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## From River to Classroom: Integrating Local Culture and Ethno-Pedagogy in Multicultural Education

Lumban Arofah<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lambung Mangkurat University, Banjarmasin, Kalimantan Selatan, [lumban.arofah@ulm.ac.id](mailto:lumban.arofah@ulm.ac.id)

Corresponding Author: [lumban.arofah@ulm.ac.id](mailto:lumban.arofah@ulm.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This article aims to introduce multicultural education with a stronger emphasis on the context of ethnopedagogy. The newly implemented “Kurikulum Merdeka” enables teachers with greater opportunities to develop learning models and mechanisms that are better suited to their students’ needs. One of the paradigms that enables teachers to design educational models rooted in the local context is ethnopedagogy. This article seeks to illustrate how multicultural education can be implemented through and beyond the framework of ethnopedagogy.

**Keywords:** Multicultural Education, Ethnopedagogy, Curriculum.

### INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia has faced new challenges since the Ministry of National Education the Republic of Indonesia introduced the New Curriculum. Unlike the previous curriculum, the Merdeka curriculum includes several notable changes. These differences are reflected in its philosophical foundation, mindset, subject orientation, and student assessment methods.

The Curriculum was introduced to address several weaknesses found in the KTSP. In the previous curriculum, the goals related to attitude, knowledge, and skills were not clearly defined. Education was divided into three separate domains—cognitive, affective, and psychomotor—but these domains were not effectively integrated into the construction of subject materials. As a result, teachers and educational practitioners tended to focus excessively on knowledge acquisition. This led to learning activities that prioritized cognitive development while neglecting the affective and psychomotor aspects. Furthermore, student assessments primarily focused on testing knowledge, which was also reflected in student report cards.

An example of a lesson learned from the KTSP can be seen in the study by Sulfansyah (2013), who investigated the implementation of KTSP in second-year classrooms. She found that teachers tended to maintain a traditional view of learning, in which the teacher was positioned as the central figure in the classroom. Limited teaching practice and a lack of professional development opportunities meant that teachers were often unable to adapt effectively to the demands of the KTSP curriculum.

Based on these weaknesses, the government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, developed a new curriculum aimed at addressing not only the cognitive domain but also students’ attitudes and skills. In the new Curriculum, the learning process includes the development of social and religious attitudes, alongside knowledge and practical skills. These

three components are integrated into the learning materials. Moreover, student assessment is no longer limited to written tests, but also includes observations, portfolios, and evaluations of attitudes. All of these aspects are documented in the student report card.

In the previous curriculum, particularly at the elementary level, learning materials were delivered through separate subjects that were not aligned with contemporary educational and psychological theories. At the secondary level, science and social science subjects were only partially taught, leading to a lack of continuity and integration across educational stages from elementary to high school.

The new Curriculum marked a significant breakthrough by introducing thematic learning, especially at the elementary level. Moving away from the fragmented structure of the previous curriculum, the government developed learning materials based on themes that integrate multiple subjects. This approach aims to foster interconnection among subjects and shape students' competencies in a more holistic manner. The curriculum also introduced a scientific approach that emphasizes the development of religious and social attitudes, practical skills, and effectiveness.

Although the new Curriculum offers several advantages and strengths, its implementation has faced various challenges—particularly from teachers, students, and the availability of learning materials. Shifting from teacher-centered learning to student-centered, project-based learning (PBL) has proven difficult due to teachers' limited experience with such methods. Many teachers are not yet familiar with designing learning mechanisms that actively involve students in the learning process. The curriculum, however, requires teachers to adopt models that position students at the center of learning. Project-Based Learning is considered a key strategy for effectively implementing the new Curriculum.

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) requires the use of a scientific approach as a guiding framework. In this approach, learning materials are developed based on observable facts and phenomena that can be explained logically and measured objectively. It deliberately avoids myths, fables, and biased assumptions. The scientific approach encourages students to develop critical and analytical thinking skills, enabling them to identify problems, understand solutions, and apply them within the learning context.

The steps of the scientific approach include: **observing, questioning, associating, experimenting, and networking**. These stages guide students in constructing knowledge through inquiry and evidence-based reasoning.

In the New Curriculum, all learning outcomes are expected to reflect students' ability to demonstrate religious values, social attitudes, practical skills, and academic knowledge. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to develop teaching strategies that support these holistic goals. One promising approach to achieve this is **ethnopedagogy**, which serves both as a source of learning content and as a culturally grounded instructional model.

## METHOD

Multiculturalism refers to a condition in which a society consists of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including differences in race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. While multiculturalism can be perceived as a threat when excessive chauvinism or intolerance arises within a community, it also has the potential to enrich cultural and social interactions—provided these differences are managed constructively.

