Minority Ethnic Students' Experiences in Multicultural Education: A Study Based on Banks' Five Dimensions at an Elite Catholic High School in Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural education is a critical policy objective in diverse societies like Indonesia. This qualitative study explores the experiences of four minority ethnic students at an elite Catholic high school in Surabaya, where the majority of students are Chinese Indonesian. Using Banks' Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education as an analytical framework, the data were analysed through thematic analysis. The findings highlight two main dynamics within the institution. The school successfully promotes a positive social environment and provides symbolic empowerment through cultural programs and extracurricular visibility. However, significant structural inequities remain, such as a lack of teacher training in culturally responsive teaching and the implicit favouring of the majority group's privilege, such as access to private tutoring. These factors lead to disproportionate representation, with majority students dominating leadership roles. The paper argues that while the school celebrates diversity, it must move beyond mere tolerance and adopt structural reforms to achieve true social justice and eliminate the unspoken ethnic hierarchy that persists.

Keywords: Multicultural Education, Minority Ethnic Students, Catholic School, Culturally Responsive Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most fundamental aspects of human life. Language not only Multicultural education has become a significant element in today's modern education system, especially in diverse societies like Indonesia, where cultural, ethnic, and religious pluralism shape the national identity. Mahfud (2016) describes multiculturalism as the recognition and appreciation of diversity, including race, ethnicity, and religion. The primary goal of multicultural education is to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to succeed academically (Smith, 2009, as cited in Raihani et al., 2025). One important pedagogical approach for achieving this goal is Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which integrates students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives into the curriculum to enhance learning outcomes (Ng et al., 2021). To achieve this, teachers and educators need to receive training that helps them understand and fight racism, as well as reduce biases based on race. The goal is to create equitable school environments (Blake, Fenning, & Jimerson, 2024).

The origins of multicultural education are rooted in the ethnic movements of the 1960s, where minority ethnic groups demanded educational reforms that would incorporate their

histories, experiences, and perspectives into curricula (Banks, 2016). Initially, the focus was on issues relevant to people of color, but this later expanded to include a broader vision of transforming educational institutions to ensure equal opportunities for all students from diverse backgrounds, including racial, ethnic, cultural, language, and gender groups (Banks, 2016). In the Indonesian context, Raihani (2025) highlights how national education policies have embraced multicultural principles to support unity in the country's diverse society, which aligns with Mahfud's (2016) vision.

This educational system is grounded in the belief that culture encompasses knowledge, values, concepts, and the interpreted meanings within a group (Banks, 2016). The aim is to eliminate cultural prejudice and guarantee equitable access to education and success for everyone; therefore, professional learning in anti-racism and racial bias reduction is necessary (Banks, 2016; Benediktsson, 2022; Blake, Fenning, & Jimerson, 2024). Furthermore, Banks and Banks (2016) argue that multicultural education enhances educators' understanding of the complexities of diverse cultures, intersectionality, and the societal structures that may oppress certain groups. May and Sleeter (2010) expand upon Banks' work by advocating for a pedagogy that challenges power structures and promotes transformative learning, relevant to addressing minority experiences in majority-dominated settings.

Banks and Banks (2007) propose five key dimensions to facilitate multicultural education reform: Content Integration, Knowledge Construction, Prejudice Reduction, Equity Pedagogy, and an Empowering School Culture. These dimensions are especially significant in faith-based schools, where a strong religious identity and institutional norms can sometimes conflict with the goal of inclusivity (Taylor & Elphick, 2023). Cho and Heinz (2025) argue that Catholic schools, like the one in this study, must balance religious identity and multicultural inclusivity, as increasing cultural and religious diversity among students presents unique challenges for teachers to manage.

In Indonesia, Ki Hajar Dewantara, a prominent educator, emphasized the role of multicultural education in the development of national unity and cultural independence. He warned against individualism, egoism, and Western materialism, and emphasized the importance of cultivating cultural values to prevent social division (Latif, 2020). Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy stresses both individual identity and collective understanding of cultural values and behavior. His emphasis on cultural independence aligns with Indonesia's current need for an educational approach that balances multiculturalism with national unity.

