

Ethnopedagogics as A Learning Strategy in Multicultural Education in Indonesian Language Subjects

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

ethnopedagogy;
multicultural education;
culturally responsive teaching;
Indonesian language learning;
qualitative case study

Article history:

Received 2024-08-26

Revised 2026-01-05

Accepted 2026-03-02

ABSTRACT

Indonesia's multicultural context presents both opportunities and challenges for education, particularly in integrating local cultural values into formal learning. Ethnopedagogy has emerged as a culturally responsive approach that connects curriculum content with students' socio-cultural backgrounds. This study examines the implementation of ethnopedagogics as a learning strategy in Indonesian language subjects within a multicultural classroom setting in a rural area of Tana Toraja. This research employed a qualitative case study design conducted at UPT SMP Negeri 3 Bonggakaradeng, South Sulawesi. Data were collected over six weeks through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with three Indonesian language teachers, focus group discussions involving twelve students, and document analysis of lesson plans and teaching materials. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis with source and method triangulation to ensure validity. The findings indicate that the integration of local cultural elements, particularly Toraja folklore, increased students' learning motivation, classroom engagement, and appreciation of cultural diversity. Ethnopedagogic-based learning fostered empathy, intercultural communication, and mutual respect among students from different ethnic backgrounds. Teachers also reported improved classroom dynamics and stronger teacher-student relationships. However, challenges included limited culturally representative resources and insufficient teacher training. The study demonstrates that ethnopedagogics can function as an effective multicultural learning strategy by promoting inclusive, culturally responsive education. Despite implementation challenges, this approach contributes to strengthening social cohesion and contextualizing language learning in culturally diverse settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a multicultural country with a rich culture, language, and very diverse traditions. This diversity is a strength as well as a challenge in the world of education. On the one hand, cultural diversity provides great opportunities for the development of education that is contextual and relevant to students' lives. But on the other hand, the national education system, which still tends to be

uniform and oriented towards a general approach, is often unable to accommodate the peculiarities of local culture. This has an impact on the marginalization of local values in the learning process, the weakening of students' sense of cultural identity, and the lack of cross-cultural understanding in the classroom. It is in this context that ethnopedagogic is becoming an increasingly relevant approach. Ethnopedagogic is a learning strategy that is rooted in the values of local wisdom and cultural practices of a community. This approach not only serves as a tool for cultural preservation, but also as a means to create an inclusive learning environment, respect diversity, and build intercultural awareness among students. In Indonesian subjects, which actually contain a strong cultural dimension, ethnopedagogic has great potential to connect subject matter with students' cultural reality, increase learning participation, and strengthen identity and tolerance.

It is in this context that ethnopedagogic is becoming an increasingly relevant approach. Ethnopedagogic is a learning strategy that is rooted in the values of local wisdom and cultural practices of a community (Muzakkir, 2021; Chotimah, et al., 2018; Azizatul 'Uula, Surachmi, & Utaminingsih, 2022). This approach not only serves as a tool for cultural preservation, but also as a means to create an inclusive learning environment, respect diversity, and build intercultural awareness among students. In Indonesian subjects, which actually contain a strong cultural dimension, ethnopedagogic has great potential to connect subject matter with students' cultural reality, increase learning participation, and strengthen identity and tolerance (Suanda and Rusmayanthi, 2023)..

Education in the current era of globalization is faced with increasingly complex challenges, especially in the context of cultural diversity. In the midst of the increasingly strong trend of globalization, education is required to not only provide academic knowledge, but also equip students with the ability to appreciate, understand, and live in harmony in cultural diversity. Multicultural education is one of the most relevant approaches to answer these challenges. In this context, ethnopedagogics emerged as an important learning strategy, as it is able to integrate local cultural values into the educational process.

