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# Exploration of Sociology Education Students' Multicultural Awareness of Social and Cultural Diversity

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## Abstract

This study explores the multicultural awareness of Sociology Education students toward social and cultural diversity in higher education contexts. Multicultural awareness has become an important issue in the digital and globalization era due to increasing social interaction, cultural exchange, and challenges related to intolerance, stereotypes, and social polarization. Sociology Education students play a strategic role as prospective educators and social agents who are expected to promote inclusive and democratic values in society. Therefore, understanding how students perceive and experience multiculturalism is essential in strengthening social harmony in multicultural academic environments. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore students' lived experiences regarding diversity and intercultural interaction. The research was conducted from March to May 2026 at the Sociology Education Study Program of Universitas Megarezky involving seven participants selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed using Jürgen Habermas's communicative action theory. The findings revealed that students generally demonstrated positive multicultural awareness reflected in tolerance, respect for differences, empathy, and openness toward intercultural communication. Interaction with peers from different cultural backgrounds contributed to the development of inclusive attitudes and social understanding. However, challenges such as stereotypes, communication misunderstandings, and the negative influence of social media were still identified. The study concludes that communicative interaction and

multicultural learning significantly contribute to the development of students' multicultural awareness. This research provides insights for higher education institutions in strengthening multicultural education and inclusive academic environments.

***Keywords:*** Multicultural Awareness, Multicultural Education, Social Diversity, Cultural Diversity, Sociology Education Students.

## INTRODUCTION

Social and cultural diversity is a key characteristic of Indonesian society, comprising various ethnicities, languages, religions, customs, and cultural values that coexist within a unified nation. This condition gives Indonesian society a complex and dynamic multicultural character. In the context of higher education, this diversity is reflected through the interactions of students from diverse social, cultural, religious, and regional backgrounds (Jalal et al., 2024). The campus environment ultimately becomes a strategic social space for fostering tolerance, inclusivity, and respect for cultural differences. Therefore, multicultural education is a crucial approach in developing students capable of living harmoniously in a pluralistic society.

According to Ariefa Efianingrum et al. (2022), multicultural awareness among the younger generation, particularly students, is crucial for facing social challenges in the era of globalization and digitalization, marked by increasing cross-cultural interactions. They emphasize that students need to have the ability to critically understand diversity to avoid being easily influenced by intolerance, stereotypes, and social discrimination. Furthermore, Epin Saepudin and Asep Wawan Jatnika (2021) explain that universities represent a miniature representation of the diversity of Indonesian society, so students need to be equipped with a multicultural understanding to see differences as a social asset, not a source of conflict.

The current development of digital technology and social media has a significant impact on student interaction patterns. On the one hand, digital media expands the space for cross-cultural communication and accelerates the exchange of global information. However, on the other hand, social media has also become a platform for the growth of hate speech, social polarization, discrimination, and the spread of intolerant ideologies, which can influence how students view diversity. This phenomenon demonstrates that students must not only possess academic abilities but also possess a strong multicultural awareness to be able to address differences critically, openly, and humanely.

Students in the Sociology of Education Study Program hold a strategic position in strengthening multicultural values because they are prepared to become future educators and agents of social change. In sociological studies, students study societal dynamics, social conflict, cultural change, intergroup relations, and social inequality. Therefore, Sociology Education students are expected to possess a high level of social sensitivity to cultural diversity and social issues in society. Multicultural

awareness is crucial because it relates to students' ability to understand social realities inclusively and respect the existence of other groups in social life.

According to Defan Zamathoriq (2021), multicultural education emphasizes not only theoretical aspects but also requires practical application in social life so that individuals can develop a tolerant character and appreciate cultural differences. Meanwhile, S. Candra, I. W. Lasmawan, and I. N. Suastika (2021) explain that multicultural values need to be integrated into students' lives to strengthen the social character and nationalistic spirit of the younger generation. Thus, multicultural education serves not only as an educational concept but also as an effort to build students' social awareness of the importance of peaceful coexistence amidst diversity.

