

Implementation of Multicultural and Inclusive Education: Challenges and Good Practices in Early Childhood Education

Anadya Nurul Yustikarini¹, Hajerah^{1*}, Ananda Sahira Jasmin¹, Julita¹,
Nurul Izzah Hazirah¹, Sandrina Nabihah¹

¹Universitas Negeri Makassar, INDONESIA

Abstract

This study highlights the critical importance of instilling mutual respect, tolerance, and acceptance of differences from an early age through multicultural and inclusive education, addressing current challenges in early childhood education (ECE) centers. Conducted at Tweety, Uminda, and Ar-Rohman Kindergartens—selected for their varying levels of student diversity and distinct inclusive approaches—the research aimed to identify student diversity, evaluate inclusive education implementation, and examine the roles of teachers and parents in fostering a supportive learning environment. Employing a case study method, data were collected through observations, questionnaires, and interviews with school principals, teachers, and parents. Findings reveal that students possess diverse backgrounds in religion, culture, habits, character, and learning abilities. To address this, schools actively promote multicultural values through daily routine activities, such as collaborative play, group work, sharing, mutual assistance, and non-discriminatory respect. Teachers further support this by providing individualized guidance tailored to each child's unique needs, ensuring comfortable participation for all. Furthermore, parents play a vital role by cooperating with the schools and cultivating an attitude of respect for differences within the home environment. Despite these positive efforts, challenges remain, notably managing the varied characters and abilities of the children and the ongoing need for enhanced communication between schools and parents. Ultimately, the study concludes that implementing multicultural and inclusive education in ECE centers is highly effective. It successfully equips young children with positive social attitudes and the essential ability to interact harmoniously within diverse environments from an early age.

Keywords: Multicultural Education, Inclusive Education, Early Childhood.

* Corresponding author. E-mail addresses: hajerah@unm.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Education, as a process of human resource development, plays an important role in shaping social skills and individual development so that a person is able to interact with the surrounding community and cultural environment (Idris, 1987). In early childhood education, schools function not only as places of learning but also as the initial environment for instilling the values of tolerance, cooperation, mutual respect, and acceptance of differences. Therefore, multicultural and inclusive education needs to be implemented from an early age so that all children, including children with special needs, can learn and play together without discriminatory treatment. An inclusive learning environment is expected to help children build positive social relationships, with teachers acting as facilitators who ensure that every student receives equal learning opportunities without labeling or differential treatment. This is in line with the research of Hajerah et al (2022) who developed a character-based holistic learning model in kindergartens, showing that the reinforcement of character values and appreciation of differences from an early age can be systematically built through a learning model integrated with children's daily activities.

Based on observations conducted at Tweety Kindergarten, Uminda Kindergarten, and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten, it was found that each school faces different conditions and challenges in implementing inclusive education. Some schools still have limited learning facilities and instructional media, while others already have more adequate teaching staff and learning resources. In addition, differences were found in students' learning abilities, character, and social interaction during daily learning activities. The observations also show that teachers play an important role in assisting children with special needs so that they can continue to participate in learning activities together with their peers. Nevertheless, some students are still less able to interact with peers who have different learning abilities. Furthermore, some parents still hold the view that children with special needs should not study together in mainstream schools. This condition reinforces the view of Hajerah et al (2021), who assert that early childhood education services should be designed based on each child's developmental needs rather than being standardized, so that all children can obtain optimal learning opportunities.

This issue is important to examine because early childhood is a *golden age*, a critical period that greatly determines children's character development and social skills in the future (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2013). If children are not accustomed to living side by side with and respecting differences from an early age, this can affect their outlook and social behavior later in life. Although inclusive education has become part of educational policy, in practice there are still various obstacles, such as limited facilities, teacher readiness, and public understanding of the importance of inclusive education in early childhood settings. Therefore, this case is important to study in order to provide a real picture of the implementation of multicultural and inclusive education in the field. In addition, Juwita et al (2025) found that applying a mindfulness approach can improve early childhood concentration ability, making attention span an important aspect that also needs to be considered in implementing inclusive education from an early age.

