



# Integrative Framework of James A. Banks and Kamanto Sunarto's Multicultural Education for Preventing SARA Conflicts in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Indonesia's cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity is a national strength, yet it also creates vulnerabilities that can trigger SARA-based tensions, particularly when intensified by digital misinformation and the politicization of identity. This study responds to the need for a multicultural education framework that bridges global theoretical perspectives with Indonesia's socio-religious realities. Employing a qualitative analytical approach, the research integrates James A. Banks' multidimensional model of multicultural education with Kamanto Sunarto's perspective, which emphasizes inclusivity rooted in Islamic intellectual traditions. The findings reveal that Banks' focus on educational integration and equity aligns closely with Sunarto's emphasis on interreligious and intercultural openness, producing a complementary model suited to mitigating SARA-related conflicts. This integrated framework provides fresh direction for curriculum development, teacher capacity-building, and interfaith educational programs, while offering practical contributions to efforts aimed at strengthening social harmony in Indonesia.

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## ABSTRAK

*Keberagaman budaya, etnis, dan agama adalah kekuatan Indonesia, namun pada saat yang sama menjadi sumber munculnya ketegangan SARA, terutama ketika diperuncing oleh arus informasi digital dan politisasi identitas. Penelitian ini berangkat dari kebutuhan akan sebuah kerangka pendidikan multikultural yang mampu menjembatani teori global dengan realitas sosial Indonesia. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif-analitis, studi ini menggabungkan gagasan James A. Banks tentang pendidikan multikultural multidimensional dengan perspektif Kamanto Sunarto yang menekankan nilai-nilai inklusivitas dalam tradisi Islam. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa penekanan Banks pada integrasi dan keadilan pendidikan berpadu secara komplementer dengan fokus Sunarto pada keterbukaan lintas agama dan budaya. Keduanya kemudian membentuk model yang relevan untuk meredam potensi konflik SARA. Kerangka ini menawarkan arah baru bagi pengembangan kurikulum, peningkatan kompetensi guru, serta program dialog antariman, sekaligus memberikan kontribusi nyata bagi upaya memperkuat harmoni sosial di Indonesia.*

## KATA KUNCI

Pendidikan Multikultural, James A. Bank, Kamanto Sunarto, Konflik SARA, Indonesia

## Introduction

Multicultural education has become a central theme in global academic discourse as societies increasingly seek models for maintaining harmony amid growing diversity. In Turkey, for instance, scholarly publications on multiculturalism have multiplied, while in Brazil discussions on ethnic and racial diversity in education have gained prominence in recent years. These trends demonstrate a global recognition that multicultural education is a strategic tool for strengthening social integration in plural societies. (Chamlian & Kowalewski, 2016; Özsoy & Bilgi, 2016)

Indonesia, often described as one of the world's most multicultural nations, provides a unique landscape for this discourse. With more than 300 ethnic groups, around 200 local languages, and six officially recognized religions—Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—Indonesia embodies both the richness and strains of cultural diversity. (Lestari, 2015) While such plurality represents a source of national strength, it also leaves the country vulnerable to fragmentation. Conflicts rooted in ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup differences (SARA) remain prevalent and are often intensified by structural inequalities such as economic disparities and political injustice. Among these factors, identity-based divisions pose the greatest threat to social cohesion. (Usman et al., 2020; Zuldin, 2019)

SARA conflicts have continued to increase over time in several regions of Indonesia. Some of the cases that have occurred include the conflict between the Dayak and Madurese tribes in Sampit, the Ambon conflict, the separatist conflict of Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS) and Operasi Papua Merdeka (OPM), the GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka) conflict, and several blasphemy conflicts that are still happening today. (Siregar, 2017) Citing data from the Ministry of Communication and Information, from 2018-2021 3,640 pieces of digital contents have been taken down because they have the potential to cause SARA conflict. (Hafil & Saputra, 2022) Based on counts up to February 2022, the National Police have followed up on 1,042 social media accounts for allegedly spreading content containing hate speech based on SARA. (HUMAS POLRI, 2022) Furthermore, as of February 2023, the Ministry of Communication and Information has also found around 3 million harmful content, among which are hate speech contents that have the potential to cause SARA conflicts. (Kiswondari, 2023)

Some SARA issues are also reinforced by political interests that try to utilize them, both to show the identity of a group and to bring down other groups. The argument is strengthened by the statement of the Governor of Lemhannas RI, Andi Widjajanto, who said that there are three most significant challenges in Indonesia's political escalation in 2023-2024, including identity politics, misinformation, and hate speech. (Biro Humas Lemhannas RI, 2022) As if becoming a reality, this statement can certainly be felt and has happened today. Rather than that, the rise of SARA issues in various aspects can have implications for polarization and division that have the potential to create conflict in society.

These recurring conflicts indicate a fundamental problem in society's understanding of multiculturalism and intergroup relations. Without an educational approach that cultivates sensitivity toward differences, SARA conflicts may continue to escalate. (S. Lee et al., 2023) Thus, strengthening multicultural education becomes a strategic necessity.

To address this challenge, the present study integrates James A. Banks' multidimensional model of multicultural education with Kamanto Sunarto's Islamic-grounded perspective. Banks proposes five dimensions—content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and the empowerment of school culture—which collectively seek to confront systemic racism, ethnocentrism, and structural inequality within educational systems (Yaya Suryana, 2015). While Banks' framework offers a comprehensive structure for promoting justice and reducing prejudice, its emphasis on Western socio-cultural dynamics limits its capacity to fully address the religious and moral dimensions that play a significant role in SARA-related tensions in Indonesia.

