

## Internalizing Multicultural Values through History Education: A Phenomenological Study at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta

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### Abstract

This study explores how students internalize multicultural values through history education in a diverse school context. Conducted at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta, the research examines students' understanding of tolerance, empathy, and cooperation within a learning environment that mirrors Indonesia's plural society. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving 20 students and three history teachers. The findings show that students at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta have begun to internalize multicultural values through daily interactions that reflect respect, cooperation, and empathy. Their tolerance is evident in behaviors such as honoring peers' religious practices and collaborating across ethnic and religious lines. Acts of mutual support during moments of personal difficulty further illustrate emerging social empathy. However, students' understanding of multiculturalism remains mostly behavioral and has not yet developed into deeper reflective awareness. The school's heterogeneous composition provides authentic opportunities for cross-cultural engagement that strengthen the internalization of values. History lessons emphasizing national unity help reinforce students' appreciation of Indonesia's plural identity. However, reliance on memorization and teachers' limited ability to connect historical content with contemporary diversity issues constrain deeper learning. Additionally, the absence of inclusive learning materials and school practices that favor the majority continues to pose significant challenges.

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### Keywords

History Education; Inclusive Citizenship; Multicultural Values; Phenomenological Study; Tolerance and Empathy

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia stands as one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world, home to more than 300 ethnic groups, 700 local languages, and various religious traditions (Ali, 2019; Docherty, 2018). This plurality is both a source of national strength and a potential source of social tension. Historical events such as the Ambon conflict (1999–2002) and the May 1998 tragedy demonstrate that managing diversity is an ongoing challenge (Ahmadi, 2021; Schulze, 2018). Consequently, systematic efforts are required to cultivate multicultural values across all sectors of society, particularly through education, which plays



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a strategic role in promoting inclusivity and mutual respect (Irshad et al., 2021; Javed & Atta, 2024).

Within this context, history education functions as a crucial medium for transmitting multicultural values and strengthening social cohesion. As a subject that encompasses the nation's collective journey, history offers students meaningful insights into how unity has emerged from diversity (Schroeder et al., 2017; Williamson, 2015). Through events such as the Youth Pledge of 1928 and the Proclamation of Independence in 1945, students can learn that Indonesia's nationhood was built upon collaboration among diverse ethnic and religious groups. However, the effectiveness of history learning in fostering multicultural understanding depends largely on how teachers connect historical content to students' lived realities. When history teaching focuses only on factual memorization rather than critical reflection, students often perceive it as detached from contemporary life (Bharath Sriraman, 2024; Ilic et al., 2018).

Multicultural-oriented history education can counter intolerance and polarization by helping students appreciate differences and dismantle stereotypes. Understanding how Indonesia's struggle for independence involved multiethnic and multireligious participation enables learners to see diversity as a collective strength rather than a divisive element (Kusmaharti et al., 2023). Yet, the current history curriculum remains overly dense, fact-centered, and dominated by monolithic national narratives that marginalize minority contributions, such as those of Chinese-Indonesian, Arab, or Indian communities (Duncan et al., 2017). This one-dimensional approach weakens the reflective and moral function of history learning, limiting its potential to cultivate empathy, tolerance, and inclusive citizenship (Jeong, 2015; Salleh et al., 2021).

Pedagogical limitations also hinder the internalization of multicultural values. Many history teachers lack adequate training to integrate multicultural perspectives into their lessons, relying instead on traditional lectures that encourage passive learning (Dodero et al., 2017; Kusmaharti et al., 2023). Consequently, students rarely engage in reflective or dialogic activities that promote critical thinking and intercultural understanding. Methods such as discussion, case studies, or project-based learning have been shown to enhance students' critical awareness and empathy (Atho, 2021; Krismawati, 2019), but these remain underutilized. Furthermore, the scarcity of inclusive and contextualized teaching materials reinforces dominant perspectives, presenting history as a linear story of majoritarian heroes while neglecting marginalized voices (Prawitasari et al., 2022; Susanto, 2022).