Several previous studies have shown that multicultural education has a positive influence on the development of students' social character. Clarisa Aeng Lau et al. (2025) found that multicultural education plays a role in strengthening students' civic disposition by developing attitudes of tolerance, social responsibility, and appreciation for cultural diversity. Furthermore, Putri Permata Assiddiq Harahap et al. (2025) demonstrated that multicultural education influences students' social awareness, fostering an inclusive attitude and acceptance of sociocultural differences. Another study by Ahmad Lonthor (2021) also explains that multicultural education can build social awareness in a pluralistic society through an understanding of the values of tolerance, justice, and respect for other cultures.

Nevertheless, research related to multicultural education still has several limitations. Most previous studies have focused more on the influence of multicultural education on students' tolerance or civic disposition in general. Previous research also tends to use a quantitative approach that focuses on measuring student attitudes without delving deeply into how students interpret social and cultural diversity in their daily lives. Furthermore, studies specifically exploring the multicultural awareness of Sociology Education students are relatively limited, even though Sociology Education students have distinct academic characteristics compared to students in other study programs because they directly study social and cultural phenomena.

Another research gap is evident in the limited exploration of the relationship between students' social experiences, the campus academic environment, and cross-cultural interactions in shaping multicultural awareness. Most previous studies have focused solely on the implementation of multicultural education in formal learning processes, without examining how students' social interactions on campus influence their perspectives on cultural diversity. Campus life is a highly complex multicultural interaction space, bringing together students from various regions with diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, previous research has not extensively discussed the influence of the digital era on the development of students' multicultural awareness. This is despite the fact that social media has a significant influence on the formation of opinions, social identities, and communication patterns of the younger generation. Student discussions in digital spaces often reveal differing views on tolerance, nationalism, and cultural diversity. This phenomenon demonstrates that students still face

challenges in understanding diversity critically and inclusively. Therefore, research on the multicultural awareness of Sociology Education students is crucial for understanding how students develop their social perspectives amidst globalization and the development of digital technology.

The urgency of this research is further heightened by the increasing phenomena of intolerance, social discrimination, identity conflict, and societal polarization influenced by cultural, religious, and ideological factors. Universities bear a significant responsibility in developing students who not only excel academically but also possess a humanistic and inclusive social character. Students, as a generation of intellectuals, are expected to become agents of social change who can maintain harmony in a multicultural society. Therefore, strengthening multicultural awareness is a crucial need in today's higher education world.

This study aims to explore the multicultural awareness of Sociology Education students regarding social and cultural diversity in their academic and social lives. It also aims to understand how students interpret tolerance, inclusivity, cross-cultural communication, and appreciation for differences in their social interactions. Furthermore, this study aims to identify factors that influence the development of students' multicultural awareness, including through academic experiences, the campus social environment, and the influence of digital media. The research results are expected to contribute to the development of multicultural education studies and become the basis for strengthening higher education policies that are more inclusive, democratic, and responsive to the diversity of Indonesian society.

## METHOD

Research Approach and Type

This research uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach. This approach focuses on exploring the subjective experiences, meanings, and multicultural awareness of Sociology Education students regarding social and cultural diversity in their academic and social lives. According to Edmund Husserl, phenomenology aims to deeply understand individual life experiences from the perspective of participants. In the context of this research, a phenomenological approach was chosen to explore how students interpret tolerance, inclusivity, cross-cultural communication, and social interaction experiences in a multicultural environment.

This approach allows researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' multicultural awareness through their lived experiences on campus. Furthermore, the phenomenological method helps researchers understand social reality directly from the perspective of participants, resulting in more in-depth, contextual, and reflective data.

Research Location and Time

This research was conducted in the Sociology Education Study Program at Megarezky University. The selection of the research location was based on the consideration that the Sociology Education Study Program has students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, making it a relevant environment for exploring

students' multicultural awareness. Furthermore, Sociology Education students have a direct connection to social, cultural, and community interaction studies, and are therefore considered to have relevant experience and understanding regarding socio-cultural diversity issues.
The research was conducted over three months, from March to May 2026. The research stages included preparation of research instruments, data collection through in-depth interviews and observations, data transcription, data analysis, and concluding.

Research Participants
This study involved seven students from the Sociology Education Study Program at Megarezky University. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which is a technique for selecting participants based on specific considerations according to the research needs. Participants were chosen because they were deemed capable of providing in-depth information regarding their experiences in dealing with social and cultural diversity on campus.

