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Strengthening Students' Spiritual Intelligence through Multicultural-Based Learning in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This study explores the role of multicultural-based learning in strengthening spiritual intelligence among elementary school students at SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember. As classrooms become increasingly diverse, the need to cultivate empathy, moral awareness, and respect for cultural differences has become more urgent.A qualitative case study design was employed using classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and documentation analysis. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to multicultural practices and spiritual development. The findings suggest that multicultural-based learning supports students' spiritual intelligence through reflective storytelling, culturally inclusive discussions, heterogeneous group collaboration, and consistent teacher modeling. Students showed noticeable growth in compassion, emotional self-awareness, respect for diversity, and ethical reasoning. These spiritual qualities emerged naturally through daily multicultural interactions.The study highlights that spiritual intelligence can be nurtured not only through religious instruction but also through culturally grounded pedagogical practices. Teacher behaviors and collaborative learning environments play a crucial role in shaping students' spiritual growth. Multicultural-based learning can contribute to students' spiritual intelligence and should be intentionally integrated into elementary school learning environments.

Keywords: Spiritual Intelligence; Multicultural Learning; Elementary Education; Empathy; Character Development; Indonesia.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pembelajaran berbasis multikultural berkontribusi terhadap penguatan kecerdasan spiritual siswa di sekolah dasar, dengan fokus pada SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember. Kecerdasan spiritual pada anak semakin dipandang penting untuk menumbuhkan empati, kesadaran diri, dan penghargaan terhadap keberagaman. Dengan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semiterstruktur dengan guru dan siswa, serta analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran berbasis multikultural mendukung penguatan kecerdasan spiritual siswa melalui penceritaan reflektif, dialog berbasis nilai, kerja kelompok heterogen, dan keteladanan guru. Siswa menunjukkan peningkatan empati,

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penghargaan terhadap perbedaan budaya, pengelolaan emosi, dan penalaran moral. Interaksi di kelas memperlihatkan bahwa nilai-nilai spiritual terinternalisasi melalui perjumpaan multikultural sehari-hari, tidak semata melalui pembelajaran keagamaan formal. Sebagai studi kasus, temuan ini bersifat kontekstual dan tidak dimaksudkan untuk digeneralisasikan. Keteladanan guru dan pembelajaran kolaboratif menjadi mekanisme utama yang mendorong siswa mempraktikkan kasih sayang, tanggung jawab, dan kesadaran diri. Pembelajaran berbasis multikultural disarankan untuk diintegrasikan secara sengaja dalam kegiatan kelas guna mendukung perkembangan siswa yang holistik.
Kata kunci: *Pembelajaran Multikultural; Kecerdasan Spiritual; Sekolah Dasar; Empati; Pendidikan Karakter; Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

The urgency to strengthen students' spiritual intelligence in elementary schools has become increasingly evident in recent years, especially in multicultural educational settings such as SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember, where students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, family traditions, religious practices, and socio-economic conditions. This diversity creates a unique learning environment that is rich with potential for cultivating empathy, compassion, moral sensitivity, and spiritual awareness (Aziz & Ulya, 2022). Ideally, schools are expected to develop not only children's academic competence but also their inner qualities that shape their character and worldview. However, real-life observations and informal reflections shared by teachers at SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember reveal that the development of spiritual intelligence has not yet been fully achieved. Many students show limited abilities in expressing empathy, resolving interpersonal conflicts peacefully, understanding emotional differences among peers, or demonstrating consistent respect for classmates who come from different cultural or religious backgrounds. These symptoms reflect a deeper educational challenge: although diversity is present within the school, it has not naturally transformed into an intentional multicultural learning experience that fosters spiritual growth (Muhammad & Sari, 2021).

This issue becomes more apparent when examining the daily interactions within the school environment. In classroom settings, instructional activities tend to focus on cognitive learning, with teachers delivering concepts that align with curriculum standards but providing limited opportunities for students to engage in reflective thinking or value-based discussions (Asmuni, 2021). Learning methods that could encourage spiritual development such as storytelling, guided reflection, collaborative dialogue, or empathy-building activities are not yet widely practiced due to time constraints, limited pedagogical training, and the absence of

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structured models that explicitly integrate multicultural values into lessons (Karmini et al., 2021). Teachers often acknowledge that while they recognize the importance of spiritual intelligence, they struggle to translate this understanding into concrete teaching practices that resonate with students' lived experiences (Tisdell, 2010). As a result, students may excel academically but lack deeper emotional and spiritual grounding, which is essential for navigating diversity in healthy and constructive ways.