Digital transformation adds another layer of complexity. Although technology provides opportunities for enriched historical exploration through archives, documentaries, or virtual simulations, it also exposes students to biased or unverified narratives that can perpetuate prejudice (Alek, 2023; Angeli et al., 2016). Strengthening students' digital literacy and teachers' media competence is therefore crucial to ensure that technology becomes a tool for inclusive and critical historical inquiry rather than misinformation (Herlina et al., 2023).

Previous research has shown that history education has strategic potential in instilling multicultural values, such as the findings of the Raihany et al. (2022) which emphasizes that history learning can strengthen social cohesion when it is linked to students' diverse experiences, while Harling (2018) found that historical narratives in schools still tend to be monolithic and less accommodating to the contributions of minority groups. Research by Setiyanugroho et al. (2022) also shows that teachers' ability to integrate multicultural perspectives into learning remains limited, leading the practice of teaching history to be often centered on mere memorization of facts. Moreover, Baddane (2025) proved that dialogical learning methods, such as discussions and case studies, can increase students' empathy and critical awareness of diversity issues, and Utomo & Wasino (2020) revealed that the lack of inclusive teaching materials weakens the internalization of the value of tolerance in history learning. Different from the five studies which focus more on curriculum, historical narratives, teachers' abilities, or the effectiveness of certain learning methods, this study offers a new contribution by examining the process of internalizing multicultural values holistically through a phenomenological approach in the context

of a school that is clearly plural, namely SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta, to provide a deeper understanding of how classroom interactions, school culture, and students' daily experiences simultaneously shape their understanding of diversity.

At the policy level, national frameworks such as the Merdeka Curriculum and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila emphasize tolerance and global citizenship as core values (Wibisono et al., 2022). However, implementation at the school level remains uneven due to limited institutional support, insufficient teacher training, and weak school cultures that fail to encourage intercultural dialogue (Bezuidenhout, 2021). A truly multicultural school environment must not only include diverse populations but also actively nurture equitable participation, empathy, and cooperation through curricular and extracurricular practices (Tonbuloglu et al., 2016; Assefa & Zenebe, 2024; Robbin & Junia, 2025).

In this regard, SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta provides an authentic setting for examining the internalization of multicultural values through history education. The school's student population represents a microcosm of Indonesia's diversity, encompassing Javanese, Betawi, Minangkabau, and Sundanese backgrounds, and embracing Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism as major faiths. Such heterogeneity allows for rich intercultural interaction, offering opportunities and challenges in building mutual respect and social solidarity. This environment thus serves as a "living laboratory" where students learn, experience, and negotiate diversity daily.

Given this background, the present study aims to explore how students internalize multicultural values through history learning in a plural school environment, particularly at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta. It seeks to identify both facilitating and inhibiting factors in this process, examining how classroom interactions, curriculum content, and school culture contribute to students' cognitive and affective understanding of diversity. Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse on multicultural-based history education in Indonesia; practically, it provides insights for teachers, schools, and policymakers to design reflective, inclusive, and contextually grounded history instruction that strengthens tolerance, empathy, and civic responsibility among students in a globalized, multicultural society.

## 2. METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore students' lived experiences in internalizing multicultural values through history education. The phenomenological method was chosen because it allows researchers to uncover the essence of human experiences by interpreting how individuals construct meaning from their daily interactions (Bliss, 2016; Tuffour, 2017). Qualitative inquiry emphasizes depth and meaning rather than generalization or measurement, making it appropriate for investigating students' subjective experiences within their natural educational setting (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Gergen et al., 2015). Through this approach, the study sought to interpret not only how students engaged with multicultural learning but also how they internalized tolerance, empathy, and respect within a plural school environment.

The research was conducted at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta, a private senior high school situated in an urban multicultural setting. The school was purposively selected due to its ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, reflecting Indonesia's plural society. The student body includes Javanese, Betawi, Sundanese, Minangkabau, and Padang ethnic groups, with affiliations to Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Such diversity provides a "living laboratory" for examining how multicultural values are experienced and negotiated in daily interactions (Gergen et al., 2015). The context allowed for authentic observation of how history education operates as a medium for fostering multicultural awareness.

