



Strengthening Character Education through Multicultural Values-Based Civic Education (PPKn) to Promote Students' Tolerance

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Abstract

This study examines the role of multicultural values-based Civic Education (PPKn) in strengthening character education and promoting students' tolerance. Grounded in the growing concern over declining tolerance among students in diverse societies, the research adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore how values are integrated and internalized within classroom practices. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving PPKn teachers and students in a secondary school setting. The findings reveal that the implementation of multicultural values in PPKn is carried out through interactive and student-centered learning strategies, such as group discussions, case-based learning, and reflective activities, which encourage students to engage with diversity meaningfully. These practices contribute to the strengthening of character education by fostering values such as respect, empathy, responsibility, and social awareness. Furthermore, the study finds that students' tolerance develops through continuous exposure to inclusive classroom environments, dialogic interactions, and collaborative learning experiences that promote mutual understanding and appreciation of differences. Teachers play a crucial role as facilitators and role models in guiding students toward positive attitudes and behaviors. The study concludes that multicultural values-based PPKn is an effective approach to integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learning, thereby enhancing both character formation and tolerance among students. This research contributes to the discourse on character education and multicultural learning by highlighting the importance of contextual and value-oriented pedagogical practices in fostering inclusive and harmonious social relationships.

Introduction

Such as in Indonesia, the problem of decreasing tolerance of student has been a growing concern in recent years (Aprilianto et al., 2025; Abd Khahar et al., 2025; Haris et al., 2025; Sholeh et al., 2025). As societies have come into contact with a wide variety of social, cultural and religious differences, and as information has spread at a rapid pace via electronic media, character formation has not always been sufficient. Consequently, the situations of intolerance, prejudice and social conflict among youth do not stop following this gap between knowledge and moral action (Tropp et al., 2022). This situation calls for the importance of implementing an education strategy which disseminates information and values that foster respect and social harmony.

Education is a crucial component in developing students' character and attitude towards diversity (Saepurokhman & Ali, 2025; Nugraha et al., 2025). Civic Education (Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan PPKn) is a strategic subject which is established in the

Indonesian educational system to produce responsible, ethical and democratic citizens. The goal of PPKn is not only to impart constitutional information but also to instill values within students, such as tolerance, justice, and respect for diversity (Pratikawati & Robandi, 2026). In reality, however, the PPKn is still introduced which is normative and theoretical, oriented towards memorizing instead of having a meaningful discussion with the social problems that occur in society. This restriction limits its capacity to develop students' character and tolerance in different social situations.

To overcome this, integration of multicultural values in PPKn learning has been widely known as a promising approach. Multicultural education contributes to the recognition, appreciation, respect for cultural differences and the promotion of equality and social justice (Arfaton et al., 2025; Ridwan et al., 2026). It makes students aware of social diversification, it makes them open and empathetic. Multicultural values can enrich the learning process when incorporated into Civic Education, creating a more contextual and reflective learning experience for students to learn about and value diversity as a basis for unity. This is especially applicable in Indonesia, where there is cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity.

Character education is also important in building students' moral and social behaviors as part of education in general. Krettenauer & Anderson (2022) describe character education as the development of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, the foundation for ethical behavior. The most relation with character formation, in multicultural education context, is tolerance, empathy, and respect to other people. (Ha et al., 2022) also say that good character education should be a part of the entire learning process, covering the curriculum, educational practices, and the school environment. This view supports the notion that if complemented with multicultural values, PPKn can be an effective medium in reinforcing students' character.

Character education and multicultural education both address tolerance as an important product of the two. Tolerance is a crucial skill in today's society. It's not just about accepting differences, it's about respect, being open and willing to engage and work constructively with others (Adelman et al., 2022). Tolerance in the school environment is manifested in the attitudes, actions and communication of students with a diverse population. But, developing tolerance is not so easy. It needs to be exposed on an ongoing basis to inclusive learning spaces, opportunities for dialogue, and opportunities to practice thinking skills. These elements are essential if students are not going to be able to turn abstract values into actionable steps.

Multicultural education has been emphasized as a positive influence on students' attitudes and social behavior in previous studies. The study conducted by Utami et al. (2025) shows that multicultural-based learning has the potential to improve students' understanding of diversity and eradicate prejudice. Also, research about Civic Education shows that participatory and value-based methods are more effective in the development of democratic attitudes and social responsibility. Though the above findings, there is still no comprehensive study on the implementation of multicultural values in PPKn and how the integration of multicultural values in PPKn contributes to strengthening character education and increasing students' tolerance in the context of Indonesia. (Almusaed et al., 2025; Awan et al., 2022).