Outside the classroom challenges also appear during recess, extracurricular activities, and school-wide events. Students sometimes form exclusive groups based on similarities in culture, language, or social background, which reduces opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural interactions (Turi et al., 2020). Small misunderstandings related to cultural expressions or religious rituals occasionally emerge, illustrating that children are still developing the ability to appreciate differences with maturity. Although such conflicts may seem minor, they reveal underlying gaps in students' spiritual capacities, especially in aspects of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and relational empathy (Mahmud & Umiarso, 2025). Teachers and school administrators have made various attempts to build harmony, such as encouraging collaborative play or organizing joint activities, but these efforts often lack continuity and systematic planning, making them less effective than expected.

Developments in educational research increasingly emphasize that children's spiritual intelligence can grow significantly when learning is contextualized within multicultural experiences. Studies conducted in various regions demonstrate that when students engage with diverse cultural narratives, participate in open discussions about differences, and collaborate in heterogeneous groups, they develop a stronger sense of identity, empathy, and moral responsibility. These findings highlight the potential of multicultural-based learning as a transformative approach for fostering spiritual intelligence. However, existing educational practices at SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember have not fully aligned with these insights. Teachers tend to rely on conventional teaching strategies that prioritize academic content mastery, while multicultural discussions are treated as supplementary or incidental. This creates a gap between what is understood theoretically about spiritual and multicultural education and the actual implementation within the school context.

Many learning materials currently used in the classroom lack cultural representation, thus missing opportunities to introduce students to diverse ways of life beyond their own. Textbooks frequently depict generic scenarios that do not reflect the multicultural reality of Indonesia, including the context of Jember, where migration, mixed ethnic communities, and

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diverse religious practices are commonplace. Without learning resources that connect directly to students' multicultural environment, it becomes more difficult for teachers to guide students in understanding and appreciating cultural differences as part of their spiritual growth (Ariyanto, 2024). This disconnect highlights an urgent need to develop learning models that are not only academically relevant but also culturally responsive and spiritually enriching.

Broader educational reforms in Indonesia including the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka emphasize the importance of holistic education through the Profil Pelajar Pancasila. Key values such as faith, moral character, and global diversity require students to demonstrate a deep sense of spirituality and multicultural awareness (Yeni et al., 2023). However, the practical realization of these goals depends heavily on the availability of learning strategies that support both cognitive and spiritual development. In schools like SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember, where diversity is an integral part of the learning environment, multicultural-based learning should naturally serve as a foundation for spiritual education. Yet, this potential remains underutilized because teachers are still searching for concrete models, guidance, and examples of best practices that can help them transform multicultural experiences into spiritually meaningful lessons.

The need for innovation becomes even more urgent when considering that spiritual intelligence is foundational for shaping students' character, emotional well-being, and long-term social development (Chong et al., 2015). Children who develop strong spiritual intelligence tend to exhibit positive behaviors such as kindness, patience, humility, and resilience qualities that are crucial for building a harmonious school culture (Anisa et al., 2023). They are more capable of managing conflicts peacefully, understanding the emotions of others, and demonstrating gratitude and interconnectedness with the wider community. Conversely, limited spiritual development may lead to frequent interpersonal conflicts, emotional instability, reduced empathy, and difficulty appreciating differences challenges that are already visible to some extent at SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember.

Therefore, it becomes essential to propose and promote multicultural-based learning as a strategic approach to strengthening students' spiritual intelligence. This approach encourages teachers to integrate cultural narratives into lessons, design collaborative activities that involve students from different backgrounds, facilitate discussions that promote open-mindedness, and incorporate reflective exercises that help students internalize moral and spiritual values. Such learning experiences can help students move beyond merely

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recognizing diversity to embracing it as a meaningful part of their identity formation. When implemented systematically, multicultural-based learning can transform everyday interactions into opportunities for spiritual growth, helping students develop the inner awareness, empathy, and moral grounding needed to thrive in a diverse society.