This study focuses on minority ethnic students in an elite Catholic high school in Surabaya, Indonesia, where the majority of students are Chinese Indonesian. These minority students, such as Javanese and Balinese, often experience tensions between their ethnic heritage and Indonesian national identity (Dawis, 2010). Catholic schools, historically chosen by ethnic minorities, provide a unique setting where students adapt to the surroundings while preserving ancestral, local, and universal values (Lim, 2009). Previous studies on multicultural education have explored various aspects, including teacher beliefs and national policies, but often overlook the direct experiences of minority ethnic students in majority-dominated educational settings.

For example, Harjatanaya and Hoon (2018) found that teachers in multicultural settings often struggle with the complex relationship between Chinese Indonesian and national Indonesian identities; they focus on tolerance without fully addressing deeper identity issues. Similarly, research by Rohman and Lessy (2017) on Catholic schools highlighted that, despite promoting a tolerant environment, ethnic hierarchies still persist, particularly in terms of leadership positions and social dynamics. These findings suggest a gap in understanding how multicultural education is experienced by students in settings where the majority group holds cultural dominance.

Building upon previous research, this study addresses the following research question: How do minority ethnic students experience multicultural education practices in an elite Catholic high school in Surabaya, Indonesia, where the majority of students are Chinese Indonesian? This research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities minority ethnic students face in a multicultural education setting, especially in a school with a dominant cultural group. The study also explores how the institutional culture and values of a Catholic school influence the implementation of multicultural education.

This study fills a gap in the literature by focusing on the lived experiences of minority ethnic students in Catholic schools, where cultural pluralism and religious identity intersect. Through exploring their experiences, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on multicultural education and provide practical implications for school policies and practices, especially in diverse and faith-based educational settings.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design, which included field research and the collection of descriptive data from spoken words, written texts, and observable actions. As Creswell (2019) notes, a key characteristic of qualitative studies is the in-depth examination of a problem to elaborate a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon. The instruments used for data gathering were a semi-structured interview guide and document analysis.

The study was conducted at an elite Catholic senior high school in Surabaya, Indonesia, which provided a rich context for studying multicultural education due to its unique demographic composition. The student body is characterized by a Chinese Indonesian majority, and while the student population is predominantly Catholic (68%), it also includes students from different religious backgrounds, such as Christian (27%), Buddhist (2%), Hindu (1%), and Confucian (1%). Furthermore, the school has students from various regions across Indonesia, including East Java, Bali, Borneo, and West Nusa Tenggara. Among the 36 students in the XI Social class, 32 identified as Chinese Indonesian, while the remaining students came from other ethnic groups, including Javanese and Balinese.

The study focused on a purposive sample of four senior high school students (aged 16–17) from the XI Social class, all of whom belonged to minority ethnic groups other than Chinese Indonesian. This group included three Javanese students and one Balinese student, with two Javanese students identifying as Christian, one as Muslim, and the Balinese student as Catholic. The participants were selected based on their minority ethnic status within the school to understand their unique experiences in a majority-dominated environment.

The details of the demographics of the participants are as follows:

Table 1. Demographics of the Participants

Student	Gender	Hometown	Ethnicity	Religion
Student 2	Male	Surabaya, East Java	Javanese	Christian
Student 19	Male	Sidoarjo, East Java	Javanese	Islam
Student 23	Male	Bali	Balinese	Catholic
Student 36	Female	Surabaya, East Java	Javanese	Christian

The participants were selected from a class that reflects the school's ethnic diversity. The selected participants came from stable family backgrounds, with parents who held bachelor's to master's degrees. The primary language spoken at home was Indonesian, although the students also spoke their native languages, Javanese and Balinese.

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, designed to explore the participants' experiences with multicultural education practices. The interview guide was based on Banks' (2007) five dimensions of multicultural education reform, including Content Integration, Knowledge Construction, Prejudice Reduction, Equity Pedagogy, and

Empowering School Culture. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, document analysis was used to provide contextual data about the student composition in the school, such as the number of Chinese Indonesians, Catholics, and students from other religious backgrounds. This helped complement and triangulate the data, offering a broader understanding of the students' experiences.

To ensure the credibility and dependability of the study, efforts were made to maintain data validity through the member checking. The participants were asked to review the transcribed interview data to verify that the interpretations and conclusions reflected their experiences accurately. This process helped ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the data.