Sunarto's perspective complements this limitation by grounding multicultural education in Islamic ethical principles such as justice, inclusivity, and tolerance, which resonate strongly with Indonesia's socio-religious landscape (Harto, 2014). His approach provides a normative foundation for fostering interreligious harmony, yet it lacks the systematic pedagogical mechanisms that Banks outlines to transform institutional culture and classroom practice. By integrating the structural rigor of Banks' model with the ethical-spiritual orientation of Sunarto's framework, this study constructs an approach that is both pedagogically robust and contextually relevant for mitigating SARA conflicts in Indonesia. Together, these perspectives form a hybrid model capable of addressing not only cognitive and institutional biases but also the religious sensitivities and cultural values that shape intergroup relations in Indonesian society.

However, despite the relevance of both frameworks, no previous study has systematically integrated Banks' and Sunarto's ideas to develop a multicultural education model specifically aimed at preventing SARA conflicts in Indonesia. For instance, Purwasari et al. (2023) reviewed Banks' five dimensions of multicultural education and emphasized their importance for Indonesia's educational context. (Purwasari et al., 2023) Wahyono et al. (2022) investigated elementary school teachers' understanding of multicultural education in Yogyakarta and found that many teachers still adopt essentialist views of diversity, shaping their levels of tolerance. (Wahyono et al., 2022) Meanwhile, Ganes Harpendya et al. (2022) examined peace education as a strategy to mitigate social conflict through both formal and informal channels. (Ganes Harpendya et al., 2022).

**Table 1. Summary of Previous Studies and Their Limitations**

Researchers	Main Findings	Limitations (Gap)
Purwasari et al. (2023)	Describes Banks' five dimensions of multicultural education and their relevance for Indonesian education.	Does not connect Banks' framework with Islamic perspectives or the context of SARA conflict prevention.
Wahyono et al. (2022)	Shows that elementary school teachers often hold essentialist views of multiculturalism, influencing their attitudes toward tolerance.	Does not propose a new theoretical model and does not integrate Western and Islamic multicultural approaches.
Ganes Harpendya et al. (2022)	Highlights the importance of peace education in reducing social conflict through formal and informal approaches.	Does not examine multicultural education through the lenses of Banks or Sunarto, nor does it propose an integrative model for SARA conflict prevention.

Although these studies contribute valuable insights, none offers an integrative model that combines Banks' and Sunarto's perspectives within the context of preventing SARA conflicts. Thus, collectively, these works reinforce the existing gap that this research seeks to fill. The absence of such an integrative framework highlights a significant theoretical and practical gap that this study aims to address. This gap is significant because Indonesia's socio-religious landscape requires a hybrid model that aligns global theories of social justice with local Islamic values of harmony and inclusivity. Therefore, this research fills that gap and offers a novel framework that can serve as a reference for future studies on multicultural education in plural societies.

The novelty of this research lies in its synthesis of Banks' emphasis on equity, tolerance, and structural integration with Sunarto's articulation of Islamic inclusivity and religious harmony. This integration contributes theoretically by offering a new framework that merges Western and Islamic educational paradigms, and practically by providing a foundation for curriculum development, teacher training, and interfaith learning programs that foster tolerance and national unity.

The general problem addressed in this study is the rise of SARA-based conflicts in Indonesia, driven by identity-based tensions, political polarization, and the proliferation of hate speech in digital spaces. At the core of this issue lies the absence of a multicultural education model that systematically integrates the perspectives of James A. Banks and Kamanto Sunarto to respond comprehensively to these challenges. Accordingly, this study is guided by three research questions: How can Banks' framework of multicultural education be applied within the Indonesian context? In what ways can Sunarto's Islamic-based multicultural perspective contribute to preventing SARA conflicts? And how can both perspectives be integrated to develop a relevant and effective multicultural education model for Indonesia?

Therefore, this study aims to analyze and integrate the perspectives of James A. Banks and Kamanto Sunarto in order to develop a Integrative multicultural education model relevant to preventing SARA conflicts in Indonesia. The model is expected to contribute not only to academic discourse but also to policy-oriented efforts promoting social cohesion.

## **Methods**

This study employs a purely qualitative library research design, which is appropriate for examining and interpreting the theoretical perspectives of James A. Banks and Kamanto Sunarto within the context of multicultural education and SARA-related conflicts in Indonesia. (Gyung-Jin Park, 2006; Mariano M. Ariola, 2006; Mestika Zed, 2004) Primary data consist of books, articles, and original writings authored by Banks and Sunarto, while secondary data include scholarly publications, research reports, and other relevant literature on multicultural education and SARA conflicts.

The collected sources were analysed using content analysis, allowing the researcher to identify key concepts, compare theoretical constructs, and synthesise both scholars' ideas into an integrative framework. (Hamzah Amir, 2020; Kenneth M. Sayre, 1969) The analysis focused on mapping thematic patterns related to multicultural principles, social justice, and inclusivity. (Susanto et al., 2024) To ensure data credibility, source triangulation was applied by systematically comparing insights from primary texts with supporting secondary literature. (Kojongian et al., 2022).

## Results and Discussion

### The Definition of Multicultural Education

Etymologically, multicultural education consists of "education" and "multicultural." Education comes from the word "pedagogic," which means the science of guiding children. (Nurkholis, 2013b) According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, education means "a process of teaching, training, and learning, especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills." (Dictionary, 2023) In contrast to the previous definition, Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) defines it as "*proses pengubahan sikap dan tata laku seseorang atau kelompok orang dalam usaha mendewasakan manusia melalui upaya pengajaran dan latihan, proses perbuatan, cara mendidik*". (Indonesia, 2023)

Then, based on Education Law Article 1 Republic of Indonesia Law no. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, education means "*usaha sadar dan terencana untuk mewujudkan suasana belajar dan proses pembelajaran agar peserta didik secara aktif mengembangkan potensi dirinya untuk memiliki kekuatan spiritual keagamaan, pengendalian diri, kepribadian, akhlak mulia, serta keterampilan yang diperlukan dirinya, masyarakat, bangsa dan Negara*." As well as the previous definition, Ki Hajar Dewantara defines *education* as an effort to advance the character, mind, and body of children in order to advance the perfection of life, namely life and life of children in harmony with nature and society. (Nurkholis, 2013a) From the above understanding, it can be concluded that education is an effort to guide children from birth to achieve physical, intellectual and spiritual maturity so that they are not only qualified in skill, cognitive, intellectual aspects but also spiritual and ethical aspects.

