

Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print) ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

Volume 13, Number 1, June 2025 pp. 3073 - 3085

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Issued by English study program of IAIN Palopo

The Role of Indonesian Language Learning in Facilitating a Multicultural Classroom at Junior High School

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Received: 2025-06-23 Accepted: 2025-07-10 DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i1.7204

Abstract

This study aims to analyze how the role of Indonesian language learning as the main communication tool and unifier in multicultural classes at Junior High School. The type of research used is qualitative research. The method used in this research is descriptive method. The data collection techniques used in this research are: 1) Observation, 2) Interview, and 3) documentation. Data analysis techniques used in this research are data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing. Based on the results of research on the role of Indonesian language in Junior High School, researchers see the role of Indonesian language learning in multicultural classes can be seen from how to facilitate cultural interaction through the short story "Dia Berbeda" which has a multicultural context that raises multicultural themes, opening space for students to get to know other cultures through stories and characters. Through short stories that contain conflicts and resolutions related to cultural, religious, or social differences, learners are invited to recognize the importance of accepting and understanding each other which strengthens the sense of tolerance between people. Researchers can conclude that the role of Indonesian language learning in multicultural classes can facilitate intercultural interaction through inclusive expression, foster a sense of tolerance through emotional and reflective experiences of the stories read and increase understanding of multiculturalism by presenting the reality of diversity in a form that is close to the lives of students. Not only by learning works of fiction but all Indonesian language learning plays an important role in the multicultural classroom.

Keywords: The Role of Indonesian Language Learning, Multicultural Classroom, Works of Fiction.

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Introduction

Indonesian is the national language and the official language of the country which has a strategic role in strengthening national identity as well as being a unifying tool amidst the diversity of Indonesian society. In the context of a multicultural country like Indonesia, the existence of Indonesian not only functions as a medium of communication, but also as a symbol of national unity. This language is able to bridge the various differences in ethnicity, culture, religion, and race that exist throughout the archipelago.

According to Mailani (2022), language equality in communication is an important aspect in maintaining the sustainability of harmonious social interactions. Language inequality can lead to misunderstandings in interpreting the messages conveyed, thus potentially disrupting the communication process between individuals and between groups. Therefore, the role of Bahasa Indonesia becomes very vital in the context of education, especially in schools that have students from diverse cultural and regional language backgrounds. As stated in the third pledge of the Youth Pledge, namely "We, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, uphold the language of unity, Bahasa Indonesia", this language has been established as the main symbol of national unification since the time of the national movement (Syifa Aulia Mareta, 2024).

This is also reinforced by the views of Prof. Dr. Abdullah Hassan who stated that Indonesian is a medium of communication that has its own distinctiveness and serves as a binder of diversity in society. Indonesia has a high level of language diversity. Based on data from Ethnologue: *Languages of the World*, there are 715 regional languages spread across various regions in Indonesia. This diversity confirms that Indonesia is a multicultural country. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) define multiculturalism as the acceptance of differences in cultural values, beliefs, gender, customs, and political views without discrimination between groups.

In the context of education, the important role of Indonesian is also reflected in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, specifically in Chapter I Article 1, which states that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process that allows students to actively develop their potential, both in terms of spiritual, intellectual, moral, and skills (Anita Sari, 2020).

Ulubongka sub-district is one of the areas that reflects Indonesia's cultural diversity. The area is inhabited by various tribes such as Ta'a, Bare'e, Kaili, Bugis and Gorontalo, and has Muslim and Christian believers. This diversity is both a cultural richness and a challenge in creating an inclusive and communicative learning atmosphere. Based on initial observations made by researchers at Junior High School, it was found that in the Indonesian language learning process,

especially on discussion text material about tolerance and diversity, there were still students who had difficulty in understanding the material. This is influenced by the lack of understanding of the concept of multiculturalism and the use of local languages that are still dominant, making it difficult to communicate between students from different ethnic backgrounds. The majority of learners come from the Ta'a, Bare'e, and Kaili tribes who are still very thick with their mother tongue. As a result, learners from minority ethnic groups such as Bugis and Gorontalo feel alienated and have difficulty interacting. This phenomenon shows that Indonesian language learning needs to be directed not only to improve language skills, but also as a means of forming attitudes of tolerance and strengthening social cohesion in multicultural classes.