Participant criteria for this study included:
Active students in the Sociology Education Study Program.
Experience interacting with students from diverse cultural backgrounds.
Willingness to participate in the research voluntarily.
Able to openly share experiences and perspectives on multicultural issues.
Seven participants is considered sufficient for phenomenological research because the focus of the study emphasizes data depth over number of participants. This number allows researchers to explore participants' experiences more intensively and in-depth.

Data Collection Techniques
Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used as the primary technique to obtain data related to participants' experiences, understanding, and perspectives on social and cultural diversity. The interviews were semi-structured to allow researchers the flexibility to explore more in-depth information based on participants' experiences.
Some of the focus questions for the interviews included:
Students' understanding of social and cultural diversity.
Experiences of cross-cultural interactions on campus.
Students' views on tolerance and inclusivity.
The influence of social media on perspectives on diversity.
Experiences related to conflict, stereotypes, or social discrimination.
In addition to interviews, observations were conducted to directly observe students' social interaction patterns in the academic environment. Observations helped researchers understand how students build communication and social relationships within a multicultural campus. Documentation was also used to supplement the

research data, such as academic activity records, photographs of student activities, and other supporting documents relevant to the research.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study was conducted in stages using a phenomenological analysis model, drawing on Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action. Habermas emphasized the importance of rational, dialogical, and domination-free communication in building social understanding in a multicultural society. In this study, Habermas's theory was used to analyze how students develop multicultural awareness through social interaction, cross-cultural communication, and the exchange of meaning in academic life.

The data analysis process involved several stages:

Data reduction, which is the process of selecting and focusing data relevant to the research objectives.

Data presentation, which is organizing the data into a descriptive narrative for ease of understanding and analysis.

Phenomenological interpretation, which is understanding the meaning of participants' experiences related to multicultural awareness from their perspectives.

Conclusion drawing, which is identifying key themes regarding the multicultural awareness of Sociology Education students.

In this analysis, the researcher identified forms of communication, social interaction, and dialogical experiences of students that reflect values of tolerance, respect for differences, and efforts to build inclusive social relationships. Habermas's perspective is used to examine how students' communicative actions can shape a more democratic and humanistic social awareness in a multicultural campus environment.

Data Validity

Data validity in this study was achieved through source and technical triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from several participants to ensure data consistency. Meanwhile, technical triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.

Furthermore, the researcher conducted member checking with participants to ensure that the data interpretations aligned with their experiences and perspectives. This step was taken to increase the credibility and validity of the research results so that the data obtained truly reflected the reality of participants' experiences regarding multicultural awareness of social and cultural diversity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

The results of this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with seven students of the Sociology Education Study Program at Megarezky University, conducted from March to May 2026. The interviews were conducted to explore students' multicultural awareness of social and cultural diversity in their academic

and social lives. The interview data showed that students had diverse views on tolerance, cross-cultural communication, inclusivity, and experiences of social interaction in a multicultural campus environment. In addition, the results of the study also showed the influence of academic experience, social environment, and digital media on the formation of students' multicultural awareness. The findings of this study were analyzed using the perspective of Jürgen Habermas's communicative action theory which emphasizes the importance of dialogical and rational communication in building harmonious social relations in a pluralistic society.

Research Interview Results

Question 1

Researcher:

What is your view on social and cultural diversity on campus?

Respondent 1:

"I think diversity on campus is very positive because it allows me to learn about cultures from other regions. I learned to appreciate the differences in language and customs of my friends."

Respondent 4:

"I see diversity as something normal because Indonesia consists of many ethnicities and cultures."

Respondent 7:

"I think cultural diversity on campus provides a very valuable social experience."

Based on the participants' responses, social and cultural diversity is seen as a positive experience that can broaden students' social horizons. The majority of participants indicated an acceptance of cultural differences and an awareness that diversity is part of the Indonesian identity.

Question 2

Researcher:

How has your experience been interacting with students from different cultural backgrounds?

Respondent 2:

"There are differences in the way they speak and joke, so I have to adapt to avoid misunderstandings."

Respondent 5:

"There have been misunderstandings due to differences in accent and communication style, but they were ultimately resolved well."

