

Implementation of the Holistic Education Approach in Inclusive Schools based on School Culture in Senior High School

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive schools require comprehensive educational services that support all aspects of student development. Holistic education nurtures students' intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual capacities. This study explores how school culture influences the implementation of holistic education in inclusive educational settings. A qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach was employed. Data were collected through interviews and observations, with purposive sampling used to select participants. The validity of the research instrument was assessed using the Aiken index, and reliability was measured with Cronbach's alpha. Data were analyzed through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Findings revealed that school culture plays a critical role in shaping holistic education practices. Core cultural values—such as religious beliefs, leadership, environmental stewardship, and discipline—are embedded into daily routines, including regular prayer, cleanliness, and a sense of responsibility. These practices promote consistent and meaningful integration of holistic values into the learning environment. The study highlights how school culture can facilitate the practical application of holistic education in inclusive school. Educators and administrators can use these insights to foster environments that support diverse student needs through cultural reinforcement. This research offers a valuable reference for teachers, researchers, and education practitioners interested in holistic education. Future studies should aim to design holistic education models that include quality assurance measures and explore multicultural approaches to inclusive service delivery.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Holistic education is an educational philosophy that emphasizes the development of learners as whole individuals, addressing not only their academic needs but also their emotional, physical, social, and spiritual well-being. Unlike traditional academic models that prioritize cognitive achievements,

holistic education seeks to nurture balanced human beings capable of contributing meaningfully to society (Illeris, 2007; Oentoro, 2010). In the context of inclusive education—where students of varying abilities, including those with special needs, learn together in the same environment—holistic education becomes especially relevant. It offers a flexible and responsive approach that aligns with the inclusive education goal of providing equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or capabilities (Ushuludin et al., 2019).

Inclusive classrooms are composed of students with diverse physical, cognitive, emotional, and cultural characteristics. Teachers in these settings must be prepared to accommodate and adapt to individual differences, which requires instructional models that are both adaptable and comprehensive. Holistic education supports this diversity by focusing on personalized learning, empathy, and interpersonal development (Kaigama & Audu, 2014). It also facilitates the cultivation of critical 21st-century competencies such as collaboration, emotional regulation, and social awareness (Wihara et al., 2024). Through its emphasis on emotional and social intelligence, holistic education helps create learning environments where all students—regardless of ability—can thrive socially and academically.

Evidence suggests that holistic approaches are particularly effective in promoting emotional and social development among students with special needs. These students often experience increased self-esteem, reduced anxiety, and improved social interaction skills when engaged in learning environments that nurture the whole child (Kotz, 2016; Hasan et al., 2024). Moreover, holistic practices foster a sense of social responsibility, enhance peer relationships, and encourage empathy, making inclusive classrooms more welcoming and cooperative (Rohmah et al., 2023). Despite these promising outcomes, holistic education remains underutilized in many Indonesian inclusive schools due to persistent structural and cultural challenges.

Initial observations from senior high schools in the Bengkulu Tengah district reveal several challenges in implementing holistic education. Three core issues were identified: First, high implementation costs often limit access to holistic programs, making them available mainly to families with higher socio-economic status. This contradicts the principle of educational equity. Second, the practical application of holistic education is still underdeveloped, with few established models guiding its integration into existing curricula. Third, many inclusive schools struggle with resource limitations, including insufficient funding, inadequate facilities, and a shortage of trained educators skilled in managing diverse student needs. These constraints hinder the development of adaptive instructional tools such as assistive technology or specialized learning modules for students with disabilities.

One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of teacher preparation. Many educators working in inclusive settings have not received sufficient training to support students with special needs effectively. According to Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, a teacher's belief in their capacity to meet diverse learners' needs strongly influences the success of educational interventions. When teachers lack confidence or training, they may struggle to implement inclusive and effective holistic learning strategies. This highlights the urgent need for professional development programs focused on inclusive pedagogies and adaptive teaching methods.