Through this article, the authors aim to analyze the various obstacles in implementing multicultural and inclusive education in early childhood education centers and to describe the good practices applied at Tweety Kindergarten, Uminda Kindergarten, and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten in creating a learning environment that values diversity. The results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for schools and educators in developing multicultural and inclusive learning in early childhood education. This is important considering that Amri & Intisari (2019) assert that pretend play is one of the important foundations for developing early childhood character, including the ability to cooperate with and respect peers from different backgrounds.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was used to obtain an in-depth picture of the implementation of multicultural and inclusive education, as well as the various challenges and good practices found in early childhood education settings. The case study method was chosen because the research focuses on the real conditions occurring at the three schools in implementing inclusive education for students with diverse backgrounds and abilities. This approach is consistent with Creswell (2015), who explains that a case study is one of the qualitative research designs appropriate for understanding a phenomenon in depth within a real-life context.

The research and data collection process was carried out on 2026 at Tweety Kindergarten, Uminda Kindergarten, and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten. The three schools were selected because they have different facility conditions, student characteristics, and approaches to implementing inclusive education, thereby providing a picture of how multicultural and inclusive education is carried out in early childhood education settings.

The data sources in this study were obtained from school principals, teachers, and parents. Principals were selected because they know the school's policies and programs related to inclusive education, while teachers were selected because they are directly involved in the learning process and student mentoring, while parents were selected to obtain information about family support for the implementation of multicultural and inclusive education. The selection of these data sources is consistent with the view of Hajerah et al (2021) that understanding children's developmental needs should be explored from various parties directly involved in the process of caring for and educating children.

Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, questionnaire distribution, and documentation. Observations were conducted by directly observing the learning process, students' social interactions, and the school environment. In-depth interviews were conducted with principals and teachers, and questionnaires were distributed to parents to obtain information about the implementation of multicultural and inclusive education, the challenges faced, and the efforts made by schools to create a learning environment that respects differences. Documentation was used as supporting data in the form of photographs of activities related to learning in early childhood education centers. Attention was also given to observing students' attention and concentration levels during learning activities, as

suggested by Juwita et al (2025), who emphasized the importance of examining early childhood attention span in the learning process.

The data obtained were then analyzed descriptively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was established through source triangulation by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation from principals, teachers, and parents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Research Location and Student Characteristics

This study was conducted at three early childhood education centers located in Gowa Regency and Makassar City, namely Tweety Kindergarten, Uminda Kindergarten, and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten. The three schools were chosen because they have different facility conditions, student characteristics, and approaches to implementing multicultural and inclusive education.

Tweety Kindergarten is located on Jalan Manggarupi No. 108, Paccinongang, Somba Opu District, Gowa Regency. The class that served as the research site has 18 students with 9 teaching staff. Students at this school come from diverse backgrounds in terms of religion, ethnicity, and family habits, with some children showing developmental delays compared to their peers.

Uminda Kindergarten is located on Jalan Talasalapang No. 38A, Gunung Sari, Rappocini District, Makassar City. The class studied has 12 students with 6 teaching staff. Students at this school come from diverse family backgrounds with different characters and habits. There are also children with special needs who continue to take part in learning activities together with the other students.

Ar-Rohman Kindergarten is located on Jalan Malengkeri No. 4, Makassar City. The class that served as the research site has 12 students with 3 teaching staff. Students at this school have fairly diverse differences in character, learning ability, and ways of interacting, with some children requiring extra attention during learning activities.

Description of Case Findings

Based on the observations and interviews conducted at Tweety Kindergarten, Uminda Kindergarten, and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten on April 8, 11, 12, and 13, 2026, several phenomena related to the implementation of multicultural and inclusive education in early childhood education settings were identified. These findings are described according to the following themes.

Facility Conditions and Learning Environment

The three schools show different facility conditions in supporting the learning process. Tweety Kindergarten still faces limitations in physical facilities, where students use plywood benches without backrests as seating during learning activities. This condition shows that providing adequate basic facilities remains a real challenge for some early childhood education centers (*Observation, Tweety Kindergarten, April 8, 2026*).