Based on this background, the researcher is interested in studying further through a study entitled "The Role of Indonesian Language Learning in Facilitating Multicultural Classes at Junior High School." This study aims to see the extent to which Indonesian language learning is able to be an effective forum in building inclusive communication and fostering mutual respect between students from different backgrounds.

This research focuses on how the role of Indonesian language learning can facilitate multicultural learners in class VIII A Junior High School?

Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to understand and describe in depth the application of multicultural concepts in Indonesian language learning. The qualitative method was chosen because it is able to reveal the meaning behind social phenomena that occur in the classroom, especially the experiences and views of learners and teachers. As stated by Sugiyono (2022), a qualitative approach produces data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. In this context, researchers focus on the interpretation of social interactions, learning strategies, and multicultural attitudes that arise in teaching and learning activities.

The research was conducted at Junior High School, Ulubongka District, Tojo Una-una Regency, Central Sulawesi. Data collection activities were carried out from January 2025 until the entire series of research was completed. The selection of this location was based on the diverse backgrounds of students who were considered representative to examine the concept of multicultural in the context of Indonesian language learning.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from informants through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and open-ended questionnaires. The informants in this study are Indonesian language subject teachers and students of class VIII A. This

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primary data contains experiences, opinions, and responses to the application of multicultural values in the learning process. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained from relevant documents or archives, such as learning records, photos of teaching and learning activities, and recordings of interviews that have been conducted. Secondary data serves as a complement that strengthens field findings.

In the data collection process, researchers used three main techniques, namely observation, interviews, and documentation.

- a. Observations were conducted directly in the classroom during the learning process. Researchers observed the interaction between teachers and students, students' responses to the material, as well as forms of communication and cooperation between students that reflect multicultural values.
- b. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore more indepth information from the teacher and eleven students of class VIII A. The interviews were designed to find out their perceptions, personal experiences, and views on learning in the context of cultural diversity.
- c. Documentation is used as an additional technique to record relevant visual and written evidence, such as photos of the classroom atmosphere, audio recordings of interviews, and learning documents used by teachers.

In testing the validity of data in research, it is often emphasized on validity and reliability tests. Qualitative research data can be declared valid if there is no difference between what the researcher states and what actually happens to the object under study. Triangulation in this credibility test is defined as checking data from various sources in various ways, and various times. (Anita Sari, 2020) . To ensure data validity, this research applies triangulation techniques, namely testing the credibility of data by utilizing various sources, techniques, and time.

- a. Source triangulation is done by comparing information from teachers and students.
- b. Technical triangulation involves comparing data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation.
- c. Time triangulation is done by repeating the interview or observation process at different times to ensure the consistency of the data obtained. This step is important to ensure that the findings produced truly reflect the reality in the field.

The research instrument used is adjusted to the method applied. In observation, researchers used observation sheets that had been prepared based on indicators of multicultural behavior and social interaction. The interview instrument was in the form of an open-ended question guide designed to explore in-depth information according to the research focus. Meanwhile, for 3076

documentation, researchers prepared a format for recording data from documents or archives found during the research process.

The data analysis technique used in this research refers to the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman. The analysis was carried out through three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

- a. Data reduction is the process of filtering and simplifying the raw data that has been obtained from the field, by focusing only on information that is relevant to the research objectives.
- b. Presenting data in a systematic descriptive narrative form, making it easier for researchers to find patterns and relationships between data.
- c. The final stage is drawing conclusions that are temporary and can change during the data collection process. The final conclusion is formulated based on the synthesis of the data that has been analyzed, and is expected to be able to answer the problem formulation comprehensively.