In addition to pedagogy and resources, school culture plays a critical role in determining the success of holistic education. A strong and inclusive school culture supports the integration of academic goals with character development, emotional well-being, and social values (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Holistic education can only thrive in an environment that values diversity, fosters respect, and encourages student participation in shaping their own learning journeys. Cultural values such as cooperation, mutual respect, and community responsibility are essential for creating inclusive spaces that promote collective growth and understanding (Kinanthi et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, the importance of cultural integration within education has been widely acknowledged. Education is both a vehicle for transmitting cultural values and a tool for modern development. By embedding local traditions, languages, and moral teachings into the curriculum, schools help students build identities grounded in cultural pride while preparing them for global

citizenship (Tilaar, 2004; Bipath & Moyo, 2016). Cultural values like mutual assistance (gotong royong), tolerance, and respect can be operationalized through group activities and collaborative projects that build social cohesion among students of diverse backgrounds (Rukiyati, 2013; Deal & Peterson, 2016). In this way, holistic education becomes not only a pedagogical approach but also a cultural imperative.

Despite the theoretical appeal of holistic education, its implementation in Indonesian schools remains limited. Current educational practices tend to focus heavily on cognitive achievement, often at the expense of emotional and spiritual development (Ghani & Riadi, 2012; Widayastono, 2012). However, studies have shown that when schools adopt a more integrated model that includes spiritual and character education, students demonstrate greater adaptability, better emotional regulation, and stronger motivation (Ricci & Pritscher, 2015; Lauricella & Macaskill, 2015).

Achieving a fully realized model of holistic education requires systemic change, including school leadership committed to cultural and pedagogical innovation. School leaders must align vision, curriculum, staff development, and community engagement to foster environments that prioritize holistic development (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2019; García Torres, 2019). Teachers, as the central agents of change, need to model exemplary attitudes, demonstrate strong pedagogical skills, and engage students in meaningful, context-rich learning experiences (Musfah, 2012; Yin et al., 2019). Schools must also maintain competitiveness with public and private institutions, which requires continuous improvement of school culture and teaching quality.

In the era of disruption and rapid technological change, it is essential to cultivate students' creativity, critical thinking, and resilience. Holistic education offers a viable path toward preparing students not only for academic success but also for ethical and innovative participation in society (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2005). In this context, the present study aims to explore the extent to which holistic education is implemented in inclusive schools, with a particular focus on school culture at the elementary level in Bengkulu Tengah. The central research question guiding this study is: To what extent is holistic education implemented in inclusive schools based on school culture in Senior High Schools in the Bengkulu Tengah district?

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of holistic education within an inclusive school context, specifically focusing on the role of school culture at MAN 2 Bengkulu Tengah. A qualitative approach was selected to enable an in-depth, contextualized understanding of educational practices, beliefs, and values embedded in the school culture that influence inclusive and holistic learning processes.

2.1 Research Design

A single instrumental case study was conducted, as defined by Stake (1995), to examine the phenomenon of holistic education within a specific bounded system—one inclusive Senior High School. The case was selected not for its uniqueness but for its potential to illuminate a broader understanding of holistic education in inclusive settings.

2.2 Site Selection

MAN 2 Bengkulu Tengah was purposively selected due to its status as an officially designated inclusive school by the local education authority and its documented commitment to character education and cultural integration. The school was deemed an appropriate setting to study the intersection of holistic education and school culture.

2.3 Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals with direct involvement in or insight into the school's inclusive and holistic education practices. The final sample included:

- 1 school principal
- 5 teachers (general and special education)
- 1 school counselor
- 2 administrative staff
- 1 curriculum coordinator

All participants had a minimum of three years of experience at the school. Ethical consent was obtained, and participation was voluntary.

2.4 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected over a two-month period using triangulated qualitative methods:

- Semi-structured interviews: Conducted with all 10 participants, using an interview guide covering themes such as leadership practices, religious and cultural routines, student diversity, and inclusion strategies.
- Non-participant classroom observations: Focused on teacher-student interactions, routines, rituals, and the physical and social learning environment. Observation checklists were informed by theoretical constructs of school culture and holistic education.
- Document analysis: Included school policies, vision/mission statements, lesson plans, extracurricular program descriptions, and activity reports related to character education and environmental stewardship.