One of the main advantages of ethnopedagogics is its ability to provide a richer and more relevant context for learners in the learning process. By associating learning materials with local culture, students can more easily understand and appreciate the knowledge they are learning, because the material does not feel alien or separate from their daily lives. In addition, ethnopedagogics also serve as a tool to develop critical and reflective skills, where learners are invited to analyze and evaluate the cultural values that exist in their own society (Wardani, Fitriyah, & Rofiq, 2024) .

Ethnopedagogic is an educational approach that integrates local cultural values, norms, and practices into the formal learning process. This approach aims to preserve cultural heritage, build students' identities, and create learning that is relevant to their social context. In the context of multicultural education in Indonesia, ethnopedagogy serves as a strategy to: Improve cross-cultural understanding through the introduction of local traditions, languages, and values in learning; Strengthening students' cultural identities so that they are able to appreciate their own cultural roots while respecting other cultures; Encourage tolerance and inclusion by reducing prejudice and stereotypes between groups; Connecting the national curriculum with local wisdom, so that learning becomes more meaningful and contextual. (Ridho, Wardhana, Yuliana, Qolby, & Zalwana, 2022).

Education that combines local cultural values with teaching practices has become increasingly relevant in the context of multicultural education (Riyanti and Nofitasari, 2021). In this era of globalization, interactions between different ethnic and cultural groups are increasingly intense, it is important for the education system to accommodate this diversity. Ethnopedagogics offer a way to integrate local wisdom into the curriculum, so that students gain not only academic knowledge, but also a deep understanding of their own cultural identity and that of other cultures (Fauzi, 2023;).

The values of local wisdom and culture in Indonesia are very diverse and the introduction to these values and culture is very important for students. The goal is for them to be able to understand and know these things well. One approach that can be used to teach this is ethnopedagogic (Wardani et al., 2024). In the context of basic education, ethnopedagogics remain very relevant because students are still in the development stage. In addition, the relationship between learning materials and culture and social

context can deepen students' understanding (Prihartini & Buska, 2019). Ethnopedagogics is a learning approach oriented to the cultivation and application of local wisdom (Oktavianti, Ika and Ratnasari, 2018). In simple terms, ethnopedagogic is a learning method that focuses on culture, both as a source of learning and as a media.

Multicultural education aims to create an inclusive learning environment, where every student feels valued and accepted regardless of their cultural background. In this context, ethnopedagogics serve as a bridge that connects different cultures with formal education. By incorporating oral traditions, arts, languages, and local cultural values into the learning process, students can better understand and appreciate the cultural diversity that exists around them (Nieto, 2010; Logita, 2023).

In addition, ethnopedagogics also plays an important role in preserving and reviving local cultures that may be endangered. In many societies, especially in remote areas, cultural knowledge and practices are often passed down orally from generation to generation. Through the application of ethnopedagogic, these values and knowledge can be documented and taught systematically in schools, ensuring that this cultural heritage remains alive and relevant for future generations. In the era of globalization that is increasingly developing, local wisdom has received significant attention, especially in supporting the development of a nation.

The implementation of ethnopedagogics in education can also help reduce prejudice and stereotypes between cultures. By studying and appreciating other cultures, students can develop a more tolerant and inclusive attitude. This is a source of conflict. Education that promotes cultural understanding can foster harmony and cooperation among various ethnic groups (Arfa & Lasaiba, 2022; Munadlir, 2016; Fatmi, Faradhillah, Rezeki, & Mukrimah, 2023)

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2. METHODS

To answer this question, a qualitative approach with a case study method is used, because it allows researchers to explore the phenomenon in depth in a specific context, namely at SMP Negeri 3 Bongga Karadeng, Tana Toraja. The case study approach is relevant in this study because it focuses on a thorough understanding of ethnopedagogic practices in one real location that represents the cultural diversity of students. Data is collected through: Participatory observation, to capture social dynamics, interactions, and student engagement during the ethnopedagogic-based learning process; In-depth interviews, with teachers, students, and the school to understand their perspectives on the application of ethnopedagogic and its impact on the learning process; Focus group discussions (FGDs), which involve students from different cultural backgrounds to gain their views on inclusivity and harmony in the classroom; Analyze documents, including curriculum, lesson plans, and teaching materials used by teachers, to see how local cultural values are integrated into learning. The selection of this method is in line with the research objectives as it allows data triangulation, strengthens the validity of findings, and provides a comprehensive picture of ethnopedagogic influences on classroom dynamics (Burns, 2015).