Multicultural comes from two words, "Multi" and "Cultural"; multi means many, and cultural means based on culture. Multicultural or Multiculturalism includes an appreciation, understanding, and assessment of one's culture, accompanied by respect and curiosity about the ethnic culture of others. (Lubis, 2006) Substantively, Multiculturalism is the willingness to accept other groups as equal as unity in difference, regardless of cultural, gender, religious, or linguistic differences. The focus of Multiculturalism is the understanding of a life rich in cultural differences, individually and publicly. (Nugraha et al., 2020)

One of the efforts that can be made to fight for Multiculturalism is through multicultural education. Multicultural education involves principles and practices that are directly connected to social justice. This means it is not just about thinking critically about unfair power, privilege, and discrimination, but also about taking action to actively fight against ongoing, systemic unfairness. (Shannon-Baker, 2018) It can be interpreted that multicultural education is education that includes all students without distinguishing groups, such as gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social strata, and religion. (Amin, 2018) Zakiyudin Badhawi adds that multicultural education is a way to teach differences and diversity. (Baidhawi, 2005)

In the terminological definition, the definition of multicultural education, according to specialists and experts, is very diverse and different. Azyumardi Azra defines multicultural education as education for or about cultural diversity in response to demographic and cultural changes in a particular community environment or even for the sake of the whole. (Azra, 2000) More specifically, M. Ainul Yaqin defines multicultural education as an educational strategy that is applied to all types of subjects by using cultural differences that exist in students such as differences in ethnicity, religion, language, gender, social class, race, ability and age to make the learning process easier. (Ainul Yaqin, 2005) In summary, Andersen and Cusher summarize multicultural education as education about cultural diversity. (Cusher & Andersen, 1994) Agreeing with

Andersen and Cushner, John W. Santrock defines it as education that respects diversity and accommodates the perspectives of various cultural groups regularly. (Santrock, 2007)

From the above definitions, multicultural education has at least three keys. First is the process of developing attitudes and behavior. Second, respect for cultural differences and diversity. Third, respect for other cultures. These three keywords will be the foundation for formulating the basic concepts for understanding multicultural education.

### **Multicultural Education according to James A. Banks**

James A. Banks is a professor who is well known in the world of multicultural education in the West as the first conceptualizer and initiator of multiculturalism education. His concern for multicultural education began when he saw a mistake in applying the theory of educational multiculturalism theory only to the same racial and national groups. He also saw that there was a high degree of racism and ethnicity applied in theory in the West. (Yaya Suryana, 2015) From this, Banks seeks to develop theories and concepts of multicultural education that are fair to all races and ethnicities. This aligns with Banks' opinion that *"Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students, regardless of their gender, social class, and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics, have an equal opportunity to learn in school."* (C. A. M. and J. A. B. Banks, 2010)

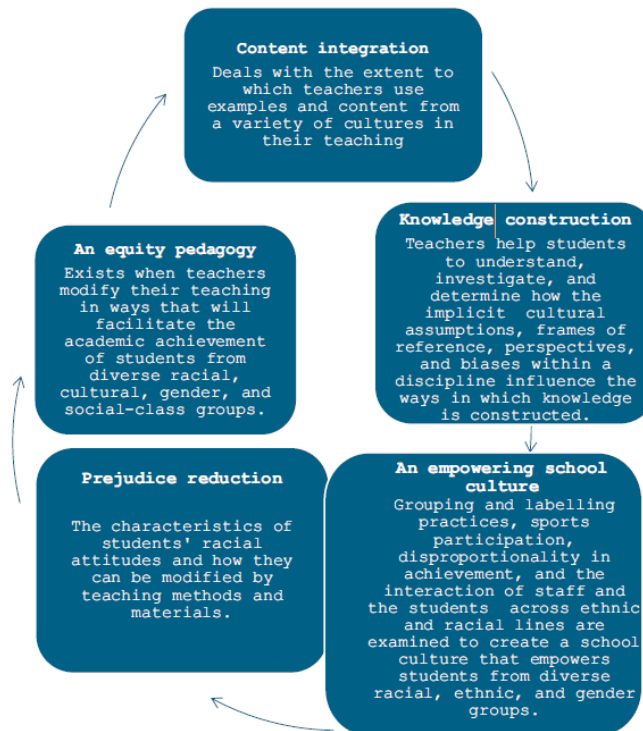
Generally, multicultural education is an educational process that, in the practice of educational management, is based on the spirit of upholding the principles of equality, mutual respect, acceptance, understanding, and moral commitment to social justice. (Gay, 1994) To achieve this goal, Banks organizes multicultural education based on three functions and orientations. First, multicultural education programs are content-oriented. The most significant effort in this orientation is to change the curriculum in order to realize three goals: (1) compiling and developing multicultural materials into all subject matter, (2) incorporating different viewpoints and perspectives in the curriculum, and (3) changing curriculum principles or standards and developing new paradigms in the curriculum. (Gary, 1994a)

Second, student-oriented multicultural education programs. Multicultural education programs are specifically designed to meet the academic needs of different groups of students, especially from minority groups, to reflect the school's diversity. The program is not structured to change the curriculum or the social context of education but to help culturally and linguistically different students transition into mainstream education.