The study involved 20 students from grades XI and XII, selected through purposive sampling to ensure variation in ethnicity, religion, and gender. These grades were chosen because students at this level had completed key components of the history curriculum related to nationalism, diversity, and

social justice. In addition, three history teachers were included as key informants to provide pedagogical insights regarding teaching practices and classroom design. Combining data from students and teachers enriched the analysis and increased the validity of interpretations (Lynch et al., 2016).

Data were collected using three complementary techniques: (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) classroom observations, and (3) document analysis. Interviews enabled participants to share personal reflections on multicultural learning experiences while allowing flexibility for probing emerging themes (Bakay, 2023). Classroom observations followed a moderate participation model, in which the researcher observed teaching and student interactions without disrupting learning. Observations focused on how history lessons connected past events to contemporary multicultural realities. Document analysis included lesson plans, textbooks, and syllabi to assess the degree of multicultural content integration. The combination of these methods ensured methodological triangulation, increasing the trustworthiness of findings (Moon, 2019).

Data analysis followed Moustakas' phenomenological procedures involving data reduction, open coding, and the development of textural and structural descriptions (Kulp et al., 2025). Codes were organized into themes representing key aspects of students' multicultural understanding empathy, cooperation, tolerance, and historical awareness. Analysis moved cyclically between data collection, interpretation, and reflection until thematic saturation was reached (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Maharani et al., 2020).

To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation, member checking, and audit documentation (Ahmed, 2024). Member checking was conducted by sharing interview transcripts and preliminary results with participants for validation. An audit trail comprising field notes, coding memos, and analytic summaries ensured transparency and replicability. The researcher also practiced reflexivity through journaling to identify potential biases and maintain interpretive integrity (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

This methodological design combines rigor, contextual depth, and ethical awareness. By situating the study in an authentically diverse school, it captures both the cognitive and affective dimensions of multicultural learning in history education. The integration of phenomenological inquiry and triangulated data collection provided a robust foundation for understanding how history education fosters empathy, tolerance, and inclusive citizenship within Indonesia's multicultural context.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### *Findings*

This study reveals that the diversity of students at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta represents a deeply rooted social reality rather than a mere demographic statistic. The student body encompasses various ethnic groups, Javanese, Betawi, Sundanese, Minangkabau, and Padang, with a smaller proportion of Chinese-Indonesian students. Religiously, the majority identify as Muslim, followed by Protestant and Catholic minorities. This heterogeneous composition creates a learning environment that mirrors Indonesia's plural society, functioning as a microcosm of national diversity where multicultural interactions occur naturally in academic and extracurricular contexts. Such diversity is not only structural but also a dynamic social force that shapes students' relationships, values, and identities (Allen, 2023). Schools like SMAS Tunas Markatin thus serve as living laboratories of multiculturalism, where tolerance, empathy, and cooperation are continuously negotiated (Hakim & Muhib, 2025). When properly supported by inclusive educational practices, diversity becomes a resource for intercultural learning and social understanding. Conversely, when ignored, it may result in subtle social divisions and symbolic exclusion (Littlewood & Herkommer, 2019). Hence, the plural school environment embodies both promise and challenge simultaneously, nurturing and testing the principles of multicultural education.

Daily interactions among students revealed natural tendencies to form friendship groups based on shared identity, often along ethnic or religious lines. Javanese students, for instance, tended to socialize more frequently with peers of similar backgrounds, while Christian students often gathered for prayer or fellowship activities. However, this pattern of affiliation did not harden into segregation. During classroom projects, art performances, and school events, students collaborated across group boundaries, demonstrating fluid interethnic and interfaith relations. Such interaction aligns with social identity theory, suggesting that individuals seek belonging while maintaining openness toward others (He, 2023; Septyawan et al., 2023). This intercultural collaboration reflects an inclusive school climate, which enhances belonging and academic engagement (Muchtar et al., 2016). Thus, the school environment at SMAS Tunas Markatin supports the development of a multicultural identity that balances cultural rootedness with openness to difference—a process consistent with Kusmaharti et al. (2023) conception of transformative citizenship.