In this regard, this research aims to explore the role of multicultural values based Civic Education in strengthening character education and students' tolerance (Syafika & Marwa, 2024; Febrianti, 2025). This study differs from the other studies which were done in general coming out of character education or multicultural education, because it combines both views in the context of PPKn. A qualitative approach is used in this research to get a detailed understanding of the process by which values become internalized in classroom practices,

interactions and experiences of learning. It also aims to capture the perceptions of teachers and students on the effectiveness of PPKn based on multicultural approach in fostering tolerance.

This study has significance because of its theoretical and practical implications. Its theoretical contribution is that it contributes to the discussion of character education and multicultural learning, emphasizing the integrative platform of Civic Education. In practice, it provides guidance for teachers and policy makers on the development and application of learning strategies which are effective for fostering tolerance and social cohesion. This is important in preparing students as knowledgeable citizens as well as responsible and tolerant citizens in a world of increasing diversity and connectedness.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore how multicultural values-based Civic Education (PPKn) strengthens character education and promotes students' tolerance. The qualitative approach was selected because this study aims to understand deeply the processes, meanings, and experiences that occur in the learning environment rather than merely measuring relationships between variables. The case study design allows for a holistic investigation of the phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly in examining how multicultural values are implemented and internalized through classroom practices and school culture.

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted in a secondary school characterized by diverse student backgrounds, making it a relevant setting for examining issues of multiculturalism and tolerance. The participants consisted of Civic Education (PPKn) teachers and students who were actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria, including teachers who have experience teaching PPKn and students who have participated in learning activities related to multicultural values. This selection ensured that the data obtained were rich, relevant, and aligned with the objectives of the study.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure comprehensive and in-depth findings. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and students to explore their perspectives, experiences, and understanding of multicultural values and tolerance within PPKn learning. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their responses while maintaining focus on key research themes. Second, classroom observations were carried out to examine the actual implementation of multicultural values in teaching practices, including instructional strategies, teacher-student interactions, and student engagement. Third, document analysis was conducted on relevant materials such as lesson plans (RPP), teaching modules, and school policies to identify how multicultural values are formally integrated into the curriculum and instructional design.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis process followed a thematic analysis approach. All data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents were transcribed and organized systematically. The researcher then conducted open coding to identify significant patterns and concepts emerging from the data. These codes were subsequently categorized into broader themes representing the core findings of the study, such as the implementation of multicultural values, the strengthening

of character education, and the development of students' tolerance. The analysis was conducted iteratively, allowing continuous refinement to ensure that the themes accurately represent the data.

Results and Discussion

Implementation of Multicultural Values in PPKn Learning

The implementation of multicultural values in Civic Education (PPKn) learning is done intentionally by involving multicultural values in planning, implementing, and interacting in the learning process (Hasnawia et al., 2025). Teachers do not just teach theoretical knowledge about diversity, but actively bring values like respect, equality, empathy and inclusiveness into the learning process. The integration is evident in the lesson plan in that teachers include real life social issues related to cultural, ethnic and religious difference as matter for discussion. Contextualizing learning content helps students critically respond to the diversity as lived rather than as abstract.

The teachers use the interactive learning and student-centered approach in classroom implementation which facilitates the internalization of multicultural values. Venturing is often used to introduce students to various viewpoints through strategies like group discussions, collaborative learning, and case-based analysis. In adopting these strategies, students develop the ability to share their opinions and respect the opinions of others (Gunn et al., 2022). The teacher's role shifts to that of a facilitator whose job is to allow dialogue, encourage candidness and give equal opportunity for participation by all students. The shift in pedagogy is crucial for establishing a democratic and inclusive learning environment that is the cornerstone of tolerance.

In addition, multicultural values are also reflected in how teachers control classroom atmosphere and relations. Teachers purposefully establish a respectful climate where discrimination is not tolerated. Students' cultural, religious or social difference is seen as a learning resource, not a barrier. Here, the classroom is a miniature society, reflecting and rehearsing the living together in harmony despite differences that characterizes a diverse society. It is in such an environment that both cognitive learning about multiculturalism and affective and behavioral aspects of character development can be reinforced.

The findings from interviews reinforce the importance of teacher strategies in implementing multicultural values. One teacher explained,

“In teaching PPKn, I always try to connect the material with real situations in society, especially issues related to diversity, so students can understand the importance of respecting differences.”

This statement highlights the intentional effort of educators to make learning relevant and meaningful, thereby enhancing students' awareness of multicultural values. Another student expressed,

“When we discuss topics in class, we are encouraged to listen to different opinions and not judge others, which makes us more respectful of each other.”