Promoting multiculturalism should begin in early childhood. Foundational education plays a crucial role in shaping the future of young learners. When children are introduced to diversity early on, they are more likely to view it as a normal and valuable aspect of life, including in future educational settings. Nganga (2015) emphasized the importance of incorporating multicultural education into early childhood learning experiences. She argued that schools and communities should recognize and support multicultural students and families,

even in rural areas. Multicultural education programs are essential for meeting students' diverse learning needs and for broadening perspectives on cultural differences.

Moreover, the research emphasizes that multicultural education is not solely the responsibility of schools—it also requires active involvement from the community. On one hand, effective multicultural education depends on well-designed guidelines and curricula, teachers who are capable of engaging with multicultural issues, and appropriate learning resources. On the other hand, it should also be closely connected to community resources. Local phenomena and real-life multicultural issues should be incorporated into instructional materials. These efforts help reduce cultural and racial barriers. Furthermore, multicultural education at the early childhood level offers students the opportunity to become familiar with cultural differences from a young age.

The research also highlights that multiculturalism is an ongoing, never-ending process. The successful implementation of multicultural education should empower teachers and school staff to fully understand the principles of multicultural curricula and learning practices. The author suggests that teachers and other school personnel engage in monthly dialogues as a tool to reflect on personal biases and attitudes related to the implementation of multicultural education. These discussions are also important for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum's application and can serve as valuable feedback for future instructional improvements.

citing Banks (2009), Nganga emphasized that multicultural education helps students recognize their rights and responsibilities as citizens, while also fostering awareness of their cultural, national, and global identities.

Gay (1995) examined curriculum theory through the work of George Beauchamp, highlighting the connection between curriculum development and multicultural education. According to Gay, multicultural education fosters civic consciousness by promoting both civil and individual rights. It also supports efforts to build a more egalitarian and democratic culture.

Bennett (as cited in Sarraj et al., 2015, pp. 39–40) noted that multiculturalism is an emerging global phenomenon. This trend has developed, in part, because many countries are not adequately prepared to manage the changes in their social landscapes brought about by increasingly diverse populations. Bennett argued that a gap exists between traditional views of culture and the realities of multicultural societies, and that public policy has not yet evolved to bridge this gap.

Bennett emphasizes that schools play a vital role in bridging the gap between traditional cultural frameworks and emerging multicultural realities. Schools can do this by implementing a well-prepared multicultural curriculum, employing staff who are familiar with multicultural education, and aligning with national policies that support multicultural values.

According to Sarraj et al. (2015, p. 40), multiculturalism is rooted in the concept of pluralism, which refers to the equal treatment and coexistence of people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, with an emphasis on respecting human dignity. A related perspective is **interculturalism**, which serves as a framework that acts as a "glue" to strengthen social cohesion in multicultural societies.

Bennett (2001) describes multicultural education as an approach to teaching and learning grounded in democratic values and principles. It promotes cultural pluralism by acknowledging and embracing the diversity found within society. In addition, Bennett has developed a cluster of research that explores the theory and practice of multicultural education in various educational contexts.

ennett (2001) identified four major clusters of research in multicultural education, each based on key assumptions and research genres:

## 1. Curriculum Research

This cluster is grounded in the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed, particularly through historical perspectives. As a result, multicultural education research in this area focuses on historical inquiry, identifying biases in learning materials, and the development of curriculum theory. The goal is to create curricula that reflect multiple perspectives and challenge dominant historical narratives.

## 2. Equity Pedagogy

This cluster is based on the belief that all children have the right to develop their full potential. Therefore, the cultural environment of schools should foster and support students' talents. Research within this cluster includes studies on classroom environments, student achievement, and the influence of cultural learning styles on academic success.

## 3. Multicultural Assumption

The third cluster focuses on the need to reduce racial and cultural prejudice and promote the development of individuals as multicultural citizens. This area of research emphasizes personal growth, cross-cultural understanding, and fostering inclusive attitudes among students and educators.

## 4. Societal Equity

The final cluster assumes that social change is possible and necessary to ensure equitable access to education and meaningful participation for all students. This line of research includes studies on demographics, representations of race and culture in popular media, and social action initiatives aimed at achieving educational equity.

Banjarmasin is an urban area that can be characterized as a multicultural city. This is evident from the diverse backgrounds of its residents in terms of ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status. Located along the southern coastal region of Kalimantan, Banjarmasin serves as a hub for the movement of money, goods, and services. As a result, it becomes a gateway for human migration—both inward to Banjarmasin and outward to other parts of Borneo. Given its multicultural nature, managing this diversity is essential to fostering social integration.

To support these efforts, it is important to institutionalize multiculturalism through formal education, particularly in schools. Multicultural education is a structured approach to teaching that aims to cultivate an awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity among students. In this context, sociology plays a vital role as a subject that can serve as a catalyst for promoting multicultural education. Beyond equipping students with cognitive knowledge—such as the history of sociology, sociological theories, approaches, and methodologies—sociology also carries a hidden curriculum that encourages students to develop social empathy and respectful attitudes toward others.

