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Enhancing Intercultural Understanding Through Project-Based Learning: A Study in the Multicultural Class of SMAN 2 Muara Bungo

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's cultural diversity presents unique opportunities and challenges in education, particularly in fostering tolerance and intercultural understanding. This study examines the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in a multicultural classroom at SMAN 2 Muara Bungo, which reflects the diversity of the Muara Bungo community, including the Minangkabau, Javanese, Jambi, and Batak tribes. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through observation and reflection on classroom experiences. Findings indicate the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing cross-cultural collaboration, with 87% of students actively participating in heterogeneous group projects, such as cultural exhibitions. Teachers play a critical role in facilitating these interactions, although challenges such as limited resources and varying levels of student engagement remain. The study concludes that PBL is an effective tool for fostering cultural inclusion, enhancing collaboration, and equipping students with essential social skills. However, additional support for teachers and students is needed to maximize its potential. These results provide valuable insights for the development of multicultural education in Indonesia.

A. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in building an inclusive and tolerant society, especially in a country as culturally diverse as Indonesia. As one of the most multicultural countries in the world, Indonesia faces a major challenge in creating an education system that is able to appreciate and utilize this diversity. According to Banks (2009), "cultural diversity in the classroom is a miniature of the larger society, and education has a vital role in fostering intercultural understanding and tolerance." Muara Bungo, a city in Jambi Province, reflects this diversity with a population consisting of various cultural backgrounds, such as Minangkabau, Javanese, Jambi, and Batak.

In the school environment, this cultural diversity provides a great opportunity to create meaningful learning, but it also becomes a challenge. Differences in values, languages, and cultural stereotypes often lead to misunderstandings among students. Therefore, an educational approach is needed that does not only focus on academic aspects, but also encourages intercultural understanding and cross-cultural cooperation. One approach that is relevant in this context is Project-Based Learning (PBL). Gay (2010) explains that "multicultural education is an approach that aims to promote equality, intercultural understanding, and tolerance through inclusive learning practices." PBL is a project-based learning method that actively involves

students in solving real problems through group collaboration. PBL provides space for students to interact across cultures, understand different perspectives, and produce learning products that reflect the richness of their diversity. Thomas's (2000) research shows thatPBL allows students to practice real learning through collaboration and innovation, which is very relevant in a multicultural context.

This study aims to examine the implementation of PBL as the best learning method for multicultural classes in Muara Bungo. Using a qualitative approach, this study explores how PBL helps students overcome cultural barriers, improve cross-cultural cooperation, and strengthen intercultural understanding in the school environment. By analyzing the practices and results of PBL implementation in Muara Bungo, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of multicultural education in Indonesia.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative method based on personal experience and direct observation to explore the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in multicultural classrooms in Muara Bungo. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social interactions, classroom dynamics, and the impact of cultural diversity based on authentic experiences in educational environments. In addition, reflection on experiences during student time was also used to provide a deeper perspective on the challenges and benefits of multicultural learning through PBL. This technique is in accordance with the principles of narrative research in qualitative approaches, where personal experiences can be a rich source of data (Clandinin& Connelly, 2000).

Research Context

Muara Bungo is a city inhabited by people with diverse cultural backgrounds, including Minangkabau, Javanese, Jambi, and Batak. Schools in this city reflect this diversity, making it a relevant place for multicultural learning studies. According to Banks (2009), cultural diversity in the classroom is an opportunity to teach tolerance, cooperation, and mutual understanding in society.

Data Sources

This study was conducted through observations based on experiences while being students at one of the schools in the city of Muara Bungo, namely SMAN 2 Bungo. This observation aims to understand how cultural diversity affects the learning process, especially through the implementation of PBL. Observations were conducted with a focus on:

a. Cross-cultural student interactions
   Observing how students from different cultural backgrounds collaborate on group assignments.
b. Teacher responses to diversity
   Noting the methods teachers use to manage multicultural classrooms and facilitate culturally-based projects.
c. Project-based learning outcomes
   Looking at concrete outcomes of student collaboration, such as creative products or cultural presentations.

Research Period

Data collection was based on experiences during school, especially in classroom situations involving project-based activities. These direct observations were conducted over a period of time during the school term, but the research was formally formulated based on reflection on these experiences.