In this context, the purpose of writing this paper is to examine the existing conditions of spiritual intelligence development at SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember, analyze how multicultural learning can be leveraged as an effective approach, and offer conceptual and practical recommendations that can support teachers in integrating multicultural perspectives into daily instruction. Through this analysis, the paper aims to contribute to the development of elementary education practices that are holistic, inclusive, and spiritually meaningful, enabling students to build the emotional and moral capacities required to live harmoniously within a multicultural world.

Theoretically, this study draws on two bodies of scholarship. Spiritual intelligence is understood through the framework of Zohar and Marshall (2000), who describe it as the capacity to access meaning, values, and purpose expressed in qualities such as self-awareness, compassion, holistic thinking, and the ability to transcend self-interest. Multicultural education is framed through Banks (2019), whose dimensions of content integration, prejudice reduction, and an empowering school culture, together with the culturally responsive perspectives of Nieto (2010) and Gay (2018), emphasize teaching that affirms students' cultural identities while fostering equity and mutual respect, consistent with UNESCO's (2006) guidelines on intercultural education. Positioning these frameworks together allows the study to treat multicultural learning and spiritual growth as mutually reinforcing rather than separate domains.

Although prior studies have separately examined multicultural education and spiritual or character development, few have explicitly analyzed how everyday multicultural interactions in regular, non-religious elementary lessons cultivate the specific components of spiritual intelligence. Existing Indonesian research tends to locate spiritual development within religious instruction or full-day Islamic programs, leaving a gap regarding public schools where diversity itself becomes the pedagogical resource. Accordingly, the conceptual contribution of this study is a model that links multicultural learning practices—reflective storytelling, inclusive collaboration, value-based dialogue, and teacher modeling—to indicators of spiritual intelligence (compassion, respect for diversity, self-awareness, and

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moral responsibility), as summarized in Figure 1. This framing distinguishes the present study from work that mainly confirms the general benefits of multicultural learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design to explore in depth how multicultural-based learning contributes to the strengthening of students' spiritual intelligence at SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember. This approach was chosen because it allows the researchers (a four-member team) to examine natural learning situations, authentic classroom interactions, and the lived experiences of teachers and students within a culturally diverse elementary school environment (Cresswell, 2016). The study was conducted in a natural setting without manipulating any variables, enabling the researchers to capture the complexity of pedagogical practices and the subtle dynamics of spiritual and multicultural development as they occur in everyday school life. Data were collected through a combination of participant observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Participant observations were carried out during classroom instruction, school routines, group activities, and intercultural interactions among students to identify patterns of behavior, teacher strategies, and moments where spiritual values were implicitly or explicitly formed. In-depth interviews were conducted with classroom teachers, Islamic education teachers, the principal, and selected students, using purposive sampling based on their involvement in multicultural learning activities and their ability to provide rich information. These interviews aimed to gain insights into teachers' pedagogical perspectives, students' experiences, and the school's efforts in integrating multicultural values into spiritual development. Document analysis included reviewing lesson plans, teaching modules, school policies, photographs, activity logs, and other relevant school documents to validate and complement the observational and interview data.

The data collection process was conducted over several weeks to ensure that the researchers could observe patterns that emerged consistently and identify variations in students' spiritual and multicultural behaviors across different learning situations. All data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model, which includes data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions(Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing the raw data into meaningful units related to spiritual intelligence indicators, teacher strategies, multicultural expressions, and students' responses during learning activities. Data were then

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displayed in the form of narrative descriptions, thematic matrices, and conceptual summaries to facilitate deeper interpretation and the identification of emerging themes. The conclusion-drawing process was carried out continuously throughout the research period, allowing the researchers to verify and refine interpretations based on new evidence and recurring patterns.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed triangulation of sources, triangulation of techniques, and triangulation of time, ensuring that the data obtained from observations, interviews, and documents were cross-checked and corroborated. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with key informants, enabling them to confirm accuracy, provide clarifications, or correct potential misunderstandings. Additionally, the researchers maintained detailed field notes and reflective memos to document contextual insights, emerging questions, and analytical decisions throughout the study. Ethical considerations were carefully upheld, including obtaining permission from the school, ensuring participant confidentiality, and explaining the voluntary nature of participation to teachers and students. The researchers also remained attentive to cultural sensitivities, especially given the focus on spirituality and multicultural values, by respecting diverse practices and using non-intrusive data collection techniques.