### 1. *Ethno-Pedagogy*

Ethno-pedagogy is defined as a cross-cultural teaching method that integrates cultural phenomena into pedagogical studies. The goal of ethno-pedagogy is to modify both cultural content and learning materials in order to make education more inclusive and contextually relevant (Burger, 1968). It provides a framework for understanding the learning process in everyday classrooms through the lens of anthropological theory. Ethno-pedagogy seeks to create an educational approach suitable for students from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds.

According to Burger, ethno-pedagogy is useful in promoting cultural pluralism, particularly when localized within specific geographical regions. To support this idea, he introduced the term "applied educational ethnology" as a key element of ethno-pedagogy. He also proposed several ethnic variables that should be considered in the development of

culturally responsive education. These variables include the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, as well as communication styles, perceptions of time and space, social norms, ethical values, concepts of causality, sociological environments, teaching methods, curricula, and subject matter.

Research has shown that ethno-pedagogy helps students adapt to the cultural values of their surrounding environments by integrating those values into learning materials. It also enables students to engage more actively in the development of knowledge. For instance, Hall (2009), in his research on Balinese gamelan, found that ethno-pedagogy allows for a culturally contextualized understanding of music. Hall argues that music differs across cultures and reflects unique meanings and values depending on its geographical and cultural context. This supports the idea that values and norms vary from one place to another, making it essential for educators to understand the cultural context of their students.

To further strengthen the approach, Abildina and Nietullaeva (2010) suggest that ethno-pedagogy should be supported by visual and technological learning tools, including printed materials, visual teaching aids, toys, and video resources. These tools help bring cultural content to life and enhance the effectiveness of culturally relevant teaching.

### **Multicultural Education Through Ethno Pedagogy Lense**

Ethno-pedagogy requires learning materials that emphasize cultural contexts. When combined with Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approaches, students are encouraged to investigate their own culture and gain knowledge through direct engagement with it. This article suggests the possibility of integrating multicultural education with a stronger emphasis on ethnopedagogy rooted in local contexts. Specifically, it proposes using the floating market as a learning resource for teachers to implement the new curriculum.

By exploring floating markets, students can observe human behavior and study the interactions between buyers and vendors, which serve as key insights into multiculturalism. Like other markets, floating markets involve buyers, traders, transactions, and the circulation of money. However, floating markets have distinct features—trading is conducted on boats, and bartering among traders is common.

According to Daud (1997:134), sellers in floating markets are typically farmers living along the riverbanks. These markets operate only in the morning and are highly dependent on river and climate conditions. Traders cannot sell goods during bad weather, as strong winds may carry their boats away. The functioning of the market is contingent on the river's current, which must be slow and steady for trading to occur.

South Kalimantan is one of the provinces in Indonesia known for its abundant rivers, which have long served as essential natural resources. Historically, rivers have been central to the daily life and culture of the people in South Kalimantan, particularly in Banjar Regency. One unique adaptation to this riverine environment is the floating market, a traditional marketplace held on boats. However, with the advancement of science and technology, floating markets in South Kalimantan are gradually fading and disappearing.

The growing population and the increasing development of infrastructure on land have contributed to the shrinking of rivers, reducing their role as transportation routes. This shift has led to the decline of floating markets across the region. Despite this trend, the Lok Baintan Floating Market, located in the village of Lok Baintan, continues to thrive and even attract more visitors, standing as one of the last remaining symbols of this unique tradition.

The resilience of the women traders in Lok Baintan plays a key role in the market's survival. They employ various strategies to remain competitive, attract customers, and stand out among other traders—even amidst the rapid currents of modernity. A crucial strategy they rely on is the possession and use of social capital. Honesty, friendliness, a caring attitude, and punctuality are the core values these traders uphold. Their honesty helps build trust and ensures customer satisfaction with both the quality and quantity of goods sold. They are consistently

warm and responsive when engaging with customers and tourists. Their care for others is reflected in their willingness to continue bartering with fellow traders. Their punctuality, especially when meeting customers at agreed times, further reinforces their reliability.

This social capital not only supports their trading activities but also enhances the overall market experience for visitors. Through these interactions, the floating market becomes a space for learning about multiculturalism. Traders are accustomed to serving buyers from diverse cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds. Their ability to adapt and communicate effectively with people from various walks of life exemplifies how multicultural values can be practiced in everyday economic activities.

## CONCLUSION

The Ministry of National Education has developed a new curriculum known as the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum allows teachers to design learning mechanisms that enhance students' curiosity and engagement. One of the educational paradigms promoted within this curriculum is *ethno-pedagogy*.

Ethno-pedagogy is an approach that encourages students to engage with the cultural contexts of their society. One example of how ethno-pedagogy can be implemented is through the study of floating markets. As unique trading spaces, floating markets offer valuable opportunities for teachers to introduce multicultural education. This is because they serve as points of interaction between traders—typically from a single local culture—and buyers who come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. These interactions make floating markets an ideal setting to explore cultural diversity, tolerance, and social adaptation in real-life contexts.

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