To address the small sample size and its limitations, it is important to note that the study was designed to focus on in-depth insights from a small group of participants, which offers rich, detailed data about their experiences. While four participants may not be statistically representative of the entire student body, their experiences are highly valuable in exploring the specific challenges and opportunities faced by minority ethnic students in a majority-dominated educational environment. This small sample size reflects a purposeful choice in qualitative research, as it prioritizes depth over breadth, which is more useful in understanding complex social phenomena (Creswell, 2019).

The guide for the interview questions, which details the dimensions and indicators, is presented below:

Table 2. The Guide for the Interview Questions

Dimension	Variable	Indicator
Content Integration	Cultural representation in curriculum	The use of diverse examples and materials
	Cultural relevance of subject matter	Connection between curriculum and students' experiences
Knowledge Construction	Understanding cultural influences on knowledge	Awareness of cultural assumptions
	Collaborative Learning Opportunities	Opportunities to work with those from different backgrounds
Prejudice Reduction	Inclusive classroom environment	Positive interactions and relationships
	Challenging stereotypes	Awareness of harmful stereotypes
Equity Pedagogy	Diverse teaching methods	Accommodating different learning styles
	Equal opportunities for all students	Access to resources and support
Empowering School Culture	Inclusive school climate	Respect and belonging
	Student voice and participation	Opportunities for input and leadership

Data were collected through individual interviews with the four participants. All interview questions were originally conducted and subsequently transcribed verbatim in Bahasa Indonesia to capture the nuance of the students' language and ensure a deeper understanding of the content. While conducting the interviews, all sessions were audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

The collected data from the interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis. This process involved systematically identifying recurring patterns and core themes within the participants' spoken words to address the central research question regarding their experiences with multicultural education practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

This study examined the experiences of minority ethnic students in the context of multicultural education practices at an elite Catholic high school in Surabaya, Indonesia. The findings reveal both positive efforts toward symbolic empowerment and the promotion of cultural pluralism, as well as ongoing systemic challenges that affect full inclusivity. The results, framed within Banks' Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education, provide an understanding of how multicultural education operates in a faith-based school setting, where the interaction between a Chinese Indonesian majority and minority ethnic students, such as Javanese and Balinese, shapes the educational environment. The following table summarizes the main findings based on Banks' Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education:

Table 3. The Findings Based on Banks' Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education

Dimension	Findings
Content Integration	Minority ethnic students felt their cultural identities were affirmed in social science subjects (Sociology, History), but they felt disconnected in STEM subjects (Math, Economics). e.g. *"I think many subjects, mainly in social fields, are basically connected to culture. For example, textbooks and lesson materials in Sociology and History often feature diverse groups of people from Indonesian society."* (Student 36)
Knowledge Construction	Minority ethnic students had limited engagement in deep academic discussions due to disparities in prior knowledge, with Chinese Indonesian students often benefiting from private tutoring. e.g. *"In group work, my friends who go to tutoring know more about the topic, like economic concepts."* (Student 2)
Prejudice Reduction	Extracurricular programs, such as Independence Day games and interreligious choir collaborations, helped reduce ethnic and religious prejudice. However, subtle teasing persisted. e.g. *"I am a Javanese, and the only Muslim here in my class. While my classmates sometimes tease me, I don't take these jokes personally, and I believe it's natural for us. We maintain strong friendships."* (Student 19)
Equity Pedagogy	Teachers relied on standardized lecture-based methods, which favored students with prior academic preparation (e.g., those with private tutoring). e.g. *"I always struggle in English and Math. While many people assume that Balinese individuals are fluent in English due to our frequent interactions with foreigners, my experience is different."* (Student 23)
Empowering School Culture	Minority students gained visibility and opportunities. However, leadership roles were still largely dominated by Chinese Indonesian students. e.g. *"As part of the school's annual 'Pagelaran Budaya' cultural performance, I was asked by my teacher, the coordinator of the cultural studies program, to wear kebaya and sing 'Lelo Ledung' and 'Sayang'. These traditional Javanese songs were well-received by the audience, especially 'Sayang', which many students knew and enjoyed singing along to.*" (Student 36)

Discussion

The study explores the experiences of minority ethnic students in the context of multicultural education at an elite Catholic high school in Surabaya, Indonesia. It highlights a dual reality: on one hand, students experience symbolic empowerment and cultural pluralism, while on the other hand, they face persistent systemic challenges. The findings reveal that multicultural education efforts are being made, but gaps remain in achieving true inclusivity, especially in this majority-dominated educational environment. This dual reality reveals the ongoing complexities of promoting true inclusivity within educational settings dominated by a particular ethnic group.

