures and ethnicities both from domestic and overseas backgrounds can be bridged through the establishment of better intercultural dialogue. Participants comment on this theme below:

- 
- P10 By learning about people of different cultural backgrounds, we can increase our horizons, have better interpersonal dialogue, and communicate more on a personal level.
- 
- P5 Because by learning people from different cultures, we can increase our horizon and have better interpersonal communication
- 
- P7 Secondly, there is no best culture in the world.
- 
- P8 To communicate well and avoid misunderstanding with other people from different cultures.
- 
- P4 Because we have to know that we are different. We can't push other people to like our culture.
- 
- P5 When we already know that we are different automatically we will respect other people/culture. each other
- 
- P11 We lived in a world with different ethnics groups, different cultures. And we live to care for each other not to fight. Everyone should realize this. Thus, we should respect other cultures.
-



### Discussion: revisiting multicultural education values

The most significant features of these multicultural education values are:

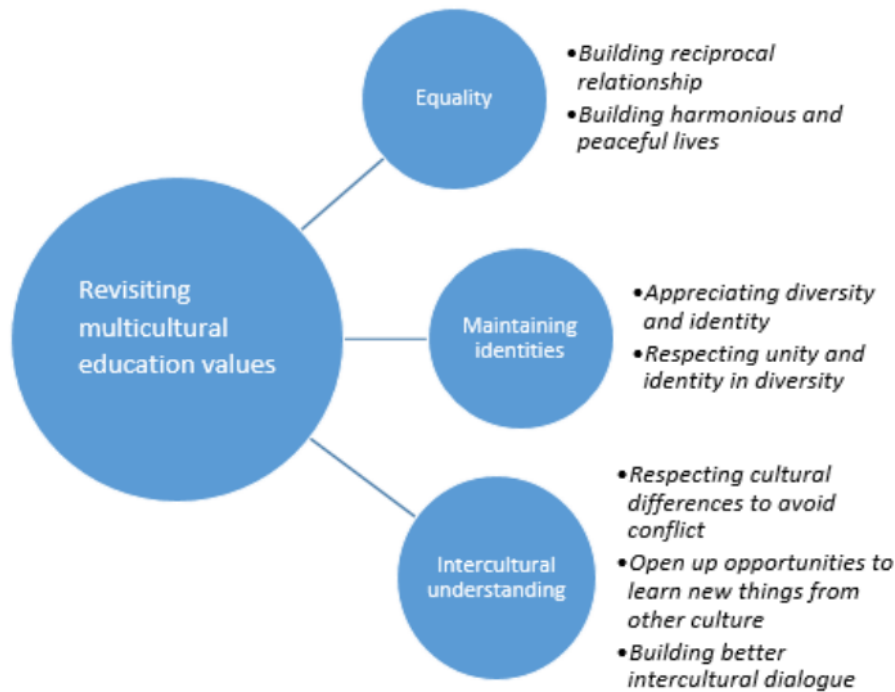


Figure 1: Revisiting multicultural education values

The equality in this finding extends what Canen and Canen (2002) providing equal opportunities, and valuing the differences (Brady & Kennedy, 2003). The findings add new themes of equality: building equal and reciprocal relationships. In terms of maintaining identities, the finding of the research reflects on the acknowledging similarities and respecting the differences, which extend the previous studies conducted by Grundy (2004). In addition, the intercultural understanding domains provides new lens of building intercultural dialogue, opportunities for learning new cultures, and avoiding conflict through appreciation and respect.

It is evident that this case study adds the values to the previous case studies reported in National Advisory and Co-ordinating Committee on Multicultural Education ([NACCME], 1987), and the school policies reflect 'Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools (Department of Education, 1997) and the 'Guidelines for Managing Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Schools' (Department of Education, Employment and Training, 2001) and in the 'case studies' (Kalantzis & Cope, 1999; Hill & Allan, 2004).

## Conclusion

The multicultural education values that should be promoted among diverse communities to establish an intercultural reciprocal harmonious relationship is equality, reciprocal relationship, appreciating identity and diversity, and respecting unity and diversity. The educational institution promote the values of tolerance such as to change students and staff and community's perceptions to be tolerant among multiethnic communities. An educational institution can foster unity in diversity to establish a united and harmonious community through its curriculum, programs, and activities.

It is suggested that relevant stakeholders need to facilitate intercultural or inter-religious understanding among different cultural and religious groups through dialogue, conversation, conference, and visiting schools. The research to reduce tensions and problems within educational institutions, communities, non-government organizations, public institutions is important for further investigation. The investigation particularly with a more comprehensive, ethnographic methodology, including many more cases, would be necessary to explore those issues.

## Declaration of conflicting interest

There is no conflict of interest for the publication of this paper

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