Third, socially oriented multicultural education programs. This program is conducted to improve schooling and cultural and political contexts. So, the goal of this program is to expand the impact of increasing racial and cultural tolerance and reducing racial and cultural bias. (Zubaedi, 2008)

After conceptualizing the basic foundation of multicultural education in general, Banks offers dimensions of multicultural education that can assist teachers in implementing several programs that can respond to the differences of learners, namely: 1) *Content Integration*, 2) *The knowledge construction process*, 3) *Prejudice reduction*, 4) *An equity pedagogy*, 5) *An empowering school culture and social structure*. (Purwasari et al., 2023; Thomas et al., 2025)

Figure 1. James Banks's Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education



First, content integration or integration of multicultural education in the curriculum. That is how a teacher can bring and provide pedagogical content with various cultural or cultural diversity material. This dimension is related to bringing various cultures into classrooms. This is sought to illustrate critical concepts, generalizations, principles, and theories in their topic areas regarding specific disciplines. (Raharja, 2010, p. 33) it can also foster in students the existence of multicultural cultures owned by other groups and can be integrated into materials or learning methods, assignments and evaluations in textbooks. (Tilaar, 2004)

Second is the knowledge construction process. It is a dimension that allows teachers to assist students in understanding and conducting an investigation and determining cultural assumptions, cultural sources, and cultural perspectives that affect students' knowledge construction. (Wahdiah et al., 2023) This is done to realize multicultural education successfully. It is necessary to think that the school is a place that has a social system where the variables are related, and the school also needs a strategy formula that can change the entire school environment in order to realize multicultural education. (Tilaar, 2004)

Third, prejudice reduction. It is a dimension that focuses on racist student behavior and how they can modify it with teaching methods and materials taught to students. (J. A. Banks, 1993a) This dimension requires teachers to be able to build positive attitudes about how students can accept differences in each ethnic group, race, culture and habits. (Tilaar, 2004)

Fourth is an equity pedagogy. What is meant is a dimension that builds equality between students carried out by teachers in learning methods for students who have different backgrounds from ethnicity, race, culture, and gender. (Wahdiah et al., 2023) This aims to eliminate economic and social class differences in learning. (Pahrudin, 2017)

Fifth, an empowering school culture and social structure. It is a dimension that requires a culture that makes the organization and practices of educational institutions conducive to the academic and emotional growth of all learners or children. (Yusuf,

2020) This dimension also establishes groupings and labeling where students can participate in school activities such as sports and activities that make each student communicate with each other to build and strengthen relationships between race, ethnicity, and gender.(Raharja, 2010)

From the descriptions of multicultural education above, we can understand that the purpose of multicultural education referred to by Banks is to develop the ability to appreciate and respect each other and create a harmonious life in a pluralistic society. Instead of that, Banks calls multicultural education education for *people of color*.(J. A. Banks, 1993b)

This view is in line with Sleeter's understanding that multicultural education is a set of processes carried out by schools to oppose oppressive groups.(Gary, 1994b) Thus, the goal of multicultural education is "*Multicultural education should help students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to participate in a democratic and free society. Multicultural education promotes the freedom, abilities, and skills to cross ethnic and cultural boundaries to participate in other cultures and groups*".(Reissman, 1994)

In summary, multicultural education is intended to assist students in developing knowledge, attitudes, and skills to participate in a free and democratic society. Multicultural education develops the freedom, ability, and skills to cross ethnic and cultural boundaries and participate in other cultures and groups.

### **Multicultural Education According to Kamanto Sunarto**

Unlike Banks' opinion, Kamanto Sunarto focuses more on forming the concept of multicultural education based on Islamic teachings, which is then referred to as Islamic multicultural education. Of course, the difference is influenced by the two figures' context of thought and social background. Banks lives in America, where the majority of the population comes from various ethnicities and races with various religious cultures that they adhere to.(J. Banks, 1984)

In contrast to Sunarto, who lives in Indonesia, he views Islamic multicultural education as more suitable because the Indonesian population is predominantly Muslim and religious people. On the other hand, multicultural education in the West is certainly not suitable for the context of education in Indonesia because Indonesia has a different cultural context from America even though both are the nations with multi-cultures.(Rustam Ibrahim, 2013)

In Sunarto's view, the critical essence of Islamic multicultural education consists of three essential elements, namely: (1) multicultural education teaches religious teachings about justice and the development of multicultural ideas, (2) multicultural education teaches religious teachings about divinity, and (3) multicultural education teaches tolerance, democracy and deliberation.(Teri Andrian & Aripin, 2023)

First, multicultural education that teaches religious teachings about justice and the development of multicultural ideas is a dimension that teaches students to appreciate, accept, and respect different people and exposes them to the norms of other cultures to foster the spirit of justice in each student. In his explanation, Sunarto argues that multicultural education is education for cultural diversity in society and can also be interpreted as education that offers a variety of models for cultural diversity in society, and sometimes also interpreted as education to foster student attitudes to appreciate the cultural diversity of society.(Sunarto, 2004)

Second, multicultural education teaches religious teachings about divinity, which shows that life begins and ends in divinity. This religion teaches us to be safe in the world and the hereafter. This is what distinguishes the Islamic multicultural education model from other models. Another difference is that the purpose of education in Islam is not limited to filling students' minds with knowledge and learning materials but cleaning

their souls, which are then filled with good morals and values to be applied in life in society. (Al-Abrasyi, 1969)