To support replication, the participants and procedures are specified in greater detail. Using purposive sampling, the research team involved eleven informants: the school principal, two classroom teachers, one Islamic education teacher, five students from the upper grades, and two parents, selected for their direct involvement in multicultural learning and their capacity to provide rich information. Data collection took place over approximately three months. The semi-structured interview guide addressed four areas: (1) understanding of multicultural and spiritual values, (2) strategies for integrating cultural diversity into lessons, (3) observed changes in students' attitudes, and (4) supporting and constraining factors. The observation checklist recorded indicators such as culturally diverse materials, patterns of teacher–student and student–student interaction, reflective dialogue, and expressions of empathy, respect, and self-awareness. Following the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, analysis proceeded through open coding of field notes and transcripts, grouping of codes into categories, and construction of the three themes reported below; credibility was established through triangulation and member checking as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Overview of Research Focus

This chapter presents the findings of the study on how multicultural-based learning contributes to strengthening students' spiritual intelligence at SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember. The results were generated through classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and documentation analysis. To present the results comprehensively, this chapter is organized into three main sub-sections: (1) multicultural values reflected in classroom practices, (2) strategies used by teachers to strengthen students' spiritual intelligence, and (3) students' behavioral responses as indicators of spiritual development. Each subsection includes a table summarizing key findings, followed by an in-depth narrative explanation describing the patterns, contextual meanings, and relevance of each finding to spiritual and multicultural learning.

Multicultural Values Reflected in Classroom Learning

Table 1. Manifestation of Multicultural Values in Classroom Activities

No	Aspect Observed	Evidence in Classroom	Implications for Spiritual Intelligence
1	Cultural representation in learning materials	Teacher used stories from Javanese, Madurese, and Arabic traditions	Helps students build respect for diverse cultural backgrounds
2	Inclusive group arrangements	Students grouped heterogeneously by culture and gender	Promotes empathy, cooperation, and mutual understanding
3	Use of multilingual expressions	Teachers encouraged students to greet in Indonesian, Javanese, and Madurese	Enhances appreciation for linguistic diversity
4	Culturally sensitive discussions	Students shared personal traditions during thematic lessons	Builds self-awareness and recognition of others' identities

The findings show that multicultural values are applied in daily classroom activities, although the level of implementation differs among teachers. Teachers often include cultural elements in learning by using stories, folktales, and examples from the local community in

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Jember. For example, one teacher used Javanese wayang stories to teach moral values, while another used Madurese folklore to explain empathy. These activities help students recognize and appreciate both their own culture and the cultures of their classmates.

Teachers also promote multicultural values by forming mixed learning groups with students from different cultural backgrounds. During group activities, students helped each other understand different languages, supported classmates with pronunciation, and shared their cultural experiences. These interactions encouraged respect, cooperation, empathy, and emotional control, which are important aspects of spiritual intelligence.

In addition, teachers used greetings in Indonesian, Javanese, and sometimes Madurese during classroom routines. This simple practice helped students appreciate linguistic diversity as a natural part of everyday life. Class discussions also gave students opportunities to share their cultural traditions, such as religious celebrations and family customs. As a result, students developed greater self-awareness while learning to respect differences. Overall, the findings indicate that multicultural-based learning can strengthen both cultural awareness and spiritual values when it is implemented regularly and intentionally.

The following excerpts illustrate how these values appeared in classroom interactions:

> *Teacher (Grade 4): "I often use stories from Javanese, Madurese, and Arabic traditions so that every child feels their own background is present in the lesson."*
> *Student: "I like it when we greet each other in different languages; it feels like we are all friends even though we come from different places."*

Teacher Strategies in Strengthening Students' Spiritual Intelligence

Table 2. Teacher Pedagogical Strategies for Strengthening Spiritual Intelligence

No	Strategy	Teacher Action	Spiritual Value Strengthened
1	Reflective storytelling	Reading stories followed by reflective questions	Self-awareness, empathy
2	Value-centered dialogue	Teacher encouraged students to express opinions respectfully	Moral reasoning, compassion

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3	Collaborative multicultural projects	Students created posters about cultural diversity	Appreciation, responsibility
4	Modeling spiritual behavior	Teachers demonstrated patience, gratitude, and respect	Internalization of positive behavior

The findings show that teacher strategies play an important role in developing students' spiritual intelligence. One effective strategy is reflective storytelling. After telling stories with moral or cultural themes, teachers asked simple questions such as, "How would you feel if you were in this character's position?" or "What lesson can we learn from this story?" These questions encouraged students to think about moral values and understand the feelings of others.