Framed by Banks' (2007) five dimensions of multicultural education, the findings show that the school has made significant strides toward promoting cultural pluralism. These efforts resonate with global studies that acknowledge the challenges faced by minority groups in majority-dominated educational settings, where inclusive policies often unintentionally marginalize minority groups. Moreover, in faith-based schools, the strong religious identity and institutional norms sometimes conflict with the goal of inclusivity (Taylor & Elphick, 2023). The religious aspect of the school creates both an opportunity for interfaith engagement and a challenge in fully accommodating the diverse religious and cultural identities of minority students. The findings also reflect Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy, emphasizing cultural independence and national unity, suggesting that for true inclusivity, transformative education practices that promote equity are essential. This highlights the need for systemic reforms to address the deep-rooted disparities present in Indonesian education.

Content Integration

Content Integration, a central dimension of multicultural education, emphasizes embedding diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum to reflect students' identities and foster inclusivity (Banks, 2016). In Indonesia's pluralistic society, where ethnic and cultural diversity play an important role in shaping national identity, this approach is important for affirming minority ethnic students' backgrounds in a school dominated by a Chinese Indonesian majority. The general atmosphere in the school was positive, characterized by strong relationships between students, teachers, and peers, which contributed to a safe, supportive, and respectful learning environment. This supportive climate made students feel valued, with their identities acknowledged by their peers and teachers.

Minority ethnic students felt their cultural identities were most strongly affirmed in social science subjects, such as Sociology and History, where the curriculum explicitly included Indonesia's ethnic diversity. For example, Sociology lessons explored topics such as interethnic marriage and adat (customary) practices, while History classes incorporated narratives of Indonesia's multicultural past, which helped to highlight the notion of cultural pluralism. Students expressed that many subjects, particularly in social sciences, were closely tied to culture. They noted that textbooks and lesson materials in Sociology and History frequently featured diverse groups from Indonesian society. Similarly, in Bahasa Indonesia, students reported that reading stories from different regions helped them feel their culture was recognized and valued.

However, STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) were perceived as culturally neutral by the students. These subjects focused on abstract concepts such as integral calculus and statistics, without incorporating cultural perspectives. This cultural disconnect left minority ethnic students feeling alienated, especially those from regions with limited access to STEM resources. Participants, especially those from social science backgrounds, mentioned that math and economics lacked cultural discourse, which created a gap in engagement for these students. Specifically, research examines secondary science teachers' pedagogical design capacities to create effective multicultural curricula, and this

research highlights the need for subject-specific skills to achieve true content integration (Brown & Livstrom, 2020).

The findings from this study resonate with Nurman et al. (2022), who emphasize the importance of a pluralistic curriculum that incorporates multiple cultural perspectives. This aligns with Mahfud's (2016) perspective that education should serve to preserve cultural roots, and it helps students connect to their identities while engaging with the broader educational system. However, the study also reveals that this integration is partial, while social sciences include cultural content, STEM subjects remain culturally neutral. This gap in curriculum integration is consistent with Holtz et al. (2025), who found that teachers often struggle to make lessons in STEM relevant to students from diverse backgrounds, which hampers equity in these subjects.

As Banks (2016) argues, culture should be integrated across all disciplines, not just in subjects like Sociology and History. The lack of integration of ethnomathematics, which links culture to math and science, highlights significant systemic barriers in Indonesia's educational system. This is similar to the challenges observed by Harjatanaya and Hoon (2018), who noted difficulties in reconciling ethnic identity with academic content in certain subjects. The current study also suggests that the disconnect minority students feel is less about ethnic exclusion and more about unequal access to education, especially in regions where educational resources are scarce. Addressing this inequality requires targeted interventions, such as cultural integration in all subject areas and access to resources for underprivileged students.