From this goal, students are expected to become human beings with noble character and able to appreciate cultural diversity around them. In Islamic education, Islam pays serious attention to cultures and traditions (*'urf*) that exist in every society and context, as reflected in the legal maxim *al-'ādah muḥakkamah* in *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Similarly, Dreamson (in his concept of culturally inclusive GCE) argues that non-Western cultures and religions (such as Aboriginality, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Taoism) should be positioned as equal agents in educational discourse. Both perspectives highlight the importance of recognizing and valuing cultural diversity as a foundation for cultivating humanity and noble character. (M. Lee & Cha, 2018)

Third, multicultural education teaches tolerance, democracy, and deliberation. This means that multicultural education teaches the importance of tolerance towards fellow humans of different ethnicities, races, cultures, and religions and teaches democracy and deliberation to reach mutual agreement. Tolerance, in the context of socio-cultural and religious settings, refers to attitudes and actions that prevent discrimination against diverse groups. In religion, tolerance means the majority religious group allowing other religious groups to coexist peacefully. (Muhajir et al., 2025) On the other hand, it also teaches deliberation in order to form a democratic attitude, be open to differences, respect mutual aspirations, and uphold the values of truth in order to realize a pluralistic society that is peaceful and dignified. (Teri Andrian & Aripin, 2023)

For example, Fethullah Gülen focuses on education and actualizes his thoughts through the Hizmet movement, which provides services to the community. One of the central values emphasized is love and tolerance, which are integrated into the educational curriculum based on openness and community service. He also believes that education is a vital means to cultivate a moderate and democratic society, free from the dominance of materialism, capitalism, communism, and other ideologies. (Ma'arif, 2019) Similarly, the modernization efforts of figures such as Imam Zarkasyi at Indonesian pesantren of Gontor demonstrate how Islamic boarding schools have evolved into key actors in national education and preserve local wisdom while promoting tolerance, civic responsibility, and national development. (Lathifah et al., 2025)

### **An Analysis of Multicultural Education on Banks and Sunarto's View**

A comparative reading of James A. Banks and Kamanto Sunarto reveals both convergence and divergence in their conceptualizations of multicultural education. At the level of shared principles, both scholars emphasize the importance of integrating multicultural content into the learning process to cultivate students' sensitivity toward diversity. Banks advances this through structured content integration and prejudice reduction, while Sunarto frames it through Islamic ethical values such as justice, tolerance, and deliberation. Although derived from different intellectual traditions, both perspectives underscore the need for educational materials that promote fairness and nurture respectful attitudes toward difference.

Their approaches to knowledge construction also converge conceptually yet differ in execution. Banks explicitly calls for teaching students to analyse how knowledge is shaped by cultural perspectives, thereby encouraging critical reflection on bias and ethnocentrism. Sunarto, on the other hand, emphasizes dialogical learning rooted in democratic and Islamic moral principles as a means for students to reach mutual understanding. Both approaches aim to build acceptance of difference, but Banks provides a more systematic pedagogical mechanism, while Sunarto provides a normative-ethical foundation that resonates strongly in religiously diverse contexts such as Indonesia.

The two scholars also share a commitment to cultivating positive attitudes and reducing prejudice. Banks proposes modifying pedagogical practices to counter racism and discrimination within the classroom, whereas Sunarto stresses moral formation through teaching respect across religious and cultural boundaries. Both ultimately seek to shape learners who can interact peacefully within plural societies.

Despite these similarities, the two frameworks diverge in their grounding assumptions and areas of emphasis. Banks’ model is rooted in social science traditions and focuses on structural aspects of schooling: curriculum design, teaching strategies, and the transformation of school culture. It is largely secular in orientation and addresses multiculturalism as an institutional and societal challenge. Sunarto’s framework, by contrast, is explicitly grounded in Islamic ethical teachings, positioning moral and religious values as the core of multicultural practice. Rather than offering a detailed pedagogical structure, his approach provides a value-based philosophy for guiding attitudes toward diversity.

Another key difference lies in the level of conceptual elaboration. Banks presents a highly articulated, multidimensional model that offers clear guidance for educators seeking to operationalize multicultural education. Sunarto provides a broader normative foundation but with fewer procedural details. As a result, Banks’ work is readily applicable for curriculum reform, while Sunarto’s is more influential in shaping the moral orientation of multicultural initiatives.

Taken together, these contrasts reveal complementary strengths: Banks offers a systematic and institutionally focused framework, while Sunarto provides ethical depth rooted in Indonesia’s cultural and religious realities. Their integration therefore offers a promising foundation for developing a multicultural education model capable of addressing SARA conflicts in Indonesia—one that combines structural justice with moral inclusivity, and theoretical rigor with cultural relevance.

**Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Banks’ and Sunarto’s Multicultural Education Perspectives**

Aspect	James A. Banks	Kamanto Sunarto
<b>Philosophical Foundation</b>	Secular, social science-based, focusing on institutional and structural change.	Grounded in Islamic ethical principles (justice, tolerance, deliberation, inclusivity).
<b>Core Orientation</b>	Multidimensional pedagogical model (content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, school culture empowerment).	Normative-ethical framework emphasizing values, character formation, and interreligious harmony.
<b>Formation of Positive Attitudes and Prejudice Reduction</b>	Modifies teaching methods to reduce racism and build positive attitudes toward differences.	Teaches respect and acceptance of people who are different; stresses moral formation.
<b>Goal of Multicultural Education</b>	Achieving social justice, reducing prejudice, transforming school systems to be equitable for all groups.	Cultivating moral sensitivity, justice, and tolerance aligned with Islamic values relevant to Indonesian society.

<b>Limitations</b>	Limited engagement with religious values; context mainly Western; may require adaptation for Indonesia.	Less detailed in instructional methodology; requires integration with structured pedagogical models.
<b>Relevance to SARA Conflict Prevention</b>	Addresses structural sources of prejudice and supports systemic transformation in education.	Addresses moral-ethical roots of intolerance and promotes interfaith harmony; aligns with Indonesia's dominant cultural-religious norms.