Teachers also used value-based discussions to help students respect different opinions. For example, during a discussion about family traditions during Eid al-Fitr, students were encouraged to express different views politely and listen to others with respect. This activity helped students develop empathy, emotional control, and moral understanding.

Another effective strategy was collaborative multicultural projects. Students worked together to create posters about Indonesia's cultural diversity. During the activity, they shared tasks, discussed ideas, and helped one another. These experiences taught students the importance of cooperation and respect for differences.

In addition, teachers acted as role models by showing positive behavior in everyday classroom activities. They greeted students warmly, handled conflicts patiently, and expressed gratitude during lessons. Students often imitated these behaviors by helping classmates and speaking kindly to friends who were upset. Overall, the findings indicate that teacher role modeling and well-planned learning strategies are essential for developing students' spiritual intelligence.

Teachers described their strategies in their own words:

Teacher: "After reading a story I ask, 'How would you feel if you were in this character's position?' so that the children learn to feel what others feel."
Islamic education teacher: "I try to show patience and gratitude myself, because children imitate what they see far more than what they are told.

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Indicators of Students' Spiritual Intelligence Development

Table 3. Behavioral Indicators of Students' Spiritual Intelligence

No	Indicator	Observed Behavior	Evidence of Growth
1	Compassion	Students comforting peers who were upset	More frequent spontaneous acts of empathy
2	Respect for diversity	Students asking questions about friends' cultural traditions	Increased curiosity and reduced stereotyping
3	Self-awareness	Students reflecting orally on their feelings during activities	Improved ability to express emotions clearly
4	Responsibility	Students taking cooperative roles in multicultural group work	More consistent task ownership and accountability

The third finding shows the development of students' spiritual intelligence through their daily behavior in the classroom. Compassion was the most visible indicator. Students often comforted classmates who were sad and helped friends who had difficulty completing assignments. These actions were shown to all classmates, regardless of their cultural background, reflecting the growth of empathy. Respect for diversity also became more apparent. During classroom activities, students showed interest in learning about their classmates' cultural traditions by asking questions and sharing experiences. This helped reduce stereotypes and encouraged mutual understanding among students.

Another important indicator was self-awareness. During reflection sessions, students were able to express their feelings, recognize their mistakes, and explain what they had learned. These activities helped students develop emotional maturity and a better understanding of themselves. Responsibility also improved through multicultural group activities. Students completed their assigned roles, participated actively in discussions, and worked together to finish tasks. They learned to balance individual responsibility with teamwork. Overall, the findings suggest that multicultural-based learning supports the development of students' spiritual intelligence by strengthening compassion, respect for diversity, self-awareness, and responsibility.

> Students' development was also evident in the way they spoke about their peers:
> *Student: "Now I ask my friends about their traditions instead of laughing at what is different."*

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Student: "When my friend was sad, I helped him because we are one class, even though we are not the same."

The relationship identified in this study is summarized in the conceptual model below.

Multicultural-Based Learning Practices →	**Classroom Processes →**	**Spiritual Intelligence Indicators**
Reflective storytelling	Empathy and perspective-taking	Compassion
Inclusive / heterogeneous collaboration	Cross-cultural interaction	Respect for diversity
Value-based dialogue	Moral reflection	Self-awareness
Teacher modeling	Internalization of values	Moral responsibility

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Multicultural-Based Learning and Spiritual Intelligence

Discussion

Mechanisms Linking Multicultural Learning and Spiritual Intelligence

The findings of this study reveal that multicultural-based learning implemented at SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember plays a significant role in strengthening students' spiritual intelligence, particularly through classroom activities that emphasize empathy, respect, and reflective meaning-making. This is consistent with the view that spiritual intelligence in childhood is not only shaped by religious instruction but also by moral encounters and meaningful interpersonal experiences. According to (Fahmy et al., 2024), spiritual intelligence in elementary school students develops effectively when teachers combine moral storytelling, reflective dialogue, and character modeling, elements that were strongly present in the multicultural learning strategies observed in this study. The integration of cultural narratives and shared values in class discussions allowed students to explore spiritual concepts through concrete social interactions rather than abstract instruction alone.