This observation contradicts the concerns of Ki Hajar Dewantara (Latif, 2020), who warned that an overemphasis on Western materialist education can weaken students' cultural independence. When local cultural content is excluded from subjects like STEM, minority ethnic students may struggle to link their classroom learning to their community's traditions and knowledge. This resulting gap impairs their academic involvement and complicates their process of forming a stable identity. As Banks (2016) advocates, content integration should not be confined to humanities but should span all subjects to cultivate a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students, regardless of their ethnic or regional background.

Knowledge Construction

Knowledge Construction, as a key dimension of multicultural education, emphasizes the need for students to engage with diverse cultural perspectives and critically examine the biases inherent in academic content (Banks, 2016). This dimension seeks to promote active engagement by helping students understand how cultural assumptions, frames of reference, and perspectives shape the knowledge constructed within disciplines. In the current study, it became clear that there were significant differences in prior academic preparation, which affected how students engaged in collaborative learning and academic discussions.

The study found that Chinese Indonesian students often benefited from external resources like private tutoring, which gave them an academic advantage in subjects like English and Mathematics. This disparity in academic preparation meant that Chinese Indonesian students frequently took leadership roles during group projects, while minority ethnic students, such as Balinese and Javanese students, often felt sidelined in deeper academic discussions. This created an unequal playing field, with minority ethnic students contributing primarily cultural perspectives rather than engaging in substantive academic debate. This emphasizes the importance of equalizing access to educational resources and providing more targeted support to disadvantaged students.

The Balinese student (Student 23) explained that in class discussions, there was often a coordinator for the group, and each member would share their viewpoints. However, some students who had attended private tutoring were more knowledgeable on certain topics and

were able to contribute more effectively. The Balinese student noted that, due to his own limited preparation, his contributions were often focused on sharing his personal or cultural insights rather than engaging with the academic content.

The resource gap that arose from access to private tutoring allowed Chinese Indonesian students to dominate academic discussions, while minority ethnic students were often relegated to cultural informant roles, sharing personal or cultural insights rather than engaging critically with the subject matter. This pattern of unequal academic participation reflects the study by Rohman and Lessy (2017), who explored similar challenges in multicultural education in Indonesian schools. While Rohman and Lessy focused on religious differences, this study extends the discussion to ethnic and knowledge gaps as primary barriers for marginalized students. To combat this, the study supports changes in teaching practices and the incorporation of resources that ensure all students can fully participate in academic discussions.

The complexities of ethnic identity, particularly among minority groups like the Chinese Indonesians, are further explored by Urban (2013), who argues that identity is not fixed but rather is shaped by historical processes of marginalization and discrimination. This notion aligns with the challenges faced by minority ethnic students in the school, where their cultural identities are continuously influenced by both their heritage and the dominant majority culture in the classroom. This highlights the need for inclusive pedagogy that encourages students to engage with both their cultural heritage and the academic content.

This finding mirrors Doucette et al. (2021), who argue that the tourist gaze, where minority students are invited to contribute cultural knowledge but not participate in critical academic discourse, reinforces an illusion of inclusivity in collaborative learning environments. Minority ethnic students, such as Student 23, felt disconnected from deeper academic discussions because their input was limited to cultural stories, rather than critical academic inquiry. This dynamic reflects broader issues in the curriculum where majority knowledge is often prioritized, and non-majority cultural contributions are marginalized. Smets (2024) discusses how a dominant curriculum can reinforce the exclusion of diverse perspectives and hinder the development of critical thinking among minority students.

The study's findings also align with Harjatanaya and Hoon (2018), who noted that multicultural education often struggles to address academic achievement disparities, especially in contexts where the majority culture dominates the educational landscape. Similarly, in countries like South Korea, scholars have used multicultural education frameworks to explain how persistent academic achievement gaps exist due to ethnic and regional disparities (Park & Cho, 2020). In this study, the issue is not solely about ethnic exclusion but is also closely tied to unequal educational resources, particularly private tutoring.

The inability to move students beyond surface-level exchanges contradicts the principles of critical multiculturalism, as outlined by May and Sleeter (2010). This theory advocates for a pedagogy that not only promotes tolerance but also challenges power structures and encourages transformative learning. Unfortunately, in this study, the school's approach to knowledge construction seemed to maintain the current social order, where minority ethnic students were unable to fully engage in critical academic discourse, which restricted their intellectual growth.