### **Multicultural Education as an Alternative Solution in Preventing SARA Conflicts**

Cultural pluralism and diversity are a phenomenon that cannot be avoided. (Thohir, 2019, p. 300) In the face of such plurality, it is impossible to take an anti-pluralism or anti-racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious pluralism stance. Being tolerant of pluralism is the best attitude in reducing SARA conflict in a pluralistic country. (Effendi, 2004)

As the largest multicultural country, Indonesia has abundant cultural diversity assets. This diversity can be preserved and managed to sustain the nation's progress. Multicultural management is only possible with multicultural education. To realize the unity of Indonesia, it is necessary to transform the awareness of multiculturalism into a national attribute by relying on respect for the diversity and plurality of its society. (Shofa, 2016)

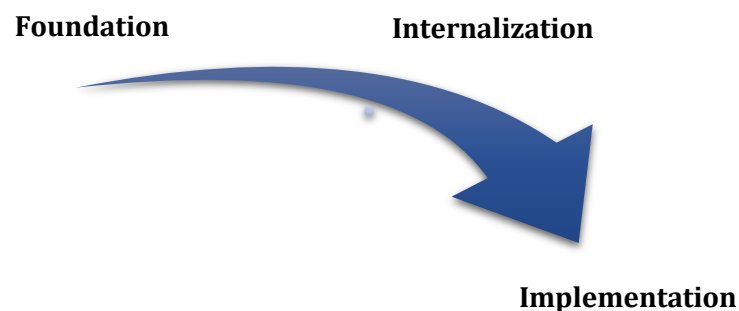
The rise of SARA conflicts that are still happening today shows that multicultural education in Indonesia still needs attention. This is partly due to the unequal education services received by the community, as well as the implementation of multicultural education that has not been carried out thoroughly. Equitable quality of education services and a more comprehensive implementation of multicultural education can help improve the performance of multicultural education achievements themselves. (Nugraha et al., 2020)

Findings from various studies affirm that multicultural education plays a strategic role in preventing and mitigating ethno-religious (SARA) conflicts in Indonesia. A literature-based study indicates that multicultural education fosters tolerant, inclusive, and solidaristic character formation among students, although its implementation still faces cultural resistance and weak policy support. (Nurfatihah et al., 2025) Another qualitative study demonstrates that diversity-oriented educational strategies cultivate democratic, pluralistic, and humanistic attitudes, thereby enabling students to act as agents of peace in a plural society while preventing the emergence of social conflicts. (Nurgiansah et al., 2022) Empirical evidence is also evident in the post-SARA conflict case of Tanjung Balai, where the integration of multicultural values into the school curriculum proved effective in bridging cultural and religious differences, though further development of independent curricula and teacher competence is still needed. (Hasanuddin et al., 2023) These findings suggest that multicultural education is not merely a theoretical discourse but has made tangible contributions to fostering tolerance, strengthening social cohesion, and preventing SARA conflicts in Indonesia.

In the context of addressing multicultural conflicts, multicultural education serves as a transformative approach through which individuals can reshape their attitudes and behaviors toward violent conflict, acquire essential values and knowledge, and cultivate the skills necessary to live harmoniously with others. This process contributes to the realization of a dynamic state of peace, fostering both inner tranquility and social harmony at the national level. (Kartadinata, S., Affandi, I., Wahyudin, D., & Ruyadi, 2015)

Integrating Banks' systematic and structured framework of multicultural education with Sunarto's emphasis on values rooted in Islamic teachings presents a constructive model for addressing racial and ethno-religious conflicts in Indonesia. The core principles shared by both perspectives—divinity, respect for diversity, prejudice reduction, equality, justice, and tolerance—are particularly relevant to Indonesia's plural context and can serve as the foundation for strengthening multicultural education. To operationalize this model, a staged approach is required, encompassing three strategic phases: establishing a foundational framework, fostering comprehensive understanding, and ensuring effective implementation. These phases can serve as the central pillars in developing a systematic and value-based model of multicultural education in Indonesia.

**Figure 2. Three Stages in Implementing Multicultural Education**



First, regarding its basic philosophical foundation, Indonesia introduced the slogan "*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*", which shows Indonesia's diversity of ethnicities, religions, and races but still in one nation and state.(SM & Mukti, 2000) The wider community has understood the slogan. In the aspect of religion, there is no single religion that is anti-diversity and intolerant of the existence of other religions. Even Islam, the majority religion in Indonesia, in its teachings, appreciates differences and respects them—quoted from QS. Al-Hujarat: 13, Allah SWT says, "*O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may get to know one another. Surely, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware.*"

If the content of the verse is examined, religious teachings can be a driving force for the community to uphold peace and improve welfare. It is human nature to be created into nations and tribes. Therefore, the religious foundation must be applied in multicultural education to maintain justice and peace. Reinforcing this opinion, Alex R. Rodger stated that religious education can promote tolerance and is an essential component of education.(Teri Andrian & Aripin, 2023)

In addition, preventive efforts should be made so that the problem of religious conflict will not recur by intensifying interfaith dialogue forums and providing education about pluralism and religious tolerance through schools as educational institutions. Pluralism and religious tolerance are not an understanding that considers all religions to be the same, but what is meant is an understanding to respect religious differences without having to follow their teachings.(Amin, 2018) The thing that needs to be underlined from pluralism in religion is at the social level not theological, not saying all religion are the same with the same God, but everyone has a different religion. As in religious tolerance, which means respecting the existence of other religions, not following the teachings of other religions.(Zarkasyi, 2012)