Results

1. Indonesian Language Learning Outcomes in Multicultural Classrooms

Indonesian language learning using the short story "Dia Berbeda" showed positive results. This short story contains a multicultural theme that introduces different cultural values. Learners were enthusiastic and active in class discussions. The teacher used the short story to introduce the character's cultural background, as well as linking the content of the story with the learners' social reality. Some learners still code-mixed with local languages, but the teacher guided them so that the use of Indonesian remained dominant.

No	Indicator	Activities	Observation Results	
1.	Opening	The teacher opens the	Learners respond to the	
	Activities	lesson with greetings and	greetings and follow the	
		prayers, and conducts	opening well.	
		student attendance.		
2.	Introduction	The teacher explains the	Learners are enthusiastic	
	to Material	meaning of multicultural	and some ask simple	
		fiction and short stories.	questions.	
3.	Utilization of	The teacher explains the	Learners show interest, but	
	Multicultural	short story "She's Different"	some learners still use code-	

The following table shows the results of Indonesian language learning in multicultural classrooms

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	Short Stories	from the cultural	mixing in class	
		background of the		
		characters.		
4.	Attitude	The teacher asks about	Learners express their	
	Toward	learners' experiences with	opinions and personal	
	Cultural	friends from different stories confidently.		
	Differences	cultures.		
5.	Use of	Teachers and learners use	Indonesian is used	
	Indonesian in	Indonesian during the predominantly; the tea		
	the	teaching-learning process. corrects if learners		
	Classroom		mistakes.	
6.	Closing	The teacher together with	Learners are able to name	
	Reflection	the learners summarizes	short stories reflectively.	
		the content of the lesson		
		and motivates them.		

The conclusion of this research shows that Indonesian language learning is effective in strengthening the position of Indonesian as a unifying tool in multicultural classrooms. This effectiveness is supported by interviews conducted with Indonesian language teachers as respondents in the study.

- 1. First, based on respondents' opinions, learning fiction with multicultural context is considered effective in connecting learners who come from different cultural backgrounds. During the learning process, there were some learners who asked questions using their local language. This caused some confusion for the teacher, so she needed to ask for help from other learners to translate the language. Nevertheless, the teacher still responded to the questions using Indonesian as a form of consistency with the role of Indonesian language as a unifier of the nation.
- 2. Second, in an effort to optimize the use of Indonesian language to invite learners to be more open to cultural differences, teachers utilize the learning of reviews of works of fiction as a medium. Through reflection activities on characters, settings, and cultural conflicts in the short stories studied, learners are invited to understand different points of view. Thus, the classroom becomes a tolerant and inclusive space, because learners learn to see cultural uniqueness as a common wealth.
- 3. Third, according to teachers, learning short story reviews with multicultural contexts also helps students understand the theme of multiculturalism better. Indonesian language is considered good enough to be used in the process of interaction between students who come from various cultures. With the

learning of fiction works, the use of Indonesian language becomes easier to apply in teaching and learning activities, especially in building intercultural communication in the classroom.

- 4. Fourth, teachers also revealed that there were some challenges in using Indonesian when teaching short story material with a multicultural context. One of the obstacles encountered is the difficulty of students in understanding the writing of standard words contained in short stories. Some learners experienced confusion about the meaning of these words, so the teacher needed to explain again in detail so that learners could more easily understand the contents of the story. As a solution to this obstacle, the teacher emphasized the importance of consistency in using Indonesian language during learning. This is seen as an obligation, both for Indonesian language teachers and teachers of other subjects, so that students are accustomed to using Indonesian in the school context, including in a multicultural classroom.
- 2. The Role of Indonesian Language Learning in Fiction Materials Using Short Stories with Multicultural Contexts.

