

Empirical Evidence of Multicultural Learning Model Effectiveness in Improving Student Learning and Cultural Cohesion in Isolated Toraja Communities

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to know the effect of the use of the Multicultural Learning Model on increasing the learning capacity of students in isolated areas, Bau Village, Tana Toraja and its Impact on Strengthening Local Community Institutions. This study uses a mixed approach that combines surveys, interviews, and learning model development. The research employed pre-experimental studies to assess the effectiveness of multicultural learning models, alongside case studies and observational methods to explore their impact on local institutions in Toraja. Respondents included students, teachers, parents, and community leaders. Research instruments used were academic tests, classroom observations, and interviews. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including t-tests to compare student performance, and qualitative thematic analysis to identify patterns in respondents' perceptions of the model's impact. The study confirms that the multicultural learning model improves the learning capacity of students in Bau Tana Village is in line with previous research which shows that an inclusive educational approach to local culture is essential in increasing participation, motivation, and learning achievement in often marginalized areas. Moreover, multicultural education can be a powerful tool to strengthen a sense of togetherness, increase community participation, and build a close relationship between education and cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Community Empowerment; Cultural Cohesion; Educational Innovation; Empirical Evidence; Inclusive Education; Isolated Communities; Learning Capacity; Multicultural Learning Model.*

Introduction

Multicultural education is an important foundation in facing the dynamics of an increasingly complex global society. In this era of globalization, intercultural interactions have become more frequent, demonstrating the need for an educational approach that understands and respects cultural diversity. This phenomenon is not only local, but also creates relevant challenges in different parts of the world (Faiqoh et al., 2022; Heliani & K Fadhillah, 2022). Isolated communities often face the dual challenge of increasing their learning capacity and strengthening their institutions. (Ibrahim et al., 2023) state that limited access to educational resources and lack of cultural diversity in the learning process can be significant obstacles (Amijaya & Suprayitno, 2018; Faiqoh et al., 2022; Hildayanti et al., 2023). Therefore, there is a need for innovative learning models that can overcome these challenges and are specifically designed to optimize learning capacity and strengthen isolated community institutions.

This research is motivated by the awareness of the urgent need to develop innovative multicultural learning models. This model is expected to be able to create an inclusive learning environment, enrich the learning experience of students, and make a real contribution to strengthening the institutional structure of isolated communities (Allo et al., 2024). Thus, this research not only explores the theories of multicultural education, but also focuses on the development of concrete solutions that can be implemented in the context of isolated communities. The Multicultural Learning Model is an approach in education that emphasizes the recognition, appreciation, and use of cultural diversity as a source of wealth in the learning process (Berthelsen & Karuppiyah, 2011; Kusumaningrum & Wahyono, 2019; Machmud & Alim, 2018; Tielman et al., 2012). The main goal is to create an inclusive learning

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environment and promote a better understanding of students' diverse cultural backgrounds, languages, and experiences.

The Multicultural Learning Model recognizes the importance of Diversity Recognition, where each individual brings a unique cultural background, experience, and identity into his or her classroom (Apriyanti, 2017). In addition, this model emphasizes Critical Against Stereotypes and Prejudices, by identifying, understanding, and overcoming stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination through a reflective and critical approach to learning materials (Soekmono & Ningtyas, 2020). The Interactive and Collaborative Approach becomes the third focus, where students are invited to share their experiences, knowledge, and views, creating a space for meaningful dialogue and mutually beneficial cultural exchange (Halim, 2022). Furthermore, the

Diverse and Relevant Curriculum includes materials and resources that reflect on students' different cultures, languages, histories, and life experiences, and relate them to contexts relevant to their lives (Cahyono et al., 2020). Then, the Responsive Teaching Approach, where teachers need to adapt their teaching methods and instructional strategies. Focused Problem-Solving on Social Justice is emphasized to teach students about social issues, human rights, inequality, and efforts to promote positive change in society. Finally, the model recognizes that learning about cultural diversity is an ongoing process that is not limited to the classroom, but rather through interaction with various communities and life experiences throughout the individual's life (Osnithia & Suparno, 2023). The main goal of the Multicultural Learning Model is to create an inclusive learning environment. This means creating a space where every student feels welcomed, valued, and supported in their learning journey, regardless of their cultural, racial, religious, or other identity background (Mashuri & Syahid, 2024). By creating an inclusive environment, students feel comfortable actively participating in learning, sharing their experiences, and learning from each other.