In this case, an understanding of religious tolerance taught through multicultural education is very important to consider. For example, a study entitled “Implementasi Pendidikan Multikultural melalui Rasa Toleransi Beragama di Sekolah Dasar Negeri 1 Cikampek Selatan Jakarta” explains the importance of multicultural education and the cultivation of tolerance characters in schools to overcome racial conflicts that occur to develop students' sense of tolerance for diversity. In its practical implementation, Christian teachers at SDN Cikampek Selatan 1 organise Christian religious lessons for Christian students while Muslim students recite the Quran together in the schoolyard. These religious activities do not involve Muslim students. To reduce inter-religious conflict and instill tolerance, the religious activities are asked not to make loud noises or sing to disturb Muslim students who are reciting the Koran, and the place of the activity is carried out in the upper room in a closed manner. Thus, the activity runs well and peacefully without any conflict among Muslim teachers. (Maemunah et al., 2023)

Second, at the internalization stage, teachers or educators play a central role. In multicultural education, they are not only expected to master their subjects professionally but also to instill core religious and ethical values in students. As a result, graduates of schools and universities are not merely proficient in their respective disciplines but are also able to apply these values in appreciating and respecting the existence of people from different religions and beliefs. (Hidayat, 2014) At the same time, it is equally essential to ensure that all teachers are supported in developing high levels of cultural competence and pedagogical efficacy so that they can better serve diverse students in their classrooms. (Choi & Lee, 2020)

In terms of curriculum, multicultural education through Civic Education and Islamic Religious Education must be examined comprehensively, starting from designing planning and curriculum through enrichment or strengthening of various existing competencies. The notion of curriculum is very fundamental and describes the natural position in an educational process as *the heart of education*. (Sangadji, 2016) So, strengthening the multiculturalism based education curriculum can develop students' attitudes to be able to respect the rights of others without distinguishing the majority and minority. (Arphattananon, 2021; Rosyada, 2014)

Therefore, multicultural education is not only a hidden curriculum, but also a value-based approach designed to instill in students a multicultural perception and attitude, enabling them to coexist peacefully amidst diverse cultures, religions, and languages. This is important for building a strong nation. The idea is that togetherness helps students grow their culture and society. This is why future studies on schools should focus on how well they teach students to value and work with others. (M. Lee et al., 2020; Sangadji, 2016) These characters are expected to be born as a result of multicultural education implemented at the university level in the curriculum.

At the school level, multicultural education depends not only on curriculum design but also on teachers whose competence, attitudes, and ethical commitment shape how multicultural values are practiced in daily learning (Yu et al., 2025). Research at SMAK Penabur Cirebon, for example, demonstrates that teachers serve as moral and cultural role models by providing opportunities for students to practice their respective religious rituals and by applying disciplinary rules consistently without discriminating between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds (Wiyanto, 2020). Such practices show that the internalization of justice, tolerance, and mutual respect is inseparable from the teacher's role in modeling inclusive behavior, which is crucial in shaping how students navigate ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity (O'Donnell et al., 2024).

This centrality of teachers is reinforced by recent initiatives such as the UNY Labschool teacher training program, where educators were equipped with strategies to strengthen the internalization of multicultural values in classroom instruction. The

program emphasizes that effective multicultural education requires not only theoretical understanding but also practical competence in designing learning modules, facilitating dialogue across differences, and creating an inclusive environment. (PGSD FIP UNY, 2025) As a result, if multicultural education has been internalized at the school and university level, it is likely to reduce SARA conflicts in the region, moreover as a mediator and *problem solver* in these conflicts.

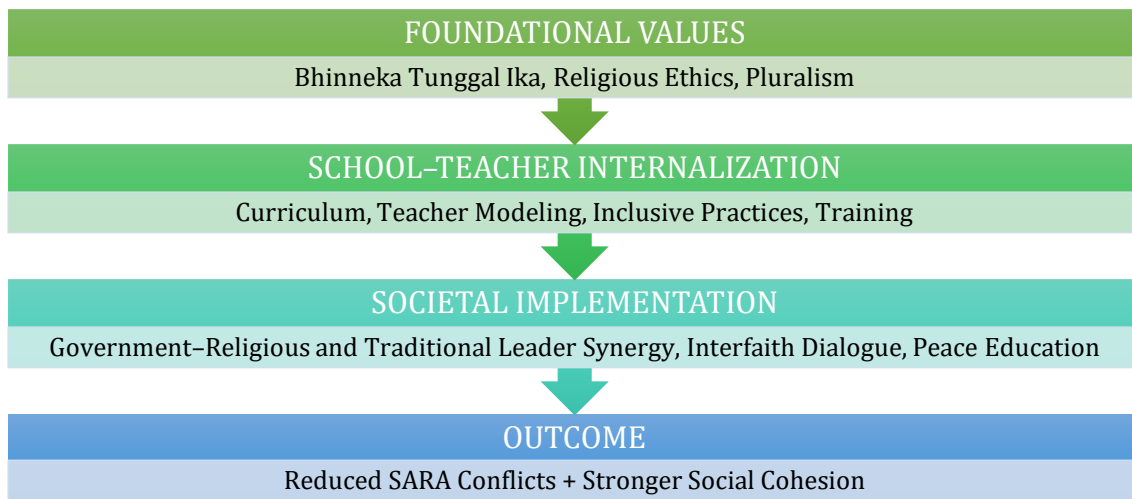
The last stage is implementation. The implementation in question is the application of multicultural education in the social realm or society. This is in line with Banks' typology of socially orientated multicultural education. (Gary, 1994a) In his view, the purpose of this program is to expand the impact of increasing racial and cultural tolerance and reducing racial and cultural bias in society. (Zubaedi, 2008) Corroborating Bank's opinion, Lue & Riyanto are of the view that the pattern of peace education in a multicultural context is highly interrelated and related, and influenced by factors of social interaction, culture, communication and also technological development. (Lue & Riyanto, 2020; Zubaedi, 2008) Therefore, the social sphere becomes an essential point in measuring the success of multicultural education.