The results of research conducted on eleven students of class VIII A Junior High School show that learning Indonesian using the short story "Dia Berbeda" has a positive impact on three main aspects, namely as a language unifying tool, an attitude of tolerance, and a means to deepen understanding of multiculturalism. Most learners showed good Indonesian language skills, with an indication that they began to reduce the use of local languages in the learning process and were able to express their opinions openly. In addition, learners also showed empathy for the characters in the short stories with different cultural backgrounds and were able to relate the content of the stories to their personal experiences and diversity situations they experienced in the classroom. Although there are some learners who still need guidance in understanding multicultural values in depth, in general, learning through short stories is considered effective in creating an inclusive and tolerant learning environment. This can be seen from the active involvement of most learners in discussing and responding to the short story material, both orally and through individual reflection.

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The role of Indonesian language learning using fiction materials with short stories with multicultural contexts can be seen from the table below.

2.AmiraGood enoughAppreciate differencesthe inUnderstand important	sm the content of to personal that it is	
Unifier Unifier 1. Aina Very good Tolerant and open short stories experiences 2. Amira Good enough Appreciate the understand open differences in important to	to personal that it is	
2.AmiraGood enoughAppreciate differencesthe importantUnderstand important	to personal that it is	
AmiraGood enoughAppreciate differencesthe inUnderstand important	that it is	
2. Amira Good Appreciate the Understand enough differences in important to		
enough differences in important to		
characters differences of	o respect the	
	other cultures.	
	ory to diverse	
i	classroom conditions	
different cultures		
	lty explaining	
	aning of	
understanding the multiculturalis	sm	
value of tolerance	1	
5. Enda Good Respect for friends Able to	explain the	
	of living in	
	harmony in differences Understand the importance	
	-	
opinions of respection opinions	ng different	
	Understand the content of	
	with the help of	
differences the teacher	-	
8. Ridho Good Understand the A little confu	sed about the	
enough meaning of cultural value	es in the short	
tolerance story		
9. Moh Alimun Very good Demonstrate an Able to dra	aw conclusions	
open and tolerant from the conte	ent of the story	
attitude towards about cultura	al diversity in	
characters the story		
	to explain the	
	ulticulturalism	
characters in short storie		
11.SitiGoodBe tolerant andCan relate	the cultural	
Nurhalizahnon-judgmentaldiversity in the	e short story to	

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ISSN 2338-4778 (Print) ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

	real life

Assessment Score Description

- Very Good : Active and reflective
- Good : Moderately active
- Good enough : Occasionally mixes languages
- Not good: Often mixes language

Evaluation of the role of Indonesian language learning in multicultural short story material is carried out by assessing three main indicators, namely: role as a unifying language, attitude of tolerance, and understanding of multiculturalism. Based on the data collected, most learners were in the "Good Enough" to "Very Good" category in using Indonesian during the learning process. This indicates that short stories as teaching media can help students familiarize themselves with using Indonesian as a means of communication together, although there are still cases of code-mixing use by some students.

In the aspect of tolerance, almost all learners showed a positive response to the cultural diversity depicted in the short story. Some learners were able to be open, respect other people's opinions, and relate the conflict in the story to the real situation around them. Reflection on the characters and cultural conflicts in the short stories encouraged learners to understand the importance of respecting the cultural backgrounds of their friends, so that the value of empathy and inclusive attitudes could grow naturally in the classroom atmosphere. In terms of understanding multiculturalism, learners showed the ability to connect the message of the story with the context of real life, understand the meaning of living in diversity, and be able to critically restate the moral message of the story. Some learners can even explain the meaning of multiculturalism deeply and reflectively. However, a small number of learners still need teacher assistance to understand certain cultural terms or values contained in the short stories.

Overall, the use of the short story "*Dia Berbeda*" in Indonesian language learning in multicultural classes makes a real contribution in shaping language skills, fostering mutual respect, and strengthening students' awareness of the importance of living in harmony with differences. This confirms that fiction materials oriented towards cultural diversity have a strategic role in multicultural education at the junior high school level.