Several studies related to this study have been carried out by several researchers. Literature review on Multicultural Learning Models (Aslan, 2019; Aydin & Tonbuloglu, 2014; Hidayah & Prasetya, 2019; Istianingrum & Hidayat, 2023; Karacabey et al., 2019; Kariyawan, 2020; Marfuah & Mulyoto, 2021; Nur et al., 2021), evaluation of the implementation of the multicultural learning model on a small scale (Astuti et al., 2021; Camelia & Suryandari, 2021; Irawati & Winario, 2020; Kurnia & Mukhlis, 2023), analysis of how multicultural learning models have influenced the social, cultural, and institutional dynamics of society (de Graaf & van den Bos, 2021; Kholish et al., 2022), and evaluation of the impact of education and community development policies related to the implementation of multicultural learning models (Hendrawati et al., 2024; Winata, 2020). The focus of this research is related to previous research but specifically differs in context: The effectiveness of multicultural learning models, The role and impact of multicultural learning models in strengthening community institutions, and Learning models that promote educational inclusion and justice for isolated communities in Toraja, taking into account the diversity of cultures, languages, and socio-economic backgrounds of students.

The community in Bau Village, Tana Toraja Regency, is isolated with various challenges. They have limited access to formal education due to long distances and lack of transportation. Although the construction of road infrastructure began in 2013 due to tourism potential, there is still a lack of educational facilities such as libraries, laboratories, and computer facilities. Qualified teaching staff are also limited, affecting the quality of education. Cultural and linguistic challenges also exist, with a lack of tailored educational materials. Limitations in technology and internet access also hinder access to online education and communication with outside the region. Economic challenges such as school fees and educational supplies are also a heavy burden for some families.

By identifying problems like these, a holistic and coordinated approach can be taken to improve the learning capacity of isolated communities, including providing better access to education, developing qualified human resources, and support to overcome cultural, economic, and technological barriers (Hildayanti et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Irawati & Winario, 2020; Kurnia & Mukhlis, 2023; Soekmono & Ningtyas, 2020). Through a deep understanding of the dynamics of multicultural education and the implementation of innovative models, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to three main aspects: first, the development of more contextual and relevant multicultural education theories; second, providing practical guidance to optimize learning capacity in the midst of cultural diversity; and third, providing a foundation for strengthening the institutions of isolated communities through a holistic approach to education. Thus, this research opens the door for deeper understanding and real implementation in an effort to improve the quality of education in isolated communities through the innovation of multicultural learning models. The formulation of the problems to be studied is 1) How effective is the multicultural learning model in increasing the learning capacity

of students in isolated schools in Toraja?, 2) What is the role and impact of the multicultural learning model in strengthening the institutions of local communities in Toraja?

Method

This study uses a mixed approach that combines surveys, interviews, and learning model development (Creswell, 2014). The research methods used include Experimental Studies or Quasi-Experimental Studies to evaluate the effectiveness of multicultural learning models through comparisons between experimental and control groups. In addition, the Case Study or Observational method was also used to explore the impact of the model on local community institutions in Toraja through direct observation and interviews. The Qualitative and Quantitative Study approaches are used to understand the experiences of students, teachers, and other stakeholders, as well as to provide a broad picture of the impact of learning models through surveys and statistical analysis. Respondents in this study included students from isolated schools in Toraja who followed the multicultural learning model, teachers who applied the model, and parents or guardians to get feedback related to changes in their children's learning capacity and socio-cultural development. In addition, local community leaders are also involved to understand the role and impact of multicultural learning models in strengthening local community institutions. The following are the research instruments used to achieve the objectives of the research: Academic tests to measure students' academic achievement before and after the implementation of the multicultural learning model, classroom observation to monitor students' social interaction and development of cultural skills during the learning process, Interviews with community leaders, teachers, and local leaders to understand their perceptions of the role and impact of multicultural learning models in strengthening local community institutions. Furthermore, the data analysis techniques used for each of the research instruments mentioned. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, such as t-test, to compare the average test scores between groups before and after the application of the multicultural learning model. Qualitative thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in respondents' perceptions of the role and impact of multicultural learning models.