This response indicates that students not only receive knowledge but also experience the practice of tolerance through classroom interactions. In addition, the use of supporting learning media and instructional resources contributes to the effective implementation of multicultural values. Teachers utilize videos, stories, and case studies that reflect diverse cultural contexts to stimulate students' interest and deepen their understanding. These materials help students visualize real-world diversity and develop empathy toward others. By

engaging multiple dimensions of learning cognitive, emotional, and social PPKn becomes a powerful medium for instilling multicultural values. The implementation of multicultural values in PPKn learning is a dynamic process that involves the integration of curriculum content, pedagogical strategies, and classroom culture. It requires teachers to be not only knowledgeable but also sensitive to diversity and committed to fostering inclusive learning environments. Through meaningful learning experiences and guided interactions, students gradually internalize multicultural values, which ultimately contribute to the development of tolerant attitudes and behaviors in their daily lives.

Strengthening Character Education through PPKn

The strengthening of character education in Civic Education (PPKn) is achieved by conducting learning activities in an orderly way and oriented to values, so that moral, social and civic responsibilities are considered in the daily activities of students. PPKn can be used as a strategic vehicle to impart knowledge about citizenship in addition to developing character values that are needed, namely responsibility, honesty, respect, and social awareness. In reality, character education is not taught in isolation, but it becomes an integral part of the goals, content, and interactions of the classroom. The integration enables students to imbibe values in a natural and meaningful way because of the direct link with real-life situations and social dynamics.

It is very important that teachers are role models and facilitators of character building. They consistently display positive attitudes and behaviors that are representative of the values being taught, including those relating to fairness, openness and respect for diversity. Students are guided in discussions, reflect on tasks and participate in group activities to encourage the development of moral reasoning and ethical decision making. For example, in the context of social justice, civic responsibility, students are asked to consider real-life scenarios, give their views and consider the implications of various actions. It facilitates students to apply character values in their daily life, beyond theoretical knowledge.

In addition, there is a strengthening of students' character education in the development of students' social attitudes and interpersonal skills through PPKn. The classroom transforms into a place where students learn how to respectfully interact, manage differences, and work collaboratively with others. These experiences help to develop empathy, tolerance and a sense of collective responsibility. Character education in this sense is not just about personal moral development, but also creating a harmonious and inclusive social atmosphere. As pupils interact with the material and one another, their growing knowledge of their place in a multicultural society is gradually built up.

The findings from interviews provide strong support for the role of PPKn in strengthening character education. One teacher stated,

“PPKn is not just about teaching laws or rules, but more importantly about shaping students’ attitudes and behaviors so they can become responsible and respectful individuals.”

This highlights the broader educational purpose of PPKn as a medium for character formation. In addition, a student shared,

“Through PPKn lessons, I learned how to respect others, work together, and be more responsible in my actions.”

This response indicates that students perceive PPKn as influential in shaping their character and guiding their behavior both inside and outside the classroom.

Moreover, the reinforcement of character education is supported by consistent practices within the school environment. Teachers integrate value-based reinforcement through feedback, classroom norms, and daily interactions. Positive behaviors such as cooperation, honesty, and respect are acknowledged and encouraged, while inappropriate behaviors are addressed through constructive guidance. This continuous reinforcement helps students internalize character values over time, making them part of their personal identity rather than temporary learning outcomes.

Development of Students' Tolerance

Tolerance is one of the key results of the internalization of values in the process of a student's development for multiculturalism values-based Civic Education (PPKn), which is reflected in the process of internalizing values of respect, empathy and openness to diversity. Tolerance is not simply defined as accepting difference; in the classroom it also implies an active desire to engage, communicate and cooperate with others who have different cultural, social, and religious backgrounds. As students are gradually exposed to inclusive learning, they naturally come to value differences as a normal and enriching element of social life.

Tolerance is instilled in the process of implementing PPKn through structured learning activities in which dialogue and understanding is encouraged. Students express their perspectives and opinions in the discussions about real-life problems concerning diversity facilitated by the teacher, while also listening to the different opinions of others (Mpuangnan, 2025). This exercise encourages students to think about and appreciate that others have other perspectives. Open discussion helps students to learn how to respond to conflict openly and without pre-judging. These experiences help to develop tolerant behaviours over time that are carried over into daily interactions.