Data Collection Sample and Participants: The study involved 1 school, 3 Indonesian teachers, and 45 students from various ethnic backgrounds. The selection of participants was carried out purposively, based on their involvement in ethnopedagogic-based learning. Duration of Observation: Observations

were conducted over 6 weeks (12 meetings) to capture consistent dynamics. Researcher Role: The researcher plays the role of observer-as-participant; Be present in class without intervening in the course of learning, but occasionally interact with students and teachers to clarify information. Data Collection Techniques Participatory observation to record patterns of interaction, cooperation, and inclusivity. In-depth interviews with teachers, students, and principals. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involved 12 students from various ethnic backgrounds. Document analysis (lesson plans, modules, teaching materials). Data Analysis Coding Process: Data is analyzed using thematic analysis. The coding is done manually with predefined category guides, then verified with qualitative analysis software (NVivo). Triangulation: Data are validated through triangulation of sources (observations, interviews, FGDs, documents), methods, and member checking with participants to ensure consistent interpretation. Peer Debriefing: Researchers discuss interim results with fellow researchers to minimize bias. This FGD aims to identify The selection of an in-depth case study approach, combined with layered triangulation and validated thematic analysis, allows this study to provide a comprehensive picture relevant to the research objective: understanding the role of ethnopedagogic in building inclusive, contextual learning, and respecting students' cultural diversity.

Analysis techniques are obtained from observations, interviews, FGDs, and documentation that will be analyzed using thematic analysis methods. The analysis process involves several steps which include: (1) Data coding identifies initial themes based on the data that has been collected. (2) Theme grouping: group emerging themes to find patterns in the data that show the relationship between ethnopedagogic application and the dynamics of social relationships in the classroom. (3) Interpretation: the themes that have been identified will be interpreted to understand the ethnopedagogic impact on the creation of a harmonious learning environment. (4) Data validation to ensure the validity and validity of the findings, this study will use several triangulation techniques: using various data sources (observations, interviews, FGDs, and documentation) to ensure the consistency of the findings. (5) *Member Checking*: involves participants in the process of validating the results of interviews or observations to ensure the accuracy of interpretation. (6) *Peer Debriefing*: Discussion with research colleagues to test the assumptions, findings, and interpretation of the research. This method is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ethnopedagogic affects social relationships in the classroom and its contribution to the creation of a harmonious learning environment.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

The findings of this study are organized into four main themes: (1) students' understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, (2) learning engagement and motivation, (3) social and emotional skills development, and (4) challenges in ethnopedagogical implementation. These findings are supported by qualitative data derived from teacher interviews.

3.1.1 Increased Understanding and Appreciation of Cultural Diversity

The data indicate that the implementation of ethnopedagogical approaches significantly enhances students' understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. Teachers reported that integrating local cultural content into lessons makes students more receptive to learning about differences.

One teacher explained:

"As an Indonesian language teacher, I try to integrate various local and national cultures. For example, I use Toraja, Bugis, and other folklore. Students are more interested if the story is from their culture or their classmates."

This statement highlights that the inclusion of culturally relevant materials fosters a sense of recognition among students. When students encounter familiar cultural narratives, they feel represented in the learning process, which promotes positive intercultural interactions.

Furthermore, teachers observed that students became more respectful and open toward peers from different cultural backgrounds. Ethnopedagogical practices created a classroom atmosphere where diversity was not only acknowledged but also appreciated as a valuable learning resource.