To achieve this goal, the implementation of multiculturalism in education requires the support of three key stakeholders: the government, religious scholars, and traditional leaders in each region. The government, through its authority, is responsible for ensuring justice in policymaking, which should be carried out in dialogue with religious and traditional authorities. As evidenced in the United States, the United Kingdom, European countries, and China, governmental policies play a decisive role in shaping the scope and impact of multicultural education, since inclusive integration policies and curriculum frameworks directly influence students' attitudes, educational equity, and inter-ethnic relations. (M. Lee et al., 2019) Such synergy can mitigate social injustices that often trigger ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup (SARA) conflicts. Ultimately, collaboration among these three actors has the potential to foster a civilized society that upholds noble human values, strengthens national identity, respects cultural heritage, and appreciates the richness of diversity. (Maksum & Yunan, 2004)

This view is reinforced by a study entitled "Peran Pemerintah Desa Kertajaya Dalam Meningkatkan Toleransi Beragama Masyarakat Multikultural di Desa Kertajaya Kecamatan Panawangan Kabupaten Ciamis". Based on the results of the study, the government plays a role in encouraging religious tolerance in a multicultural society through the formulation of inclusive policies that recognise and protect the religious rights of everyone. This includes freedom of religion, protection from discrimination, and strict law enforcement against violations of religious rights. Second, facilitating interfaith dialogue guided by religious experts. This dialogue should include a better understanding of different religions, conflict resolution, and concerted efforts to promote interfaith tolerance and harmony, so as to create an environment conducive to interfaith tolerance and dialogue. (Farhan Wahdatul Huda et al., 2023)

As a result, a detailed explanation regarding three stages in SARA conflict resolution with Bank and Sunarto's multicultural education model can be seen in the following figure:

**Figure 3. The Integrative Conceptual Framework of Multicultural Education**



The integrative conceptual framework proposed above shows that the effectiveness of multicultural education in preventing SARA conflicts depends on three interconnected elements. First, a strong foundational value system rooted in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and religious teachings—especially Islam—provides the moral basis for justice, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Second, these values must be internalized at the school level through teachers who model inclusive behavior, supportive curriculum design, daily learning practices, and capacity-building programs such as the UNY Labschool training. Third, multicultural values need to be applied in the wider community through collaboration between government, religious leaders, and traditional authorities via inclusive policies and interfaith dialogue. When these three elements operate together, multicultural education functions as a comprehensive and practical approach to reducing SARA tensions and strengthening social cohesion in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, the application of Banks' and Sunarto's perspectives in the Indonesian context is not without limitations. Structural challenges such as unequal access to education, socio-political polarization, and the persistence of exclusive religious or ethnic interpretations may hinder the effective implementation of an integrative multicultural model. Moreover, the theoretical frameworks developed by Banks and Sunarto require contextual adaptation to align with Indonesia's local wisdom, cultural diversity, and educational realities. (Hasanuddin et al., 2023) Therefore, while their integration offers a strong normative foundation, its practical success depends on continuous adaptation—such as incorporating indigenous values (*kearifan lokal*), strengthening community-based initiatives, and aligning state policies with multicultural education goals. (Nurfatihah et al., 2025) These adjustments are essential to ensure that the proposed framework is not only conceptually robust but also pragmatically applicable in addressing SARA conflicts in Indonesia.

### **Implications of the Study**

This study contributes to the theoretical development of multicultural education by integrating James A. Banks' multidimensional framework with Kamanto Sunarto's Islamic-based perspective on justice, tolerance, and inclusivity. The synthesis demonstrates that structural approaches to reducing prejudice can be strengthened by ethical and religious values that align with Indonesia's socio-cultural context. This integration provides a more comprehensive foundation for understanding how multicultural education can address both institutional and moral aspects of SARA conflicts.

Practically, the findings highlight the central role of teachers and schools in shaping students' multicultural attitudes. Effective multicultural education depends on teachers who model inclusive behavior, apply culturally responsive pedagogies, and incorporate tolerance-oriented materials into daily instruction. Training initiatives such as the UNY Labschool program further show the importance of equipping educators with the skills needed to internalize and operationalize multicultural values in the classroom.

At the policy level, the study underscores the need for coordinated efforts among government institutions, religious leaders, and traditional authorities to support inclusive education. Policies should explicitly integrate multicultural competencies into national curriculum frameworks, promote interfaith dialogue, and ensure equitable treatment across diverse groups. Such policy alignment can help address the broader social conditions that contribute to SARA tensions and strengthen education's role in building social cohesion.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that integrating James A. Banks' multidimensional framework with Kamanto Sunarto's Islamic-based perspective offers a coherent and contextually relevant model of multicultural education for preventing SARA conflicts in Indonesia. Banks' emphasis on structural equity and prejudice reduction aligns with Sunarto's focus on justice, tolerance, and ethical inclusivity, demonstrating that both frameworks converge on values essential for sustaining harmony in plural societies.

The novelty of this study lies in bridging Western and Indonesian-Islamic approaches, an integration that has been largely absent in previous research. This synthesis not only enriches the theoretical foundation of multicultural education but also provides a practical model that can guide schools, pesantren, and policymakers in embedding multicultural values systematically through curriculum design, teacher training, and interfaith learning initiatives.

By demonstrating that multicultural education functions as both an instructional and ethical framework, this study affirms its potential to cultivate tolerance, reduce prejudice, and strengthen social cohesion. Future research may test the effectiveness of this integrated model in educational settings and explore its applicability in other multicultural contexts facing identity-based tensions.

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