2.5 Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the study adopted multiple strategies recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- Triangulation of data sources and methods
- Member checking with key informants to validate findings
- Peer debriefing with fellow researchers not involved in the data collection
- Audit trail documenting the research process and analytical decisions

2.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically using the Miles and Huberman interactive model (1984), which includes:

- Data reduction: Coding raw transcripts and observation notes to identify meaningful segments
- Data display: Organizing codes into matrices and visual charts to identify patterns
- Conclusion drawing and verification: Developing interpretive themes linked to the theoretical framework (e.g., school culture, holistic education principles, inclusivity practices)

Thematic categories were constructed inductively and then interpreted using relevant educational theory, including Bandura's self-efficacy and school culture frameworks by Gruenert and Whitaker.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored how school culture at MAN 2 Bengkulu Tengah shapes the implementation of holistic education in an inclusive setting. Four central cultural domains emerged from the data: religious values, leadership development, environmental awareness, and discipline practices. These domains were identified through thematic analysis of interviews, observations, and school documents and are discussed below alongside relevant literature.

In an interview with Mrs. RY, the Headmaster, it was revealed that whenever students meet their peers, teachers, or others, they are encouraged to demonstrate positive attitudes. Mr. HD further emphasized the importance of values such as honesty, the courage to admit mistakes, mutual respect, and engaging in friendly competition through good deeds. Additionally, the counseling teacher, Mrs. RH, provided clarification on this matter. *"Life in the school of the MI Alhizam is well-known for the independence values among students which can be reflected from the students' ability for being independent, not*

only emotion but also attitude”.

Students are encouraged to interact with their peers without discrimination, promoting positive thinking, teamwork, and helping others. This is reflected in the regulations that foster students' obedience and independence in their daily lives, though these traits vary depending on each student's personality and emotional intelligence. The diverse backgrounds of students, with differing socio-cultural conditions, intellectual levels, and academic abilities, contribute to fostering national awareness and positive social interactions, helping to build mutual respect for diversity. A strong school culture plays a key role in creating an environment that motivates all members principals, teachers, students, staff, and others to learn and improve the overall school performance. This atmosphere promotes a healthy, cohesive, and professional culture, offering a sense of family, collaboration, perseverance, enthusiasm, a strong work ethic, and a learning environment for both teaching and learning. The dominant school culture, consistently nurtured among students, focuses on fostering religious values, leadership, and environmental awareness.

3.1 Religious Culture as a Foundation for Holistic Character Development

Routine religious practices—such as reciting prayers before lessons, participating in congregational worship, and engaging in moral discussions—were observed consistently across classrooms and communal activities. These practices not only reinforce spiritual development but also serve as mechanisms for cultivating respect, empathy, and discipline.

As the school counselor explained: *“We believe that spiritual values shape students' emotional control, help them respect diversity, and prevent conflict in inclusive settings.”*

This finding aligns with research by Jalaludin (2012) and Gruenert & Whitaker (2015), who emphasize that moral and religious grounding in school culture contributes to emotional and ethical maturity—key dimensions of holistic education.

3.2 Leadership Culture through Practice-Based Programs

The development of leadership skills and the cultivation of positive behaviors in students are actively fostered through a variety of school programs that emphasize practical application over theory. While reading about leadership is valuable, true leadership qualities are best developed through consistent practice and lived experiences. At this school, leadership is embedded into the daily routine and culture of both students and staff through habitual actions grounded in universal principles of character and responsibility.

One prominent initiative supporting this effort is *The Leader in Me* program—a comprehensive, school-wide framework designed to cultivate leadership at all levels. This program adopts a holistic and systemic approach, integrating leadership development into the curriculum, pedagogy, school environment, and daily interactions. It incorporates leadership modeling, a positive and nurturing environment (commonly referred to as the “see-hear-feel” experience), teaching strategies, and school traditions that reflect and reinforce the school's vision and mission. Through this cohesive structure, students, teachers, school administrators, and even parents engage in the practice of leadership, helping to make leadership a core component of the school's culture.