Students' understanding of multiculturalism was especially visible in their practice of interreligious tolerance. Observations indicated that mutual respect had become a routine aspect of school life: non-Muslim students remained quiet during Islamic prayers, while Muslim peers respected Christian celebrations outside class hours. These simple yet significant gestures demonstrate tolerance as a lived social ethic, embedded in daily behavior rather than abstract moral instruction. However, interview data showed that such tolerance was often pragmatic rather than reflective; many students equated it with "not disturbing others." This finding echoes McGrath (2021), who argue that tolerance in education must evolve into reflective, empathy-based awareness. Accordingly, history education can serve as a bridge linking historical narratives of cooperation with students' lived experiences of diversity.

Beyond tolerance, social empathy emerged as a defining feature of students' multicultural awareness. Observations revealed that students willingly helped one another across religious or ethnic lines, particularly in moments of need. For instance, when a peer's family faced hardship, classmates jointly organized a fundraising activity regardless of background. Such acts exemplify defines as *social empathy*, understanding others' circumstances, and acting upon shared moral responsibility (Jeong, 2015). In this sense, empathy functions as both an emotional response and a civic competency that fosters inclusive community life (Mellawaty et al., 2025). Schools, therefore, operate as training grounds for emotional intelligence, where empathy and moral awareness are cultivated through relational engagement rather than abstract teaching. This emotional dimension of multiculturalism sustains social cohesion and reinforces the moral foundation of plural societies (Robbin & Junia, 2025).

Another significant finding is the persistence of *gotong royong*, a form of cooperative collectivism, as a unifying local value. Whether in classroom projects or community service, students worked harmoniously, transcending religious and ethnic divisions. This collective ethos reflects a traditional Indonesian cultural framework that promotes solidarity and equality (Akintayo et al., 2024). In this sense, *gotong royong* bridges local wisdom and global multicultural principles, demonstrating that inclusivity can be culturally grounded rather than externally imposed (Trismahwati & Sari, 2020). Integrating such indigenous values into multicultural education helps localize global ideals within students' lived contexts.

The study also found that history education played a key role in shaping multicultural understanding. Lessons on the Youth Pledge and Indonesia's independence movement prompted students to appreciate unity amid diversity. However, students reported that most lessons emphasized memorization over reflection. Many noted that they only began to value multicultural perspectives when teachers mentioned underrepresented historical figures, such as Chinese or Arab-Indonesian patriots' stories often absent in official textbooks. This reflects broader critiques of Indonesia's monolithic historical narrative, which tends to marginalize minority contributions (Raymond et al., 2019). As Tuffour (2017) argues, history teaching should help students *interpret* rather than simply *recall* the past, encouraging critical connections between history and current social realities.

Nevertheless, the internalization of multicultural values remains hindered by structural barriers. The curriculum remains content-heavy, prioritizing chronological recall over ethical reflection (Balabanski, 2023). Teachers' limited training in multicultural pedagogy also restricts opportunities for dialogic and participatory learning (Kılıç, 2022). Furthermore, textbooks predominantly highlight majoritarian heroes, overlooking contributions from minorities. As Cole & Packer (2019) notes, such curricular exclusion undermines students' capacity for cross-cultural empathy. Developing inclusive teaching materials is thus vital for broadening students' historical consciousness and their sense of national belonging.

Finally, school culture shapes the overall success of multicultural education. While student interactions are mostly harmonious, institutional practices often privilege the majority. Religious programs, for example, are organized mainly for Muslim students, with limited space for others. This imbalance reflects what terms *subtle inequity*, the quiet reproduction of majority norms (Reinholz & Shah, 2018). An inclusive school culture must therefore go beyond tolerance to actively celebrate all identities through equitable participation, interfaith dialogue, and collaborative initiatives. Promoting multiculturalism, in this sense, requires not only pedagogical reform but also institutional commitment from educators and policymakers to treat diversity as an educational strength rather than a managerial challenge.