In contrast, Umindia Kindergarten has much more adequate facilities, with a clean and well-organized school environment. The school even provides separate bins for organic and non-organic waste as a way of instilling environmental cleanliness habits from an early age (*Observation, Umindia Kindergarten, April 11, 2026*). Meanwhile, Ar-Rohman Kindergarten has quite a lot of learning media, but the piled-up quantity makes the classroom feel more crowded and less comfortable (*Observation, Ar-Rohman Kindergarten, April 12, 2026*). This finding is consistent with Hajerah et al (2024), who showed that the availability of learning media, such as loose parts media, can improve early childhood literacy skills when properly managed and arranged by teachers, rather than simply being available in large quantities.

Diversity of Student Backgrounds

Students at the three schools come from diverse backgrounds in terms of religion, ethnicity, family habits, character, and learning ability. The principal of Tweety Kindergarten stated that:

"The children here are indeed different from one another some are of different religions, different ethnicities. But at school they still play and learn together, there's no problem." (Ramlah, S.Pd., personal interview, April 8, 2026)

The principal of Umindia Kindergarten explained that differences in students' origins and habits contribute to shaping different characters in each child, but this does not become an obstacle because the school consistently accustoms children to living harmoniously and helping one another (Fatimah Uchy, S.Pd., personal interview, April 11, 2026). A similar view was expressed by the principal of Ar-Rohman Kindergarten, who asserted that differences among children are natural, given that each child grows up in a different family environment and parenting style (Ir. Nurwahidah, personal interview, April 12, 2026).

Implementation of Multicultural Values through Daily Habituation

None of the three schools implement multicultural education as a separate program; instead, it is embedded through habituation carried out routinely in daily learning and play activities. This habituation includes playing together without choosing playmates, group work, sharing toys, helping one another, and cultivating polite behavior. The principal of Ar-Rohman Kindergarten explained:

"We accustom the children to learning together, playing in groups, sharing toys, and helping one another in their daily activities. Teachers also instill polite behavior and respect for friends." (Ir. Nurwahidah, personal interview, April 12, 2026)

At Ar-Rohman Kindergarten, the introduction of diversity is also carried out through storytelling activities using books about ethnic and regional differences, as well as Independence Day (August 17) celebrations themed around culture

and traditional dress (*Observation, Ar-Rohman Kindergarten, April 12, 2026*). Meanwhile, at Umindia Kindergarten, a teacher (Juliani, S.Pd.) stated that the habituation of tolerance values is carried out every day so that children can understand how to behave well toward others from an early age. This is reinforced by Amri et al (2023), who developed busy book media to support early childhood literacy, while also showing that interactive learning media can serve as a means of instilling values and strengthening children's social interaction in an enjoyable learning atmosphere.

Services for Children with Special Needs

All three schools were found to have students requiring special attention in the learning process, although not all of them have a formal diagnosis. The services provided include individual mentoring, simplified instructions, and flexible timing during learning activities. The principal of Umindia Kindergarten stated:

“Every child has different abilities, so teachers must provide an approach tailored to each child's condition. The services provided include guidance during learning, giving instructions gradually, and cooperation with parents.”
(Fatimah Uchy, S.Pd., personal interview, April 11, 2026)

A teacher at Ar-Rohman Kindergarten, Jumriani, added that children who still have difficulty understanding lessons are guided gradually with simpler activities, while children who grasp material more quickly are given activities suited to their developmental level (personal interview, April 13, 2026). In this way, all students are still able to take part in learning activities together within the same classroom (*Observation, Umindia Kindergarten, April 11, 2026*).

The individual services provided by the three schools are consistent with the findings of Hajerah et al (2021), that early childhood education services should be designed based on each child's developmental needs rather than being standardized, so that teachers first need to understand the condition and abilities of each student before determining the appropriate form of support. This support also needs to address children's attention span during learning activities. Juwita et al (2025) found that applying a mindfulness approach can help improve early childhood concentration ability, a finding relevant to strengthening teachers' strategies at Tweety Kindergarten, Umindia Kindergarten, and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten in assisting children who have difficulty focusing their attention while taking part in learning activities with their peers.