Finally, this study takes Banks (2010) a step further by showing that regional inequalities in Indonesia worsen the challenges of multicultural education. While multicultural issues are important, the inequalities resulting from regional educational disparities create significant barriers for minority ethnic students, especially in subjects like STEM, where resources and tutoring are not equally accessible. This supports Ki Hajar Dewantara's emphasis on creating an educational system that helps students become independent thinkers, but the current practices are insufficient in ensuring that all students, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, can achieve that level of academic independence.

Prejudice Reduction

Prejudice reduction, a core dimension of multicultural education, aims to promote positive attitudes toward diverse cultural groups through inclusive activities and interactions (Banks, 2010). This study reveals that the school's extracurricular programs played a significant role in enhancing intergroup relationships and reducing prejudice among students. For instance, during Independence Day, traditional games like balap karung (sack races) and tarik tambang (tug-of-war) were combined with regional variations, such as Javanese and Balinese dance elements. These activities helped students appreciate diverse cultural practices and facilitated cross-cultural interactions.

The only Muslim student in the class (Student 19) noted that while occasional teasing from classmates occurred, he didn't take it personally, and believed it to be a natural part of their interactions. This student emphasized that strong friendships were maintained, and he felt no discrimination from the teachers or the materials, despite the school being Catholic. He appreciated the opportunity to learn from various perspectives, especially given the diversity of students from different provinces.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also revealed that teasing and subtle biases persisted, especially in informal interactions. These minor instances of prejudice were often dismissed as harmless by some students but could have left others feeling excluded or hurt.

Student 2 also shared that despite being questioned about his ethnicity due to his appearance, he had no issues interacting with Chinese Indonesian classmates. He explained that those who knew him understood his Javanese heritage, and this had never led to conflict. His father, a Christian pastor, encouraged him to attend the Catholic school, where he had become involved in the religious community.

Although the school's intercultural activities, such as extracurricular events and interreligious choir performances, successfully helped create a welcoming environment and reduced ethnic and religious prejudice, this study's findings align with those of Harjatanaya and Hoon (2018), who argue that while multicultural education programs may celebrate diversity, they often fail to address the deeper systemic causes of prejudice. Ethnic essentialism, or the practice of reducing individuals to cultural stereotypes, continues to persist.

Another Javanese student in the choir (Student 36) observed that, although most of the choir members and trainers were Chinese Indonesian, she did not feel discrimination or prejudice in the choir, despite the differences in ethnicity and background.

However, the study also shows that the dominance of the majority group, especially in extracurricular leadership roles, could reinforce cultural hierarchies. For instance, the school's ability to promote interreligious tolerance through the choir demonstrates the potential of faith-based schools to bring diverse groups together. But it also points to minority ethnic students who, despite their active participation, still find themselves relegated to less visible roles. This aligns with Lim (2009), who observed that minority groups in Catholic schools in Indonesia often successfully adapt but are still subject to implicit cultural biases and inequalities.

Furthermore, programs like the Pancasila Project, which emphasized values such as democracy and cultural diversity, were successful in promoting inclusivity at the surface level. However, they failed to address the underlying systemic issues of ethnic bias and cognitive roots of prejudice. This study calls for a more demanding pedagogical approach to reduce biases and ensure that multicultural education goes beyond symbolic activities and engages deeply with issues of ethnic inequality.

The findings align with Cho and Heinz (2025), who argue that Catholic schools must balance religious identity with the need to create inclusive environments for diverse student populations. In this context, the school's approach to prejudice reduction was largely effective but highlighted the need for a deeper commitment to addressing the structural and cognitive dimensions of prejudice, as opposed to focusing solely on superficial inclusion.

Equity Pedagogy

Equity pedagogy, a critical dimension of multicultural education, involves adapting teaching methods to meet the diverse academic and cultural needs of students, ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all (Banks & Banks, 2016). In this study, students reported that most teachers showed limited awareness of their individual learning needs, especially for students from marginalized ethnic and regional backgrounds. Many teachers relied on standardized teaching approaches, primarily using lecture-based formats that favored students with prior academic preparation or those who had access to external resources, such as private tutoring. This one-size-fits-all approach meant that students who were already ahead, particularly those from urban areas, had a distinct advantage. This reinforced existing inequities in the classroom, particularly for students who lacked access to educational support outside of school.