3. Assessment Score in Indonesian Language Learning

Description of the assessment score used to assess learners' abilities and attitudes in three main aspects: the use of Indonesian as a unifier, tolerance, and understanding of multiculturalism. This assessment score is divided into four categories, namely Very Good, Good, Fairly Good, and Poor. These categories describe the level of engagement and understanding of students during the

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learning of short stories with multicultural contexts. The assessment criteria for Indonesian language learning are as follows:

- 1. Learners who scored Very Good showed active engagement and reflective attitudes in learning. They are able to use Indonesian consistently without mixing it with local languages, are very tolerant of differences, and understand multicultural values well. Learners in this category can also relate the content of the short story to personal experiences and conclude the meaning of the short story in depth.
- 2. Participants with a Good score tend to be quite active, show an open attitude towards differences, and have a sufficient understanding of the content of short stories. They may still need light assistance in linking the contents of the short stories with real-life contexts, but they already have a strong foundation in understanding the value of diversity.
- 3. Meanwhile, learners in the Good Enough category usually still occasionally mix the use of Indonesian with local language and need help in understanding the cultural context in the story.
- 4. The learners with a score of Less Good tend to have difficulties in identifying the value of tolerance and the meaning of multiculturalism, and are less consistent in using Indonesian during learning. This score is an important indicator for teachers to design further learning strategies according to the needs of each learner.
- 5. Response of Class VIII A Students of Junior High School to the Role of Indonesian Language Learning through Short Stories with Multicultural Contexts

Based on interview activities with students of class VIII A, the following results were obtained.

Most learners stated that learning to use the short story "Dia Berbeda" helped them become more accustomed to using Indonesian during class. Learners felt that the content of the short story which was easy to understand and close to their daily lives made them more confident in using Indonesian, although some learners admitted that they still occasionally mixed with local languages. The majority of learners admitted that the short story opened their views on the importance of respecting cultural differences. Learners felt that the stories reflected real situations that they often experienced in class and school, such as differences in the way of speaking, dressing, or habits between each other. Through the conflicts and resolutions in the short stories, learners learn that differences are not to be argued about, but to be accepted in the classroom.

Learners generally understand that multiculturalism means coexisting in a diversity of cultures, religions and customs. They realize that everyone has different backgrounds, but can still respect each other and work together. Some learners even mentioned that they came to know the meaning of mutual tolerance, not easily judging others by their ethnicity or religion, and the importance of knowing other cultures in order to understand different points of view. Most learners were able to relate the contents of the short story to their own lives. Learners told stories of feeling foreign or different because they came from a minority tribe, or seeing their friends who had difficulty getting along because of language differences. But after learning, they felt more open and started to establish better relationships with friends from different backgrounds. The short stories provide valuable lessons about the importance of understanding each other and building togetherness in the midst of diversity in the classroom.

Conclusions

Based on the results of research conducted in class VIII A Junior High School in the 2024/2025 academic year, namely regarding the role of Indonesian language learning in facilitating multicultural classes at Junior High School, From the research results obtained through observation, interviews and documentation, and supported by theoretical studies and relevant research, it can be concluded that Indonesian language learning through the short story *"Dia Berbeda"* plays an important role in shaping an inclusive learning atmosphere in multicultural classes. Three main indicators are, 1) The role of Indonesian language learning as a unifying tool, 2) Fostering an attitude of tolerance, and 3) Deepening understanding of multiculturalism which is the focus of the research shows an interrelated contribution in developing language skills as well as shaping students' social character.

These three roles show that Indonesian language learning is able to make a meaningful contribution not only in the linguistic aspect, but also in the formation of students' social attitudes. Learning through multicultural short stories is proven to be an effective medium in building tolerant, inclusive, and culturally aware characters in a diverse learning environment.

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