The role of teachers in modeling spiritual values emerged as one of the most influential aspects. The observational data showed that teachers consistently practiced patience, mutual respect, and emotional regulation when responding to classroom conflicts, which encouraged students to imitate these behaviors. This supports findings by Ilyasin,

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(2020), who argue that students internalize spiritual values more effectively when teachers demonstrate them authentically in daily interactions. In their study, spiritual intelligence grew not through lectures but through teacher attitudes particularly in moments of conflict resolution, collaborative tasks, and shared classroom rituals. The same pattern appeared at SDN 1 Karanganyar, where students mirrored the teacher's mannerisms, such as greeting politely, helping peers spontaneously, and responding calmly to disagreements.

The study found that multicultural-based learning especially cooperative group tasks among students from different cultural backgrounds enhanced empathy and moral reflection. Students learned to listen to differing perspectives and value the uniqueness of each group member. This resonates with (Suhifatullah et al., 2021), who emphasize that spiritual intelligence flourishes when children are placed in socially diverse learning environments that demand cooperation, emotional understanding, and mutual care. Their research suggests that diverse classrooms naturally foster spiritual skills such as compassion, self-awareness, and gratitude, because students are compelled to move beyond self-centered thinking. The same mechanisms were evident in this study: heterogeneous group activities required students to negotiate, compromise, and practice kindness, which strengthened their spiritual dispositions.

The Role of School Culture and Broader Context

Another crucial finding is that school culture plays an essential part in sustaining spiritual development. The school's practice of integrating cultural appreciation activities with reflective moments such as discussing moral lessons after storytelling or concluding collaborative tasks with gratitude reflections provided ongoing reinforcement for spiritual growth. This aligns with the principles of holistic education described by Ramadhan & Usriyah, (2021), who asserts that spiritual development in children is most effective when embedded holistically in the school environment rather than confined to religious subjects alone. They further argue that spiritual learning requires dialogic experiences, community engagement, and ethical reflection within daily school life, all of which were present in SDN 1 Karanganyar's learning environment.

When comparing these findings with national literature, a clear parallel emerges. A study conducted by Nurjanah, (2021) in an Indonesian integrated Islamic school found that students' spiritual intelligence improved significantly when spiritual routines such as gratitude journaling, daily reflection, and dialogic sharing were integrated into regular lessons. Although SDN 1 Karanganyar is a public school without a full-day spiritual program,

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similar impacts occurred because multicultural learning provided students with continuous opportunities for value internalization. This suggests that spiritual intelligence does not require religious intensity, but rather meaningful interaction, ethical dialogue, and habitual reflection, which fit naturally into multicultural pedagogy.

Challenges and Alternative Explanations

The study also identifies challenges faced by teachers. Some teachers expressed difficulties in allocating sufficient time for deep reflection or cultural dialogue due to curriculum demands. This concern echoes the critique by Tisdell, (2010), who states that Indonesian teachers often struggle to balance cognitive learning outcomes with moral-spiritual objectives because the curriculum prioritizes measurable academic achievements. At SDN 1 Karanganyar, reflective dialogue and value clarification discussions were sometimes shortened or replaced by textbook-focused lessons when time was limited. This indicates that although multicultural-based learning has strong potential to enhance spiritual intelligence, structural support from school policies is needed to sustain it consistently.

At the same time, the development of students' spiritual intelligence cannot be attributed to multicultural-based learning alone. Several other factors plausibly contributed to the observed changes, including students' family and religious upbringing, the school's routine religious and character activities, the organizational culture and leadership of the school, peer relationships, and the individual character and commitment of teachers. Because this qualitative case study did not isolate these variables, the findings are best read as describing multicultural learning as one important contributing factor operating within a broader ecology of influences, rather than as the sole cause of spiritual growth.