The Balinese student (Student 23) shared his struggles with English and Math, pointing out that while many people assume Balinese individuals are fluent in English due to frequent interactions with foreigners, his experience differed. He explained that coming from a smaller town outside of Denpasar, the quality of education varied significantly. This student observed that his friends, who excelled in English, likely benefited from former schools, private tutoring, or frequent travels abroad, which created a sense of being left behind.

This experience illustrates how the traditional, lecture-based approach often privileged certain students over others. The student's background and access to education were significant factors in their struggles, which reflect broader educational inequalities. These regional and ethnic disparities affected students' academic progress, especially when teachers were not attuned to the students' varied learning styles and backgrounds.

Although some younger teachers made efforts to incorporate student-centered methods, such as "heart-to-heart" small group discussions to explore personal or cultural issues, these efforts were inconsistent. The focus was often more on social comfort than on adapting academic content to help students catch up or engage in critical learning. This inconsistency in applying student-centered methods reflects a broader concern raised by Ng et al. (2021) and Blake, Fenning, & Jimerson (2024), who highlight that teachers often lack sufficient training in culturally responsive pedagogy. This training gap is a major barrier to creating equitable and anti-racist school environments.

Furthermore, the study found that urban, Chinese Indonesian students often had greater access to private tutoring, which preserved inequities and reinforced academic disparities. Teachers, consciously or unconsciously, tended to favor these students, giving them more opportunities to lead class discussions or participate in extracurricular activities. This is in line with the research of Raihani (2017) on the importance of equitable access and inclusive teaching practices. However, as this study demonstrates, the lack of personalized support for students from rural areas or marginalized ethnic backgrounds, like Student 23, compounds the inequities within the system.

Most students felt that the standardized assessments used in the school were fair because they were applied equally to everyone. However, Student 23's experience revealed a hidden issue: teachers often showed favoritism toward students who were already academically talented or socially active, many of whom were Chinese Indonesians. This created a systemic disadvantage for students from marginalized regions or ethnic backgrounds, who may not have had access to the same preparation. This aligns with Benediktsson (2022)'s concerns about the inadequacy of teacher education policies to address multicultural needs, particularly in terms of preparing educators to engage with diverse student backgrounds.

This finding also resonates with Banks (2010)'s call for institutional transformation to address systemic problems within education. The study emphasizes that the educational ideal of Ki Hajar Dewantara, which seeks to achieve physical and intellectual harmony for all

students, remains an aspiration due to the lack of targeted support for marginalized learners. Student 23's need for private tutoring is a perfect example of how structural inequalities persist, further exacerbating the achievement gap between urban and rural students.

The study highlights a shift in focus from policy-level inequalities, as discussed by Nurman et al., 2022, to understated issues of favoritism within the classroom. Specifically, the privilege of urban Chinese Indonesian students and the standardized assessments that often fail to expose these classroom inequities show that education policies are not enough on their own. Teachers' professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy is essential to move beyond these surface-level adjustments.

This study's findings align with Harjatanaya and Hoon (2018), who noted that multicultural education programs often fail to address the deeper systemic issues of ethnic stereotyping and academic favoritism. The research shows that ethnic stereotypes, such as the assumption that Balinese students are weaker in English, reflect broader educational inequities that must be addressed through transformative pedagogical practices.

Empowering School Culture

Empowering School Culture, as defined by Banks (2016), involves restructuring the school's cultural environment to ensure that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender groups experience equality and feel empowered. In this study, participants perceived the school's culture as one that strongly valued diversity and inclusion. The school's promotion program played a crucial role in fostering a diverse student body from various regions of Indonesia. Although the majority of students were Chinese Indonesian, all participants felt comfortable and included within the school community, highlighting the positive role the school culture played in supporting minority ethnic students.

Student 36 expressed immense pride in being part of the school's annual cultural performance, Pagelaran Budaya, which celebrated Indonesian traditions. She described how she was invited to participate in the event, where she wore traditional attire and sang well-known Javanese songs. The performance was well-received by the audience, and the success of the event led to an invitation to repeat the performance in front of parents. This participation allowed her to experience visibility and cultural pride, as the school provided a platform for minority ethnic students to showcase their cultural identities.

This experience demonstrates how the school's recognition of cultural heritage empowered minority ethnic students, providing them with visibility and platforms to celebrate their cultural identity.