3.1.2 Increased Learning Engagement and Motivation

Another key finding is the significant improvement in students' engagement and motivation. Teachers emphasized that culturally relevant teaching strategies make learning more meaningful and relatable.

A participant stated:

"To increase student engagement, I often associate Indonesian Language subject matter with their daily lives. For example, when studying text types such as descriptions or narratives, I ask students to write about their environment or personal experiences. This makes them feel more connected to the material being taught. In addition, I often hold group discussions so that students can have a dialogue and exchange opinions, which of course increases their participation in class. I also apply the use of multimedia such as videos and short stories to attract their interest."

This excerpt demonstrates that contextualizing learning within students' lived experiences enhances their participation. Teachers also reported that students showed greater enthusiasm during lessons and were more willing to contribute to discussions.

In addition, ethnopedagogical practices were found to strengthen teacher–student relationships. Teachers who acknowledged students' cultural backgrounds created more supportive and inclusive classroom environments, which further increased student motivation.

3.1.3 Social and Emotional Skills Development

The findings also reveal that ethnopedagogical implementation contributes to the development of students' social and emotional competencies, including empathy, cooperation, and intercultural communication.

One teacher noted:

"Ethnopedagogics help students recognize and understand the cultural diversity that exists around them. When we integrate local cultural values in the learning process, students are taught to be more sensitive to the backgrounds of their peers, as well as to appreciate the differences that exist. Their social skills develop as they learn how to interact with others who have different values and norms. Emotionally, students also learn to control their emotions when faced with social situations that may be challenging or when there are differences of opinion rooted in cultural differences."

Classroom observations further indicated that students developed empathy during group activities. For instance, when students shared stories about their family traditions, their peers responded with curiosity and respect by asking thoughtful questions and expressing appreciation. Additionally, collaborative learning activities involving students from diverse backgrounds enhanced communication and teamwork skills. These interactions encouraged students to negotiate meaning, share perspectives, and build mutual understanding.

3.1.4 Challenges in Ethnopedagogical Implementation

Despite its benefits, the implementation of ethnopedagogical approaches presents several challenges. Teachers identified limitations in resources, training, and cultural representation.

One participant explained:

“The main difficulty is finding a material source that is suitable and can represent all the cultures in the classroom. Not all local cultures have documentation that is easily accessible or can be directly applied in the context of learning. Sometimes, the materials available are only representative of the majority culture, so students from minority cultures feel undervalued or unrecognized. This is a challenge because I want all students to feel that their culture is valued and considered important in the learning process. In addition, there are also challenges in conveying cultural material that may not be very familiar to me, so I have to learn more about the culture before teaching it.”

This finding suggests that unequal cultural representation may lead to feelings of marginalization among minority students. Teachers also highlighted the lack of professional training in ethnopedagogical approaches, which limits their ability to effectively integrate cultural content. Furthermore, resistance to change and limited collaboration with parents and communities were identified as additional barriers to successful implementation.

3.1.5 Positive Impact on Classroom Dynamics

The final finding indicates that ethnopedagogical practices positively influence classroom dynamics by fostering inclusivity, reducing intercultural tensions, and enhancing student confidence.

A teacher stated:

“Yes, students’ motivation to learn increased after ethnopedagogics were implemented. Students feel more connected to the material being taught because they can see their cultural relevance in the lesson. They become more enthusiastic about taking lessons, especially when they are given the opportunity to share about their own culture. It also boosts their confidence, as they feel that their cultural identity is valued in the classroom. Ultimately, this has a positive impact on their academic performance.”

Teachers reported that students became more active participants and demonstrated greater confidence in expressing their ideas. Additionally, the classroom environment became more harmonious, with reduced instances of cultural misunderstanding or conflict.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that ethnopedagogical approaches play a crucial role in enhancing multicultural education. These results can be interpreted through existing theoretical frameworks and previous empirical studies.