Results and Discussion (10 Pt)

The research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a multicultural learning model in isolated communities, particularly focusing on increasing students' learning capacity and strengthening local institutions in Bau Village, Tana Toraja Regency. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the model's impact on education and community development.

Multicultural Learning Model Increased the students' Learning Capacity

To find out the effect of the use of the Multicultural Learning Model on increasing the learning capacity of students in isolated areas, Bau Village, Tana Toraja, a t-test was carried out using the SPSS application. Before analysing the pretest and post-test data, the data normality test was first carried out using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results of the data normality test can be seen in the following columns:

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest of students' academic achievement	.112	30	.200 [*]	.978	30	.772
Posttest of students' academic achievement	.100	30	.200 [*]	.958	30	.277
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.						
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

Based on the output table "Tests of Normality" in the Shapiro-Wilk test, it is known that the Sig. value for the Pre-Test value is 0.772, and the Post Test value is 0.277. Because the value is greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that the data of Pre-Test and Post Test scores are normally distributed. Thus, the requirements or assumptions of normality in the use of the paired sample t test have been met. Next is a descriptive analysis of pretest and post-test scores:

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest of students' academic achievement	66.1033	30	1.81098	.33064
	Posttest of students' academic achievement	85.2000	30	2.74829	.50177

In the output above, a summary of the descriptive statistical results of the two samples studied, namely the Pre-Test and Post Test values, is shown. For the Pre-Test score, the average learning outcome or Mean was obtained of 66.1033. As for the Post Test score, the average score of learning outcomes was 85.2000. The number of respondents or students used as a research sample was as many as 30 students. The Std. Deviation value in the Pre-Test was 1.81098 and the Post Test was 2.74829. The last is the Std. Error Mean value for the Pre-Test of 0.33064 and for the Post Test of 0.50177.

Because the average score of learning outcomes in the Pre-Test is 66.1033 < the Post Test is 85.2000, it means that descriptively there is a difference in the average learning outcomes between the Pre-Test and the Post Test results. Furthermore, to prove whether the difference is real (significant) or not, we need to interpret the results of the paired sample t test contained in the output table "Paired Samples Test"

Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pretest of students' academic achievement & Posttest of students' academic achievement	30	-.007	.971

The output above shows the results of the correlation test or the relationship between the two data or the relationship between the Pre Test variable and the Post Test variable. Based on the output above, it is known that the correlation coefficient value is -0.007 with a significance value (Sig.) of 0.971. Because the Sig. value

> probability of 0.05, it can be said that there is no relationship between the Pre Test variable and the Post Test variable. Furthermore, a paired sample test was carried out to determine whether there was an effect of the use of the Multicultural Learning Model on increasing the learning capacity of students in an isolated area, Bau Village, Tana Toraja.

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest of students' academic achievement	-19.0966	3.30188	.60284	-20.329	-17.863	-31.67	29	.000
	- Posttest of students' academic achievement	7.1033	2.74829	.50177	6.1033	8.1033	67.8	29	.000

Before discussing the interpretation of the numbers contained in the output table of the "Paired Samples Test" above, it is first necessary to know the formulation of the research hypothesis and decision-making guidelines in the paired sample t test.

Research Hypothesis Formulation:

Null Hypothesis (H_0) = There is no average difference between Pre-Test and Post Test learning outcomes, which means that there is no effect of the use of the Multicultural Learning Model on increasing the learning capacity of students in an isolated area, Bau Village, Tana Toraja.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1) = There is an average difference between Pre-Test and Post Test learning outcomes, which means that there is an influence of the use of the Multicultural Learning Model on increasing the learning capacity of students in an isolated area, Bau Village, Tana Toraja.