Similarly, students from diverse backgrounds had the opportunity to take on leadership roles within extracurricular activities. One student (Student 2), for example, was involved in the student council, while another (Student 19) excelled in sports. These students appreciated the opportunities the school provided for them to engage in leadership roles and contribute to various school programs. Student 2 noted that despite being Javanese, his ethnicity was never a source of conflict, as his classmates respected her background.

This leadership involvement helped develop a sense of belonging and empowerment for minority ethnic students. Student 36 felt that the Pagelaran Budaya was a symbol of pluralism in action, countering fears of bourgeois individualism as described by Mahfud (2016), by recognizing minority cultural expressions in a majority-dominated setting.

However, despite these empowering practices, the findings reveal a persistent tension between empowerment and exclusion. While minority ethnic students gained visibility and opportunities, leadership roles in high-profile activities, such as the choir and student council, were still implicitly held by Chinese Indonesians. This supports subtle cultural hierarchies within the school and shows that even in inclusive settings, systemic inequities persist. This aligns with Harjatanaya and Hoon's (2018) observation that while multicultural education

programs may promote symbolic empowerment, they often fail to dismantle the deeper structural inequalities that persist within institutions.

Moreover, while the Catholic identity of the school promotes interfaith tolerance, it also requires minority ethnic students to contend with institutional norms that may not fully align with their own cultural and religious identities. For example, Student 2, a Javanese Christian, participated in Mass services but avoided discussing religion with Catholic peers, an action that reveals the dual realities of empowerment and exclusion within the same institutional context. The findings underscore the need for a redefined approach to empowerment, one that not only celebrates diversity but also addresses the structural barriers that prevent genuine inclusion. While symbolic recognition programs like the Pagelaran Budaya promote a positive sense of cultural pride, they are insufficient in overcoming deep-rooted cultural hierarchies. As Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasized, education should not only counter individualism but also address systemic social inequities. This study builds on Banks (2010)'s argument for transformative education, advocating that education must go beyond inclusive programs and actively work to dismantle systemic dominance.

Thus, while the school's culture empowered minority students symbolically, a deeper systemic reform is needed to ensure that minority ethnic students are not merely visible, but also have equal access to leadership roles, opportunities, and decision-making processes. The findings suggest that multicultural education should not be limited to symbolic acts of inclusion but must be embedded in the school's structures and policies to ensure equitable participation for all students.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiences of minority ethnic students in multicultural education at an elite Catholic high school in Surabaya, Indonesia, where the majority of students are Chinese Indonesian. Using Banks' (2007) Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education as a framework, the study examined how the school promotes inclusivity through cultural programs and extracurricular activities. These efforts align with the principles of Prejudice Reduction and Content Integration, which enable minority students to feel valued and respected. Interreligious engagement in these activities also demonstrates the importance of balancing religious identity to create inclusivity in Catholic schools.

However, the study identified challenges within the dimensions of Knowledge Construction and Equity Pedagogy. Inequities arose due to the majority students' access to private tutoring, a lack of teacher training in culturally responsive pedagogy, and the persistence of subtle ethnic stereotypes. While the school creates symbolic empowerment, the concentration of leadership roles among Chinese Indonesian students reinforces existing ethnic hierarchies.

This research contributes to the conversation on multicultural education by showing that celebrating diversity alone does not guarantee equity. The study highlights ethnic and regional resource gaps in Indonesia's faith-based schools, where minority groups must adjust to both institutional settings and their ethnic and national identities. The findings suggest that structural reforms are necessary to address deep-rooted issues, particularly in teacher preparation for culturally responsive teaching.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that schools provide continuous professional development for teachers in culturally responsive teaching, integrate local culture across all subjects, and address gaps in educational resources. Specific recommendations for schools include the development of professional learning communities focused on equity pedagogy, the adoption of culturally inclusive curricula across all subject areas (not just social sciences), and the incorporation of more targeted support for marginalized students, such as academic tutoring for those who lack access to private resources.

Future research should explore the perspectives of Chinese Indonesian students on their privilege and access to private tutoring to better understand the complexities of these educational dynamics. Additionally, research could be expanded to include comparisons between schools with varying proportions of minority groups to understand the broader implications of multicultural education practices across Indonesia.

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