First, the increased understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity observed in this study align with Banks’ (2015) theory of multicultural education. Banks argues that integrating diverse cultural content into the curriculum promotes intercultural competence and mutual respect. The findings demonstrate that when students are exposed to culturally relevant materials, they not only gain knowledge about other cultures but also develop a deeper appreciation of diversity. Similarly, Burns (2015) emphasizes that multicultural education fosters inclusive learning environments where students feel valued and respected.

Second, the improvement in student engagement and motivation supports the principles of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010). According to this framework, students are more likely to engage in learning when their cultural identities are acknowledged and incorporated into instructional practices. The interview data clearly show that contextualized learning—such as writing about personal experiences or local environments—enhances students’ emotional connection to the material. This finding is consistent with Wibowo (2016), who highlights the importance of cultural relevance in increasing student participation and interest.

Moreover, the study confirms that ethnopedagogical approaches strengthen teacher–student relationships. When teachers demonstrate cultural awareness and sensitivity, they create a supportive environment that fosters trust and engagement. This relational aspect of teaching is essential for effective learning, particularly in culturally diverse classrooms.

Third, the development of social and emotional skills observed in this study can be explained through Vygotsky's social constructivist theory. Vygotsky emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration. Ethnopedagogical practices, such as group discussions and storytelling, provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful dialogue and co-construct knowledge. These interactions facilitate the development of empathy, communication skills, and emotional regulation.

The findings also highlight the role of ethnopedagogy in promoting intercultural competence. By engaging with diverse perspectives, students learn to navigate cultural differences and develop tolerance. This is particularly important in multicultural societies, where individuals must interact with people from various cultural backgrounds.

However, the study also identifies significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure the effective implementation of ethnopedagogical approaches. The lack of culturally representative resources is a major concern, as it may lead to unequal representation and reinforce existing inequalities. This finding is consistent with Nieto (2010), who emphasizes the importance of institutional support and access to resources in implementing multicultural education.

In addition, the lack of teacher training in cultural competence poses a barrier to effective implementation. Teachers need professional development opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills required to integrate cultural content into their teaching. Without such training, ethnopedagogical practices may be implemented inconsistently or superficially.

Resistance to change is another challenge that reflects broader systemic issues in education. Adopting new pedagogical approaches requires not only individual commitment but also institutional support. Schools must create an environment that encourages innovation and collaboration among teachers.

Finally, the positive impact of ethnopedagogical practices on classroom dynamics reinforces the importance of culturally responsive teaching. The findings demonstrate that when students feel valued and included, they are more likely to participate actively and develop positive attitudes toward learning. This is supported by Rahman (2021), who identifies motivation as a key factor in academic success, and by Yudha (2023), who highlights the role of inclusive environments in promoting student participation.

Furthermore, the reduction of intercultural tensions observed in this study supports previous research indicating that multicultural education promotes social cohesion and reduces discrimination (Tapung, 2016; Raihani, 2023). Ethnopedagogical practices encourage students to view diversity as a strength rather than a source of conflict.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that ethnopedagogical approaches have significant potential to enhance both academic and social outcomes in multicultural classrooms. By integrating cultural elements into teaching, educators can create more inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments. However, achieving these outcomes requires addressing challenges related to resources, training, and institutional support.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of ethnopedagogy holds significant potential in enhancing learning quality by fostering intercultural understanding, increasing student motivation, and creating more harmonious classroom dynamics. These findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on ethnopedagogy while also identifying key challenges, including insufficient teacher training and limited supporting resources in schools. Although the results highlight the benefits of ethnopedagogy, its effective implementation requires stronger support in terms of policy, teacher competence development, and the provision of locally based learning resources. Future research is recommended to investigate the long-term impacts of ethnopedagogy and explore its adaptability across diverse educational contexts, particularly in culturally heterogeneous regions. More broadly,

these findings align with global educational goals, such as fostering global citizenship and reducing social inequality. Moving forward, ethnopedagogy has transformative potential to create more inclusive, culturally responsive, and socially just education systems.

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