The Role of Teachers in Creating an Inclusive Environment

Teachers at the three schools carry out a dual role as learning facilitators and as models of tolerant behavior for their students. Teachers actively correct behavior that does not reflect mutual respect and guide children to interact well with all of their peers. A teacher at Umindia Kindergarten revealed:

“Teachers accustom the children to respecting one another, sharing toys, cooperating during learning activities, and helping friends who are having

difficulty. This habituation is carried out every day.” (Juliani, S.Pd., personal interview, April 11, 2026).

Observations at Tweety Kindergarten show that mocking behavior between students still occurs, at times causing a peer to cry, and teachers always provide direct reprimands and guidance (*Observation, Tweety Kindergarten, April 8, 2026*). A similar condition was found at Ar-Rohman Kindergarten, where children still threaten one another and speak in a loud tone while playing, so that teachers need to continuously supervise and direct interactions among students to keep them positive.

In addition to the role of teachers, parental support also influences the success of implementing multicultural and inclusive education. However, parental involvement at the three schools remains a challenge in itself, as not all parents actively monitor their children's development at school (Fatimah Uchy, S.Pd., personal interview, April 11, 2026). Limited physical facilities, particularly at Tweety Kindergarten, also pose an obstacle to creating a more optimal learning environment for all students (*Observation, Tweety Kindergarten, April 8, 2026*).

This challenge is consistent with the findings of Fitria et al (2024) that improving the quality of inclusive education in early childhood settings still faces various obstacles, ranging from limited facilities and teacher readiness to the need for innovation in implementing inclusive learning so that it can be gradually accommodated by each school. This is also reinforced by Kartini et al (2023), who found that teachers' readiness to handle children with special needs in early childhood education still needs to be improved through ongoing training, workshops, or seminars so that the learning services provided to children become increasingly optimal.

Sociological and Anthropological Analysis

The findings at Tweety Kindergarten, Uminda Kindergarten, and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten show that multicultural and inclusive education is implemented through social interaction, behavioral habituation, and the adjustment of learning to students' needs. These findings can be analyzed using several sociological and anthropological theories relevant to early childhood education.

Student Diversity from the Perspective of Cultural Capital

Based on the research findings at Tweety Kindergarten, Uminda Kindergarten, and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten, it was found that students come from diverse backgrounds in terms of religion, culture, family habits, character, and learning ability. These differences affect how children interact and take part in learning activities at school. This finding is consistent with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of Cultural Capital, which explains that every child brings values, habits, experiences, and parenting patterns from the family environment into the school environment (Bourdieu, 1986). Children who are accustomed to actively interacting at home tend to adapt and socialize more easily, whereas children

who receive less social stimulation require more support in adjusting to the school environment.

This finding is also supported by Kasmianti (2021), who explains that the diversity of children's cultural and social backgrounds affects the learning process in early childhood education, so that teachers need to understand student characteristics when implementing multicultural education. Multicultural education helps children learn to accept differences and build social skills from an early age (Kasmianti, 2021). In line with this, Setyowahyudi (2020) emphasizes that instilling multicultural education values in early childhood will be more optimal if supported by the understanding and involvement of all parties, including pre-service teacher trainees, in fostering openness toward diversity starting from the higher education environment. The cultural capital that children bring from home is also inseparable from the active role of parents, as found by Hutagalung & Ramadan (2022), who state that families play an important role in instilling multicultural values in children through time management, good communication between parents and teachers, and cultivating an attitude of respecting differences at home, so that what has been instilled at school can be consistently reinforced within the family environment.

Analysis of Tolerance Habituation through Social Interaction

The habituation of tolerance, sharing, playing together, and mutual respect applied by teachers at the three schools shows that social interaction plays an important role in shaping children's behavior. Teachers actively guide children not to mock their peers, to be willing to cooperate, and to be able to resolve conflicts well. This finding is consistent with George Herbert Mead's theory of Symbolic Interactionism, which explains that a person's behavior and social identity are formed through the process of interaction with their social environment (Mead, 1934).

In their daily activities at school, children learn to understand the meaning of tolerance through direct experience while playing and communicating with their friends. This habituation helps children understand that every individual has differences that must be respected. Mardianti et al (2023) mardianresearch also explains that instilling tolerance values in early childhood can be done through playing together, sharing, and group work within a multicultural school environment. This habituation helps children develop empathy and respect for friends regardless of their background.