Furthermore, the school nurtures leadership and independence through various student-centered activities, particularly extracurricular programs and student organizations. These activities provide meaningful platforms for students to exercise initiative, responsibility, and collaborative decision-making beyond the classroom. The school's "learning to live" program further reinforces this goal by combining elements of personal wellness, creative expression, arts, and community service. This program is designed to instill life skills, enhance social awareness, and cultivate a strong moral compass—essential attributes for future leaders. Collectively, these initiatives contribute to the formation of students who are academically competent, socially responsible, self-aware, and capable of leading with integrity.

This reflects the idea of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and is consistent with Kaigama & Audu's

(2014) assertion that holistic education must prioritize personal agency alongside academic skills. Such leadership development also enhances self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), especially for students in inclusive settings.

3.3 Environmental Stewardship as Holistic Social Learning

Promoting environmental awareness among students is one of the key programs at MAN 2 Bengkulu City. The school has been recognized as a green school, focusing on health and environmental care. Environmental education begins during school orientation with a planting program, laying the foundation for a culture of environmental love. Early engagement in planting activities helps nurture the next generation's strong commitment to environmental conservation. The Global Environment Citizenship (GEC) program, part of the "learning to live" initiative, enhances students' understanding of environmental issues. GEC covers topics like plants, fruits, and youth research institutions to promote environmental awareness. Through this program, alongside school health efforts and environmental care, the school aims to cultivate environmental consciousness in students, contributing to a shady, clean, and green school environment. Additionally, it encourages maintaining the cleanliness of the school and collaborating with the local community to foster a healthy lifestyle.

To ensure a clean and comfortable school environment for learning, proactive measures must be implemented, such as fostering a culture of environmental care, establishing environmental regulations, creating a class cleaning schedule, designating officers to oversee and enforce discipline, conducting environmental and health campaigns within the school, and organizing environmental activities during holidays. According to an interview with Mr. SG from the school's public relations department, the informant stated that *"The environmental policy in the school has been stated in the form of a decree and integrated into each subject as well as the vision and mission that have been adjusted to the spirit of caring for the environment"*. This aligns with the views of other informants, which are further supported by the perspectives of additional informants. The school's vision and mission are prominently displayed in a strategic location, making them visible to all members of the school community. Support for the Adiwiyata policy, particularly in terms of environmental preservation, is demonstrated through community involvement. As a school that values environmental care and fosters an environmental culture, it is essential for school members to participate in various environmental activities. Additionally, schools are encouraged to engage the local community in activities that benefit not only the school population but also the broader community and surrounding environment.

3.4 Discipline as a Construct of Internal Responsibility

Discipline is a foundational element in the educational process and plays a critical role in shaping students' character and responsibility. At this school, discipline is emphasized not merely through rules and regulations, but through consistent implementation and the cultivation of self-awareness. For instance, students who arrive late or commit other disciplinary infractions are subject to corrective measures designed not just to penalize, but to teach responsibility and accountability.

According to the school's guidance and counseling teacher, Mrs. MY, "Education in this school is about student freedom, which can be reflected in the ability of students to be independent—not only in emotional aspects but also in behavior. Students are expected to have self-discipline in doing any activity, and later they will gain many benefits from this process." This statement reflects the school's philosophy of discipline as a process of internal growth rather than external control.

Rather than relying solely on punitive approaches, the school promotes proactive strategies that empower students to develop intrinsic motivation and behavioral self-regulation. Teachers and staff act as role models by maintaining consistency in enforcing rules while encouraging students to take ownership of their actions. The integration of discipline into daily school activities—such as time management, classroom routines, and extracurricular responsibilities—helps students internalize values like respect, accountability, and commitment.

Furthermore, the emphasis on discipline supports the broader goals of holistic education by nurturing independent learners who are emotionally resilient and socially responsible. Self-discipline, in this context, is not just about compliance but about forming habits that contribute to personal and academic success. Through this approach, the school creates a structured yet flexible environment where students can grow into disciplined individuals capable of managing freedom responsibly.