According to Santoso (2014: 265), the decision-making guidelines in the paired sample t-test based on the significance value (Sig.) of the SPSS output results, are as follows:

If the value of Sig. (2-tailed) < 0.05, then H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted.

Conversely, if the value of Sig. (2-tailed) > 0.05, then H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected.

Based on the output table of the "Paired Samples Test" above, it is known that the value of Sig. (2- tailed) is $0.000 < 0.05$, then H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. So, it can be concluded that there is an average difference between Pre-Test and Post Test learning outcomes, which means that there is an influence of the use of the Multicultural Learning Model on increasing the learning capacity of students in an isolated area, Bau Village, Tana Toraja.

The output table of "Paired Samples Test" above also contains information about the value of "Mean Paired Differences" is -19.09667. This value shows the difference between the average Pre Test learning outcome and the average Post Test learning outcome or $66.1033 - 85.2000 = -19.09667$ and the difference between -20.32961 to -17.86372 (95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower and Upper).

In addition to comparing the significance value (Sig.) with a probability of 0.05, there are other ways that can be done to test the hypothesis in this paired sample t test. Namely by comparing the calculated t value with the t table. The guidelines or basis for decision-making are as follows.

If the value of t counts > t of the table, then H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted.

Conversely, if the value of t counts < t table, then H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected.

Based on the output table "Paired Samples Test" above, it is known that t has a negative value of - 31.678. t calculation has a negative value because the average score of Pre-Test learning outcomes is lower than the average Post Test learning results. In the context of a case like this, a negative t-count value can mean positive. So that the t-value is calculated to be 31,678.

Next is the stage of finding the value of the table t, where the table is searched based on the value of df (degree of freedom) and the value of significance ($\alpha/2$). From the output above, it is known that the df value is

29 and the value of $0.05/2$ is equal to 0.025. We use this value as a reference basis in finding the t-value of the table in the distribution of t-values of statistical tables. So, the t-value of the table is 2.045.

Thus, because the value of t is calculated $31,678 > t$ table 2,045, it can be concluded that H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. So, it can be concluded that there is an average difference between Pre-Test and Post Test learning outcomes, which means that there is an influence of the use of the Multicultural Learning Model on increasing the learning capacity of students in an isolated area, Bau Tana Village, Toraja.

Relevant research shows that a multicultural approach allows students to see the value of diversity and appreciate their own culture, ultimately increasing their learning capacity. In the context of isolated areas such as Bau Tana Village, where students may feel marginalized in a national education system oriented towards dominant culture, this learning model can restore a sense of belonging and pride in their cultural identity. Research by Ferguson (Ferguson-Patrick, 2020) states that inclusive learning to students' cultural backgrounds can improve students' cognitive skills and emotional engagement.

Thus, the finding that the multicultural learning model improves the learning capacity of students in Bau Tana Village is in line with previous research which shows that an inclusive educational approach to local culture is essential in increasing participation, motivation, and learning achievement in often marginalized areas.

Impact on Strengthening Local Community Institutions

The interviews with community leaders, teachers, and parents provided rich qualitative data that underscored the impact of the Multicultural Learning Model in strengthening the sense of community in Bau Village. This section discusses the findings from these interviews, focusing on how the model contributed to greater community participation in educational activities and local initiatives, ultimately reinforcing the institutional foundations of the village.

A key theme that emerged from the interviews was the increased sense of community cohesion. Community leaders reported that the introduction of the multicultural learning model not only benefitted students but also extended its influence beyond the classroom. By fostering an inclusive approach to education, the model encouraged collaboration and mutual respect, leading to greater community participation in educational activities. For example, a village elder noted that parents who had previously been less involved in their children's education began to attend school events, volunteer for community-based initiatives, and even engage in discussions about educational needs and cultural preservation.