Mead's perspective is also relevant for gaining deeper insight into the phenomenon of peer mocking found in the case findings regarding the role of teachers at Tweety Kindergarten and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten, namely when children mock and threaten one another while playing, and speak in a loud tone to the point of making a peer cry. Within Mead's framework of mind, self, and society, mocking is a symbol exchanged between children and is interpreted by the targeted child as a social judgment of themselves. Through a process Mead calls taking the role of the other, a child gradually begins to see themselves as they are seen by their peers, so that repeated mockery or negative labeling can potentially be internalized as part of the child's self-concept. If this process is left

without intervention, the targeted child risks developing a poor self-image, a sense of insecurity in social settings, and reluctance to participate in group activities. Therefore, the teacher's role as a generalized other representing broader social norms and values becomes very important in correcting this mistaken symbolic meaning. The direct reprimands and guidance given by teachers at Tweety Kindergarten and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten, as described in the case findings, can be understood as an effort to reshape the meaning of interaction, from a demeaning symbol of mockery into a positive symbol of togetherness. Teachers need to consistently provide positive symbolic meaning in daily life, for example by affirming that every child has their own strengths, involving frequently mocked children in group activities, and encouraging all students to use constructive words when interacting with friends. With appropriate and sustained intervention, classroom social interaction experiences can be directed toward forming a healthy self-concept, in line with Mead's idea that the self is continually formed and can be reshaped through meaningful social interaction.

Analysis of Inclusive Education from the Perspective of Social Constructivism

The implementation of inclusive education at Tweety Kindergarten, Uminda Kindergarten, and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten shows that all students are still given the opportunity to take part in learning activities together despite having different abilities. Teachers provide individual mentoring, gradual guidance, and adjustments to learning activities according to each child's needs. This finding is consistent with Lev Vygotsky's theory of Social Constructivism, which explains that children's development occurs through social interaction and assistance from adults as well as peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Vygotsky, children develop more easily when they receive support and guidance suited to their needs. This is evident in teachers' efforts to assist children who experience learning difficulties so that they can continue to take part in activities together with their peers. Nur et al (2022) research on teachers' perceptions of multicultural education in early childhood found that most teachers already have a good understanding of the importance of instilling the value of diversity, although this understanding has not yet been fully and consistently realized in daily teaching practice, so ongoing strengthening of teacher competence is needed. In line with these findings, Parwoto & Usman (2023) assert that the teaching profession has a strategic role in inclusive education for gifted young children, including in adapting learning approaches so that every child whether they have special needs or special talents receives equal learning opportunities.

Cultural introduction activities carried out at Ar-Rohman Kindergarten through regional stories, the use of traditional dress, and culture-themed activities demonstrate a process of passing on cultural values to children from an early age. The school functions as a social environment that helps children recognize the diversity of culture, language, and community customs around them. From an anthropological perspective, these activities represent a form of enculturation the

process of instilling cultural values in the younger generation through social and educational environments.

Through these activities, children learn to understand that cultural differences are part of community life that must be respected. Junanto & Fajrin (2020) research explains that multicultural education in early childhood can be implemented through the introduction of local culture, traditional games, regional stories, and social activities that involve interaction among students. These activities help children develop tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity from an early age (Junanto & Fajrin, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Research at Tweety Kindergarten, Umindia Kindergarten, and Ar-Rohman Kindergarten concludes that multicultural and inclusive education is effectively implemented through daily habituation, despite challenges such as limited facilities and varying parental involvement. Schools foster tolerance and empathy through collaborative play, cultural storytelling, and individualized guidance. Theoretically, these practices align with Bourdieu's Cultural Capital, Mead's Symbolic Interactionism, and Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, highlighting that strong collaboration among schools, teachers, and parents is essential for children's social development. To optimize these efforts, schools should continuously develop inclusive, culture-based activities, while teachers must adapt their methods to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students. Additionally, schools need to strengthen communication and cooperation with parents, and the government should support these initiatives by providing educator training, adequate facilities, and mentoring for inclusive early childhood programs.

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