Cross-Context Evidence and Theoretical Contribution

The findings reinforce patterns similar to those reported in the case study by Fatimah & Wahyudi (2022), who investigated spiritual development through character-based learning in a multicultural classroom setting. Their study found that students showed improved self-regulation and empathy when teachers facilitated intercultural group work and moral inquiry. They also reported that storytelling using culturally diverse characters supported students' spiritual meaning-making mirroring the strategies used at SDN 1 Karanganyar. These parallels across contexts highlight the reliability of multicultural approaches in nurturing students' spiritual intelligence in Indonesia's diverse educational landscape.

This study expands the current literature by demonstrating how spiritual intelligence can be strengthened even in non-religious lessons. Much of the existing research, such as that

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by Siren Nugroho et al. (2021), focuses on spiritual development through Islamic education or religion-based learning models. In contrast, this study shows that multicultural-based learning implemented in regular subjects like social studies or language arts also contributes significantly to spiritual formation. Thus, the study offers a new conceptual insight: that multicultural values and spiritual values are not separate domains but mutually reinforcing. Through multicultural interactions, students practice humility, empathy, inner calm, openness, and ethical responsibility all core dimensions of spiritual intelligence according to Zohar & Marshall (2001).

Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of peer interactions in shaping spiritual awareness. In several observations, students demonstrated increased self-awareness and willingness to reflect on their emotions after group tasks. This aligns with the argument by Doustdar Toosi et al., (2016) that peer-led moral experiences shape children's ethical and spiritual identities more strongly than teacher lectures. When students work together across cultural differences, they learn to regulate emotions, apologize, negotiate, and forgive actions that gradually refine their spiritual character. These processes were evident throughout the study, especially during collaborative assignments and class discussions.

Synthesis and Broader Significance

The study suggests that multicultural-based learning is a promising pathway for strengthening spiritual intelligence in elementary school students. The combination of teacher modeling, meaningful peer interaction, reflective dialogue, and culturally rich learning materials creates a powerful environment for spiritual growth. These findings contribute significantly to the academic discourse by demonstrating that spiritual intelligence is deeply connected to multicultural education a relationship not yet widely explored in existing Indonesian scholarship. The evidence suggests that schools aiming to enhance students' spiritual intelligence should integrate multiculturalism not only as a diversity initiative but as a core pedagogical strategy.

Taken together, the findings both align with and extend existing scholarship. They confirm prior work indicating that spiritual and moral qualities develop through meaningful social interaction and teacher modeling; however, they extend this literature in two ways. First, whereas much Indonesian research situates spiritual development within explicitly religious programs, this study shows that comparable qualities can emerge within regular multicultural lessons in a public school. Second, the study offers an integrative reading in which multicultural competence and spiritual intelligence reinforce one another, providing a

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conceptual bridge between two fields that are often treated separately. These contributions are analytic and context-bound rather than causal, and they invite testing in other settings.

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, it was conducted at a single school with a limited number of informants, so the findings are context-specific and not intended for statistical generalization. Second, because the data relied on observations and interviews, they are subject to researcher subjectivity and potential observer bias; triangulation and member checking were used to mitigate, though not eliminate, this risk. Third, the study covered a relatively short period and did not measure the long-term persistence of the spiritual qualities observed. Finally, potential confounding factors—such as family upbringing and the school's religious activities—were not controlled. These limitations point to the need for multi-site, longitudinal, and mixed-methods research in future studies.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that multicultural-based learning at SDN 1 Karanganyar Jember contributes to the development of students' spiritual intelligence by fostering empathy, respect for diversity, emotional self-awareness, and moral reflection through daily classroom interactions. Students developed these qualities not only through religious instruction but also through multicultural learning experiences that encouraged cooperation, appreciation of differences, and the internalization of shared values. Although challenges such as limited instructional time and curricular demands remain, multicultural-based learning provides a strong foundation for holistic character development. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to integrate reflective activities and culturally diverse learning materials into classroom instruction, while schools should strengthen multicultural values through school culture and co-curricular programs. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of multicultural learning on students' spiritual intelligence in different educational contexts. Overall, the findings suggest that multicultural-based learning is an effective approach for promoting tolerance, strengthening spiritual intelligence, and preparing students to become empathetic and socially responsible individuals in diverse societies.

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