Discussion

The data consistently point to school culture as the principal driver behind the effective implementation of holistic education. The school's culture—characterized by shared values, communal rituals, and inclusive norms—acts as an enabling environment for pedagogical innovation and character formation. This supports the argument by Deal & Peterson (2016) that school culture is not merely a backdrop but a dynamic force that shapes educational outcomes. In the context of inclusion, this cultural infrastructure plays an even more crucial role by normalizing diversity, reducing stigma, and embedding adaptive practices in everyday routines.

One of the key strategies employed is fostering an environment of acceptance and appreciation for diversity. The school organizes activities that introduce various cultural traditions, languages, and customs, helping students understand and respect differences among their peers. This approach supports the creation of a learning environment that values pluralism and nurtures social cohesion. As noted by Ushuludin et al. (2019), holistic education in inclusive settings requires recognizing the whole child—emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually—and responding to their individual backgrounds and learning needs.

The curriculum implemented at MAN 2 Bengkulu Tengah City is designed to be flexible and responsive, offering diverse learning experiences that cater to multiple learning styles. Instructional methods include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approaches, as well as technology integration and differentiated instruction to meet the varying needs of students. This aligns with Kaigama and Audu's (2014) assertion that inclusive education must be adaptable, inclusive of learners with various abilities, and centered on pedagogical diversity.

However, there are notable limitations in implementing holistic education effectively, especially in resource-constrained environments. One major challenge is the limited availability of financial and material resources, which affects the school's ability to provide adequate facilities and support systems. In rural or underfunded schools, access to assistive technology, special instructional materials, and trained personnel is often limited, hampering the full realization of inclusive, holistic education (Musfah, 2012).

Another challenge is the varying levels of teacher preparedness. Not all educators possess the knowledge or skills necessary to manage diverse classrooms. Implementing inclusive and holistic teaching requires not only technical pedagogical skills but also an understanding of social-emotional learning and student-centered approaches. Professional development programs are essential to equip teachers with the competencies needed to facilitate learning that supports all domains of student development (Mahesa et al., 2024). This gap in training echoes the findings of Bandura (1997), who emphasized that self-efficacy in teachers directly influences their ability to manage classrooms effectively and respond to individual student needs.

MAN 2 Bengkulu Tengah City has adopted 21st-century holistic education approaches rooted in a positive school culture. The educational process prioritizes the cultivation of strong character, spiritual awareness, and emotional resilience in addition to academic excellence. Key values integrated into the school culture include religious practice, environmental stewardship, leadership, discipline, and social responsibility. These are reinforced through daily routines, collaborative activities, and institutional practices that shape student behavior and identity (Ushuludin et al., 2019; Febriantina et al., 2020).

A strong school culture motivates all members of the community—students, teachers, staff, and parents—to collaborate based on mutual trust. This shared sense of purpose fosters innovation, collective ownership, and a supportive learning environment (Suriansyah, 2014). When students feel emotionally and socially safe, they are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and a love for learning, which further supports their academic and personal growth (Kusdaryani et al., 2016).

The holistic approach, particularly when applied in inclusive settings, has been shown to significantly improve the social and emotional development of students with special needs. Unlike traditional models that focus primarily on academic achievement, holistic education addresses a broader range of developmental areas, including physical and emotional well-being (Zulaikhah et al., 2020). Activities such as group discussions, team-based projects, and role-play simulations enable students to practice empathy, improve communication, and build collaborative skills—essential for inclusive interaction.

In this context, the role of the teacher is crucial. Teachers are not merely content deliverers but serve as facilitators of growth across all dimensions—cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual. They begin by observing and understanding each student's individual needs, learning preferences, and social-emotional dynamics. This knowledge allows teachers to tailor their instruction and create an inclusive, nurturing environment that respects student diversity while promoting academic engagement (Mahesa et al., 2024). Teachers thus act as key agents in shaping not only curriculum delivery but also the school's ethos.