The results of the study show that the ethnic and religious diversity at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta is clearly reflected in the composition of students, which includes Javanese, Betawi, Sundanese, Minangkabau, Padang, as well as a small number of students of Chinese descent, with the majority of Muslims and some Protestants and Catholics. Field observations show that students tend to form friendship groups based on identity proximity. However, this pattern is flexible because in various school activities—such as group work, class projects, and art performances—they collaborate across ethnicities and religions without showing social barriers that hinder interaction. In daily life, the practice of tolerance is seen in students respecting each other's religious practices, for example, staying calm during prayer or giving each other space for certain celebrations outside class hours. In addition, social empathy is seen when students help friends who are struggling, including spontaneous fundraisers when one of their peers faces a family tragedy. The value of cooperation also appears consistently in classroom activities and social actions, where students work together regardless of their identity background. In the context of learning history, students said that materials such as the Youth Pledge and the struggle for independence helped them understand the meaning of unity. However, most considered that the learning process was still dominated by memorization and lacked space for reflection. They also said that interest in multicultural values increased when teachers told stories about characters who rarely appear in textbooks. In addition, field findings indicate an imbalance in school practices that further facilitates the majority's religious activities. At the same time, the space for minority groups' expression is still limited. Overall, empirical data show that student interactions are harmonious and inclusive. However, the internalization of multicultural values is still influenced by classroom dynamics, teaching practices, and school culture that are not fully equal across all groups.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that students at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta have begun to internalize multicultural values such as tolerance, empathy, and cooperation through daily interactions and history learning. However, this internalization remains partial, with varying depth across cognitive and affective dimensions. This unevenness indicates that while multicultural practices are evident in behavior, the reflective and transformative understanding of diversity is still developing. The Understanding by Design (*UbD*) framework provides useful lenses for analyzing this phenomenon (Yurtseven & Altun, 2017). Higher-order understanding requires learners to progress beyond remembering and applying to analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Similarly, emphasize that meaningful learning should aim for enduring understandings and knowledge that students can transfer to new, authentic contexts (Hernández & González, 2022).

In this study, most students demonstrated tolerance and empathy through behavioral practices—such as respecting peers of different religions, collaborating on group projects, and helping classmates during crises. These findings resonate with previous studies showing that Indonesian students often exhibit behavioral tolerance but lack deeper reflective engagement. Students' multicultural understanding at SMAS Tunas Markatin thus appears to operate at the "application" level of Bloom's taxonomy rather than the "evaluation" or "creation" level, where learners critically assess and reconstruct values. The limited progression toward higher-order thinking reflects a history learning process that emphasizes factual recall and chronological mastery over interpretive and moral reasoning, a pattern consistent with observations in other Indonesian schools (Raihany et al., 2022).

The phenomenological data also show that students' tolerance often manifests as pragmatic coexistence rather than value-based reflection. Many understood tolerance as "not disturbing others" rather than as a moral principle rooted in empathy. This confirms the assertion that multicultural awareness must move beyond superficial acceptance toward critical consciousness that challenges bias and inequity (Sloan et al., 2018). Reflection, therefore, becomes a crucial pedagogical bridge linking cognitive understanding with affective internalization. When history teachers facilitate reflective dialogues connecting past struggles for unity with contemporary diversity, students begin to develop historical empathy, a capacity to understand the past from multiple perspectives (Djasuli et al., 2017). Historical empathy transforms history learning from rote memorization into moral cultivation and civic consciousness (Fanani et al., 2025).