Additionally, the building of tolerance is closely related to classroom environment, which is well supportive and inclusive. The role of teachers is an important one with regard to building norms promoting equality, fairness and respect for others between students. Students are free to express their identities and perspectives in such an environment without the threat of discrimination. The feeling of psychological safety is essential to enable authentic interactions and trust between peers. Through this embracing environment, students learn to look at others' experiences through an empathetic lens, fostering an understanding that is key to tolerance.

The results of interviews reflect the students' experience of developing tolerance in PPKn learning. One student stated,

"In our class, we often discuss different opinions, and the teacher reminds us to respect everyone's views, even if we disagree."

This statement reflects how classroom practices directly influence students' attitudes toward diversity. Similarly, a teacher explained,

"I always encourage students to see differences as something positive, so they can learn to accept and appreciate others without discrimination."

This highlights the intentional role of educators in shaping students' perspectives and guiding them toward more inclusive attitudes.

Tolerance is reinforced through collaborative learning activities that require students to work together despite their differences. Group work, peer discussions, and joint problem-solving tasks provide opportunities for students to interact closely with others who may have different backgrounds or viewpoints. These interactions help break down stereotypes and build mutual understanding. As students collaborate, they learn to value each other's contributions,

negotiate differences, and develop a sense of shared responsibility. Such experiences are instrumental in transforming abstract concepts of tolerance into practical behaviors.

Moreover, the development of tolerance is not an instantaneous process but occurs gradually through repeated experiences and consistent reinforcement. Teachers continuously model tolerant behavior and provide guidance when conflicts arise, helping students navigate social challenges in a constructive manner. This ongoing process ensures that tolerance becomes embedded in students' attitudes and behaviors, rather than remaining a superficial understanding. As a result, students become more adaptable, open-minded, and capable of living harmoniously in a diverse society.

The significance of multicultural values-based Civic Education (PPKn) lies in its ability to transform citizenship learning from the transmission of normative knowledge into the practical experience of democratic and inclusive social relations. Jayadi et al. (2022) identified unity in diversity, equality, cultural identity, and social justice as central paradigms of multicultural education in Indonesia. The present study demonstrates how these broad principles can be translated into classroom interactions rather than remaining abstract curriculum statements. This interpretation is consistent with Siegel-Stechler (2021), who found that discussions of current events, debates, simulations, and inquiry-based activities were strongly associated with an open classroom climate. Consequently, the contribution of multicultural PPKn does not merely depend on adding information about cultural differences but on structuring participation so that students can express, examine, and reconsider their perspectives respectfully.

The use of contextual social issues also indicates that character formation becomes more meaningful when citizenship concepts are connected to the social realities experienced by students. Lash (2021) demonstrated that multicultural citizenship education can develop students' cultural citizenship and critical consciousness when teachers deliberately connect curriculum content with contemporary social tensions. While Lash examined teaching within a politically hostile environment, the present study extends this argument by showing that contextual multicultural learning is equally important in ordinary classroom settings. McAvoy and McAvoy (2021) similarly found that structured deliberation among high school students could reduce political divisions. However, deliberation was effective because students were guided to examine evidence and engage with opposing arguments. Therefore, contextual discussion should not be treated as unrestricted conversation; it requires clear norms, balanced participation, and teacher-guided reflection to develop civic reasoning rather than reinforce existing prejudice.

Case analysis, discussion, and multicultural learning media can further promote perspective-taking, but their educational effects depend on how they are pedagogically processed. Gunn et al. (2022) showed that a structured debate design requiring students to prepare opposing positions created a safer environment for examining controversial issues and reduced the tendency to defend only pre-existing opinions. This suggests that students should occasionally be encouraged to explain perspectives different from their own before making moral judgments. Sumargono et al. (2024) likewise demonstrated that a historical empathy-based multicultural learning model supported by virtual reality contributed to students' understanding of culturally diverse experiences. In relation to the present study, videos, stories, and social cases should therefore be accompanied by perspective-taking questions, reflective writing, and role-reversal activities. Without these processes, learning media may only provide information about diversity without producing deeper empathy or behavioral change.

The teacher's role should be interpreted as that of an active norm-setter rather than merely a passive moral example. Bergamaschi et al. (2022), based on data from 1,858 secondary students, found that intolerance decreased when students perceived their teachers as explicitly addressing racism, discrimination, and cultural diversity. This means that tolerant behavior is strengthened when teachers visibly challenge discriminatory statements, ensure equal participation, and explain why certain behaviors are inconsistent with classroom values. At the same time, Aldrup et al. (2022) found inconsistent evidence that teachers' self-reported empathy alone was associated with instructional quality or student outcomes. Personal empathy is therefore insufficient unless it is translated into observable pedagogical actions. The present findings support the importance of combining teacher role modeling with explicit interventions, fair classroom management, and consistent responses to prejudice.