Respondent 6:

"The campus environment helps me socialize more easily with students from various regions."

Respondent 7:

"I learned that every culture has positive values to learn from."

Interview results indicate that cross-cultural interactions provide social experiences that build students' adaptive and tolerant attitudes. Intergroup communication experiences also demonstrate a social learning process that strengthens students' multicultural awareness.

Question 3
Researcher:
What does tolerance mean to you as a Sociology Education student?
Respondent 1:
"Tolerance means respecting the opinions and beliefs of others, even if they differ from our own."
Respondent 6:
"Tolerance allows us to live peacefully in diverse environments."
Respondent 7:
"As a sociology student, tolerance is important for understanding a pluralistic society."
Participants defined tolerance as a form of respect for the rights, views, and social identities of others. This understanding demonstrates a good level of social awareness regarding the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships in a multicultural society.
Question 4
Researcher:
Does social media influence your perspective on cultural diversity?
Respondent 2:
"Sometimes social media also brings up negative comments about certain groups."
Respondent 3:
"I often see cultural content that makes me more interested in learning about diversity."
Respondent 4:
"Social media can have both positive and negative influences depending on how it is used."
Respondent 5:
"I have seen debates about cultural differences on social media that have made the atmosphere uncomfortable."
Social media is seen as a two-pronged platform for developing students' multicultural awareness. On the one hand, social media broadens cultural insights and social interactions, but on the other hand, it can give rise to stereotypes and identity-based social conflicts.
Question 5
Researcher:
Have you ever experienced or witnessed discrimination on campus?
Respondent 5:
"Sometimes students form groups based on their region of origin."
Respondent 6:
"I see that most students are quite open to differences."
Respondent 7:
"Discrimination usually arises from a lack of understanding of other people's cultures."
Interview results indicate that social discrimination still occurs in the form of stereotypes, cultural jokes, and social categorization based on regional identity.

However, most students demonstrate an open attitude and strive to build more inclusive social relationships.

Question 6

Researcher:

How does sociology learning play a role in building your multicultural awareness?

Respondent 1:

"The sociology material helps me understand social conflict and the importance of tolerance."

Respondent 2:

"I better understand that each culture has different values."

Respondent 5:

"Sociology helps me understand the importance of coexistence."

Respondent 6:

"I learned that diversity is a social reality that must be accepted."

Respondent 7:

"Through sociology, I understand that good communication can reduce social conflict."

Sociology learning plays a significant role in building students' multicultural awareness. The learning material helps students understand the reality of social diversity, the importance of tolerance, and the need for dialogical communication in a pluralistic society. This finding aligns with Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, which emphasizes the importance of rational and dialogical communication in creating harmonious social relations in a multicultural society.

The results of the study indicate that students in the Sociology Education Study Program at Megarezky University have a relatively good multicultural awareness of social and cultural diversity on campus. The majority of participants viewed diversity as a positive social experience because it provides an opportunity to understand the cultures, languages, and characteristics of individuals from different regions. This finding suggests that cross-cultural social interactions can foster tolerance, social empathy, and respect for differences among students. These findings align with James A. Banks's opinion, which asserts that multicultural education aims to build understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity through inclusive social experiences and educational processes.

Students in this study expressed that cultural diversity on campus broadened their social horizons and helped develop cross-cultural communication skills. These findings support research by Clarisa Aeng Lau et al. (2025), which explains that multicultural education contributes to strengthening students' civic dispositions by developing tolerance, respect for diversity, and social responsibility. Furthermore, Putri Permata Assiddiq Harahap et al. (2025) stated that students who have experience with cross-cultural social interactions tend to exhibit more inclusive and open attitudes toward other social groups. This suggests that students' social experiences play a significant role in shaping their multicultural awareness.

The research findings also indicate that cross-cultural interactions do not always proceed without obstacles. Several participants revealed cultural stereotypes, communication misunderstandings, and regional identity-based jokes that have the potential to lead to social discrimination. This phenomenon suggests that even though students possess a relatively good sense of tolerance, challenges remain in building fully inclusive social relationships. This finding is relevant to research by Defan Zamathoriq (2021), who explained that multicultural societies still face issues of social prejudice and cultural stereotypes due to a lack of understanding of social differences. Therefore, multicultural education needs to be directed not only at knowledge but also at developing social experiences that encourage dialogue and positive interactions between groups (Md. Mahmud, & Hossain, 2022).