Another key finding concerns the limited inclusivity of historical content. Classroom observations and document analysis revealed that textbooks and lesson plans tend to privilege majority narratives, emphasizing Javanese or Muslim heroes while underrepresenting minority contributions. Similar patterns have been reported in analyses of national textbooks (Xiong et al., 2022). This narrative bias restricts students' understanding of Indonesia's pluralistic heritage and undermines the inclusive intent of history education, as Bers et al. (2014) note: Multicultural education must integrate diverse perspectives into the curriculum to foster democratic citizenship. The marginalization of minority histories prevents students from connecting the ideal of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) with the lived realities of pluralism.

Teachers' role also emerged as central in mediating the internalization of multicultural values. Interviews revealed that while teachers valued diversity, they often lacked the pedagogical tools to embed multicultural perspectives within historical narratives. Most instruction remained lecture-based, focusing on transmitting information rather than facilitating inquiry or reflection. This aligns with prior findings that many Indonesian history teachers have limited exposure to multicultural pedagogy (Craddock, 2023). Teacher competence, therefore, determines whether history classrooms function as spaces for inclusive dialogue or as arenas of passive memorization. Research on culturally responsive teaching underscores that teachers act as transformative intellectuals who must help students interpret social realities through critical and empathetic lenses (Hasibuan, 2025).

Furthermore, the findings highlight that the school's diverse social environment serves as both a resource and a challenge for multicultural education. Students' cross-cultural cooperation during projects, religious events, and community activities reflects the persistence of *gotong royong* (cooperation) as a cultural mechanism for unity. This cultural value, deeply embedded in Indonesian tradition, functions as a bridge between local wisdom and global citizenship education (Mazid et al., 2024). When linked with historical narratives of collective struggle, *gotong royong* provides a culturally grounded framework for teaching inclusivity. However, the persistence of majority-centered institutional practices, such as unequal representation at school events, reveals that structural inclusivity is still evolving. As Bakay (2023) argue, multicultural education must extend beyond curriculum reform to institutional transformation that ensures equitable participation for all identity groups.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the study's findings suggest a shift in history education from knowledge transmission to reflective and transformative learning. Interactive pedagogies such as group discussion, project-based learning, and case analysis can encourage students to connect historical content with current social issues (Sormunen et al., 2020). Such methods have been shown to enhance empathy, collaboration, and moral reasoning (Carrión et al., 2018). Teachers should guide students in analyzing how historical narratives of unity and struggle relate to ongoing issues of intolerance, inequality, and cultural conflict. By fostering critical reflection and emotional engagement, history education can help students interpret diversity not as division but as a foundational strength of nationhood.

At a broader level, the findings reinforce the argument that history education serves as a powerful medium for cultivating civic and multicultural identities. When aligned with UNESCO's *Global Citizenship Education* framework, history learning contributes to the development of global competencies, critical thinking, intercultural communication, and empathy that prepare students to engage ethically in plural societies (Hunduma & Mekuria, 2024). Multicultural history education thus bridges local values of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* with global ideals of peace, justice, and sustainability. As students learn to interpret history from multiple perspectives, they not only gain intellectual understanding but also moral resilience, the capacity to respond empathetically and responsibly to diversity in an interconnected world.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the internalization of multicultural values at SMAS Tunas Markatin Jakarta develops through daily social interaction and history learning that emphasizes unity in diversity. Students show tolerance and empathy through practical behaviors, such as respecting friends' religious practices and helping others regardless of identity differences. The ethnic and religious diversity in schools creates an authentic context that allows for natural cross-cultural interaction. However, students' understanding remains pragmatic, as it is not fully accompanied by deep reflection on multicultural values as ethical and civic principles. History learning contributes positively, but it is still hampered by an approach that focuses on memorization and minimal dialogue. The limitations of teacher competence and less inclusive teaching materials also limit the critical meaning of diversity. A school culture that has not fully provided equal space for minority groups also affects the depth of internalization of multicultural values. Overall, this study emphasizes the need to strengthen the curriculum, increase teacher capacity, and establish an inclusive school culture to optimize the role of history education in building tolerance, empathy, and multicultural citizenship.

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