School culture, as described by Gruenert and Whitaker (2015), is a system of shared values, beliefs, and norms that guide the behavior and practices of all members of the school community. Culture is expressed through both visible symbols (e.g., rituals, policies) and invisible elements (e.g., trust, shared meaning), and plays a vital role in shaping attitudes and interactions. In the case of MAN 2 Bengkulu Tengah City, school culture is constructed through daily routines and traditions—such as exchanging greetings, maintaining cleanliness, decorating classrooms, and promoting polite behavior. These practices cultivate discipline, mutual respect, and a sense of collective responsibility among students and staff.

This finding supports Saw's (2013) argument that holistic education, when embedded in school culture, is realized through environmental habit formation. Establishing intellectual traditions—such as regular reading, discussion, and reflective writing—complements emotional and social development and contributes to an academic environment that promotes lifelong learning (Lee & Louis, 2019). Moreover, the integration of extracurricular programs focused on creativity, arts, and community service enhances students' talents and strengthens their sense of purpose and identity (Sutarman et al., 2017).

Developing a strong and aligned school culture requires coherence with the school's vision and mission. These foundational statements serve as guiding principles, outlining the school's values and long-term goals. A well-articulated vision not only fosters a shared identity but also reinforces the integration of Emotional Quotient (EQ), Spiritual Quotient (SQ), and Social Intelligence (SI) alongside academic goals (Bipath & Moyo, 2016). The school community, united under this vision, works collaboratively to actualize a learning environment that supports holistic development.

Leadership also plays a pivotal role in cultivating a positive school culture. School principals and educational leaders are responsible for aligning institutional practices with core values, inspiring staff and students, and facilitating cooperation among all stakeholders. According to Sergiovanni (2003), strong leadership is essential for implementing cultural and pedagogical reforms that foster inclusive and effective educational environments. School leaders must encourage participatory decision-making, support teacher development, and establish systems that promote engagement and accountability across all levels of the school system.

A thoughtfully structured and contextually responsive school culture can significantly elevate the quality of education provided. As García Torres (2019) emphasizes, the cultural fabric of a school influences not only academic performance but also student well-being, teacher satisfaction, and

community involvement. The integration of leadership, shared values, and inclusive practices ensures that schools can respond effectively to the diverse and evolving needs of their student populations.

In conclusion, the research findings at MAN 2 Bengkulu Tengah City underscore the importance of holistic education embedded within a supportive school culture to meet the needs of diverse learners. The combination of inclusive practices, strong leadership, culturally relevant pedagogy, and a value-driven school environment contributes to shaping students into individuals who are not only intellectually competent but also socially responsible, emotionally mature, and spiritually grounded. While challenges such as limited resources and insufficient teacher training remain, these findings highlight the critical role of school culture as a catalyst for meaningful, inclusive, and transformative education.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that holistic education at MAN 2 Bengkulu Tengah City is implemented through a school culture grounded in core values such as religious principles, leadership, environmental stewardship, and discipline. A well-structured, systematic, and contextually relevant school culture was found to have a significant positive impact on overall school quality by fostering collaboration, mutual trust, and a shared commitment to continuous improvement. This culture promotes an environment where learning is both meaningful and enjoyable, encouraging both individual and collective growth. The role of the school principal is pivotal in shaping and sustaining this culture by promoting active engagement among all stakeholders—teachers, students, staff, and parents—in the educational process. However, the study also revealed certain limitations, particularly in the area of teacher preparedness. Not all teachers possessed the skills or knowledge required to effectively manage highly diverse classrooms, which poses a challenge to the full realization of inclusive, holistic education. Insufficient training and limited time for professional development hinder teachers' ability to design and implement learning experiences that accommodate all learners. As a result, classroom management and instructional design can become significant barriers to achieving inclusive education goals. Future research is recommended to explore practical models for professional development that support teachers in implementing holistic education, especially within inclusive settings. Further studies could also examine how specific cultural values—such as environmental consciousness—can be adapted and applied across different educational contexts to enhance the relevance and sustainability of holistic education programs.

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