From the perspective of Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, the results of this study demonstrate that dialogical communication plays a crucial role in developing students' multicultural awareness. Habermas emphasized that harmonious social relationships can be created through rational, open, and dominating communication. In this study, students who actively interacted with peers from different cultures demonstrated more adaptive and tolerant communication skills . They learned to understand others' perspectives through discussions, group work, and everyday social interactions on campus. This reflects the process of communicative action as described by Habermas, where individuals build social understanding through dialogue and the democratic exchange of meaning.

The implementation of Habermas's theory in this study is evident in how students use communication as a means of building inclusive social relationships. When cultural misunderstandings or social stereotypes arise, most students choose to resolve them through open communication and mutual understanding of each other's perspectives (Cherng, & Davis, 2019). This process demonstrates that communicative action can be a social mechanism for reducing conflict and strengthening social solidarity in a multicultural campus environment (Risal et al., 2025). Furthermore, sociology lessons, which extensively address issues of diversity, social conflict, and community interaction, also help students develop critical and reflective thinking skills regarding the social realities around them.

This study also found that social media has a significant influence on the development of students' multicultural awareness. Some participants stated that social media helped them learn about other cultures and broaden their social horizons. However, participants also acknowledged that social media often becomes a platform for the emergence of hate speech, cultural stereotypes, and social polarization. These findings support research by Epin Saepudin and Asep Wawan Jatnika (2021), which explains that the digital era presents new challenges in multicultural education because social interactions are no longer limited to physical spaces but also occur intensively in digital spaces. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy and multicultural awareness is crucial so that students can critically respond to information and avoid being easily provoked by identity conflicts on social media.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus, which specifically explores the multicultural awareness of Sociology Education students in the context of social

interaction and cultural diversity in the digital age. Previous research generally uses a quantitative approach to measure students' levels of tolerance or general multicultural attitudes. Meanwhile, this study uses a phenomenological approach to explore students' subjective experiences in understanding social and cultural diversity. Furthermore, this study integrates Habermas's theory of communicative action in analyzing the process of developing students' multicultural awareness through dialogic communication and cross-cultural social interaction.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the number of participants, consisting of only seven students, means the results cannot be broadly generalized to all Sociology Education students or students at other universities. Second, this study was conducted at a single educational institution, thus limiting the social and cultural context of the study to a specific campus environment. Third, this study focused more on students' subjective experiences, so data interpretation was heavily influenced by participants' openness in sharing their experiences. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a wider range of participants, employ a mixed methods approach, and examine the influence of digital media and the social environment on students' multicultural awareness in greater depth.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study shows that students in the Sociology Education Study Program at Megarezky University have a relatively good multicultural awareness of social and cultural diversity on campus. Students view diversity as a positive social experience because it broadens their horizons, increases tolerance, and builds cross-cultural communication skills. Social interactions with students from diverse backgrounds help them understand the importance of inclusivity, respect for differences, and a harmonious social life. Furthermore, sociology learning contributes to shaping students' critical thinking on issues of discrimination, social conflict, and societal plurality. However, this study also found that cultural stereotypes, communication misunderstandings, and the negative influence of social media remain challenges in strengthening students' multicultural awareness. Based on Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, dialogic communication and open social interaction are crucial factors in building inclusive and democratic social relationships in a multicultural campus environment.

Based on the research findings, universities are expected to strengthen the implementation of multicultural education through more dialogic, collaborative, and experiential learning based on students' social experiences. Lecturers are also expected to create inclusive discussion spaces to increase awareness of tolerance and appreciation for cultural diversity. Furthermore, strengthening digital literacy is necessary to enable students to critically respond to information and differences in social identity on social media. Future research is recommended to involve a wider range of participants from various study programs and universities to obtain a more comprehensive picture of multicultural awareness among students in Indonesia. A mixed methods approach can also be used to combine exploration of students'

subjective experiences with quantitative measurements of multicultural attitudes and cross-cultural communication.

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