Teachers echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that the multicultural approach helped bridge the gap between school and community. They reported a notable increase in parental involvement in school activities, such as cultural festivals, collaborative learning projects, and discussions on local heritage. This active participation was especially important in a rural, isolated community like Bau Village, where formal educational resources are limited. One teacher highlighted that by involving parents in culturally relevant educational activities, the model empowered families to take a more active role in their children's learning, contributing to a stronger sense of shared responsibility for educational outcomes.

Parents themselves reported feeling more connected to both the school and the broader community. The interviews revealed that many parents initially hesitated to engage in school matters due to a lack of formal education or confidence in their ability to contribute. However, the culturally relevant nature of the curriculum allowed them to share their own experiences and traditions, making them feel valued and included. One parent remarked, "I felt like I had something to offer when the school asked me to talk about our local rituals. I never thought my knowledge could help my child's education." This sense of inclusion empowered parents to participate more fully in both educational and community-building activities.

Another important finding was the strengthening of local institutions through the multicultural learning model. Community leaders emphasized that the increased participation in education extended to broader community initiatives. For instance, local leaders noticed higher engagement in village meetings and development programs. They attributed this shift to the way the multicultural learning model fostered a more inclusive mindset, encouraging individuals to view their cultural knowledge and experiences as valuable assets not only within the school but also in village governance and development efforts. A village chief noted, "The school's approach reminded us that our traditions and values can guide the development of our community. We started to see education as part of our culture, not separate from it."

This integration of education and cultural heritage strengthened the institutional foundation of Bau Village, with community members working together more cohesively on local initiatives. For instance, a cultural festival that was traditionally organized by only a few families became a village-wide event after the introduction of the multicultural model. The inclusion of younger generations in the planning process helped bridge the generational divide and allowed for the transmission of cultural knowledge from elders to students. Community leaders saw this as a pivotal moment for the village, as it demonstrated the potential of education to unify the community and preserve local traditions while embracing new ideas.

Therefore, the interviews revealed that the multicultural learning model had a profound impact on strengthening the sense of community in Bau Village. By fostering an inclusive approach to education, the model increased community participation in educational activities and local initiatives, helping to build a stronger institutional foundation. The model's emphasis on cultural relevance empowered parents, encouraged collaboration between community members, and reinforced the connection between education and local cultural heritage. This holistic approach to learning and community development offers a valuable framework for strengthening isolated communities through education.

The holistic approach found in the multicultural learning model in Bau Village is also supported by previous research that shows the importance of community collaboration in strengthening educational institutions in isolated communities. Research Franco (Franco & Tracey, 2019) suggests that education that actively involves the community can build a stronger institutional foundation and ensure the sustainability of educational programs. Findings from interviews that show that this model encourages collaboration and strengthens the relationship between education and society shows a positive correlation between this learning model and the development of more sustainable local institutions.

This finding is also related to research by Lara et. Al. (Solano Lara et al., 2018), which emphasizes the importance of education as a tool for community empowerment, especially in marginalized areas. The holistic approach described in the multicultural learning model in Bau Village is in line with Freire's idea that education should facilitate the community's critical engagement with their social and cultural realities. By leveraging education to strengthen social cohesion and cultural relevance, this model offers a valuable framework for community development in isolated communities, not only through formal education but also through the strengthening of local social and cultural institutions.

Thus, this discussion shows that the findings of the interviews support various previous studies that emphasize that multicultural education can be a powerful tool to strengthen a sense of togetherness, increase community participation, and build a close relationship between education and cultural heritage. This approach makes a significant contribution to the development of isolated communities by strengthening institutional structures and empowering communities through collaboration and cultural preservation.

Conclusion

The study confirms that the multicultural learning model improves the learning capacity of students in Bau Tana Village is in line with previous research which shows that an inclusive educational approach to local culture is essential in increasing participation, motivation, and learning achievement in often marginalized areas. Moreover, multicultural education can be a powerful tool to strengthen a sense of togetherness, increase community participation, and build a close relationship between education and cultural heritage.

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