Effective implementation also depends on teachers' multicultural competence and institutional support. Lu et al. (2022) conceptualized multicultural teaching as a multidimensional practice involving teachers' multicultural beliefs, efficacy, instructional practices, school support, family and community relationships, and their ability to manage resistance. Their model indicates that teachers may value diversity but still experience difficulty translating those beliefs into classroom practices. Schotte et al. (2022) similarly showed that teachers' cultural beliefs were related to students' school adjustment in complex ways and that multicultural beliefs did not automatically result in equally supportive learning experiences. Thus, the implementation identified in this study should not rely solely on individual teacher commitment. Schools need to provide professional development on facilitating sensitive discussions, responding to bias, selecting representative materials, and assessing affective and behavioral learning outcomes.

The inclusive classroom climate emerging from multicultural PPKn can be understood as an important mechanism connecting instructional practices with students' social development. Schachner et al. (2021) demonstrated that classroom cultural-diversity climate is multidimensional, encompassing equality, inclusion, cultural pluralism, critical awareness, and recognition of intercultural connections. Their findings warn against a color-evasive approach that treats all students identically while ignoring unequal experiences and cultural identities. Abacioglu et al. (2023) further found that peer relationships could mediate the relationship between multicultural education practices and student engagement, although the effects differed according to classroom composition. Accordingly, placing students from different backgrounds in the same group does not automatically produce tolerance. Collaborative activities require shared goals, interdependent roles, equitable opportunities to contribute, and reflection on how differences were negotiated.

The development of tolerance should also be understood as more than the absence of conflict. Tropp et al. (2022) concluded that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice among young people, but its effectiveness depends on the quality of interaction, institutional support, equal status, and opportunities for meaningful cooperation. Repeated contact without these conditions may leave stereotypes unchanged or even intensify intergroup tension. Adelman et al. (2022) further distinguished passive tolerance, in which individuals merely refrain from interfering with others, from active tolerance, in which they support the rights and participation of groups whose practices they may personally disapprove of. The collaborative and dialogic practices examined in the present study potentially support active tolerance because students are encouraged not only to accept difference but also to communicate, cooperate, and treat different viewpoints fairly. Nevertheless, future assessment should

explicitly examine whether students are willing to defend others from discrimination and support equal participation, not simply avoid interpersonal conflict.

Within the Indonesian educational context, the findings reinforce evidence that multicultural values are most effectively internalized when they are embedded across instructional content, classroom activities, and everyday school practices. Arfaton et al. (2025) reported that group discussion, diversity-related films, and technology-assisted learning helped high school students understand tolerance and mutual respect. However, their study also indicated that multicultural education must move beyond theoretical explanation to influence students' social behavior. Hasnawia et al. (2025) similarly found that multicultural PPKn promoted tolerance through content diversification, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, and equitable teaching. The present study strengthens these conclusions by indicating that sustainable implementation requires alignment among lesson planning, instructional strategies, teacher–student interaction, and classroom norms rather than relying on occasional multicultural activities.

Character education consequently develops through repeated participation in value-oriented practices rather than through moral instruction alone. Maulana et al. (2024) identified role modeling, experience-based learning, multicultural resources, and intercultural collaborative projects as important strategies for cultivating tolerance and national character. They also noted barriers related to teacher training, curriculum integration, learning materials, and community involvement. Haq et al. (2022) similarly emphasized that character education must be systematically planned, implemented, and aligned with the school's vision and daily culture. In the present context, responsibility, empathy, honesty, and respect become meaningful when students repeatedly practice them through group responsibility, classroom dialogue, reflective activities, constructive feedback, and the resolution of disagreements. Character should therefore be evaluated through observed conduct, participation patterns, reflective work, and students' responses to actual social differences rather than through cognitive tests alone.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the integration of multicultural values into Civic Education (PPKn) plays a significant role in strengthening character education and fostering students' tolerance. Through interactive learning strategies, contextual discussions, and inclusive classroom practices, students are not only able to understand the importance of diversity but also to internalize values such as respect, empathy, and social responsibility. The findings reveal that PPKn, when implemented beyond a purely theoretical approach, becomes an effective medium for shaping students' attitudes and behaviors in navigating differences constructively. Moreover, the active role of teachers as facilitators and role models, supported by a conducive learning environment, further reinforces the development of positive character and tolerant dispositions among students. Therefore, multicultural values-based PPKn learning is essential in preparing students to become responsible, ethical, and tolerant citizens capable of contributing to a harmonious and diverse society.

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