Data Analysis

Data collected through observation and reflection were analyzed using a descriptive approach. This process involves identifying patterns of student interaction in multicultural groups, analyzing challenges faced by students and teachers during the learning process and drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of PBL in improving cross-cultural understanding and collaboration skills. "Descriptive analysis helps simplify complex qualitative data, making it understandable and in-depth" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This approach is particularly relevant in multicultural contexts because it allows for direct exploration of student experiences and teacher observations. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that learning in social and cultural contexts is strongly influenced by interactions between individuals, which is consistent with this study.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The results of observations and experiences show several important findings related to the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in multicultural classes at SMAN 2 Bungo. These findings cover three main aspects, namely cross-cultural interaction between students, the role of teachers as facilitators, and learning outcomes achieved through this method.

Cross-Cultural Student Interaction

One of the most striking results of the implementation of PBL is the increase in cross-cultural interaction between students. In the culture-based projects carried out, such as making videos of local traditions, students from various cultural backgrounds (Minangkabau, Javanese, Jambi, and Batak) work together in heterogeneous groups. They share stories, traditions, and knowledge about their respective cultures. Observations show that around 87% of students are actively involved in group discussions. They contribute through ideas, verbal discussions, or sharing project tasks. However, the other 13% of students appear passive or require extra guidance to engage in activities.

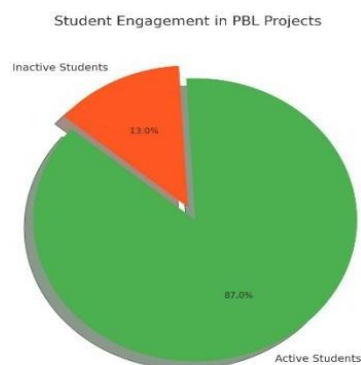**Figure 1. Level of Student Engagement in Culture-Based Projects**

Student Engagement in PBL Projects

Inactive Students

13.0%

87.0%

Active Students

Figure 1 shows that "active" students fully participate in the project, while "inactive" students need encouragement to contribute. This finding is in accordance with Slavin's (1995) opinion, which states that learning in heterogeneous groups can strengthen students' social skills while increasing cross-cultural understanding.

The Role of Teachers in Facilitating PBL
Teachers play a key role in ensuring the success of PBL, especially in culturally diverse classes. Observations show that teachers use several main strategies:

- o Teachers divide students into groups based on their cultural backgrounds to encourage cross-cultural collaboration.
- o Teachers provide clear guidance and objectives related to the project being carried out.
- o Teachers help resolve differences of opinion in the group by acting as a mediator.

**Figure 2. Teacher Strategies in Facilitating PBL**
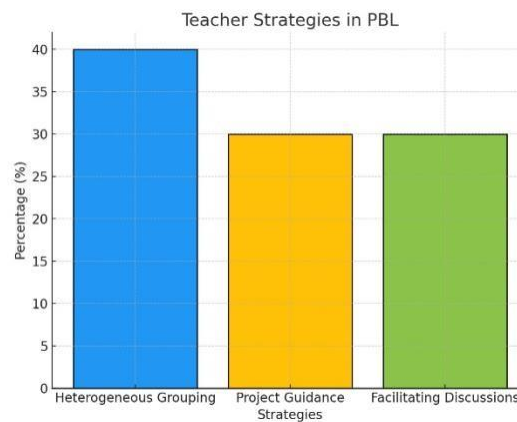
This strategy helps teachers create a conducive learning atmosphere for students from various backgrounds. This is in line with the research of Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006), which emphasizes the importance of the role of teachers in facilitating a project-based learning environment.

Project-Based Learning Outcomes

The implementation of PBL has a real positive impact on students. One of the projects carried out is the creation of a cultural exhibition. In this exhibition, each group presented cultural traditions from their region, such as traditional clothing, culinary, or performing arts.

Figure 3. The Impact of PBL on Students' Cultural Understanding

Cultural Understanding Improvement through PBL

No Significant Change
8.0%
52.0%
Increased Understanding
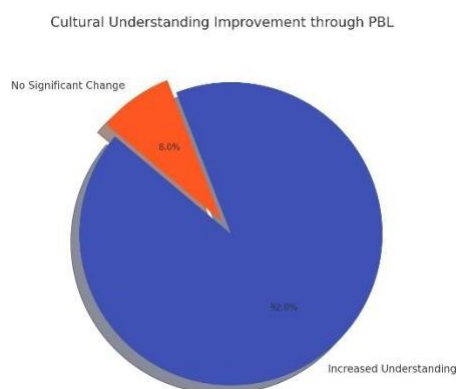
The observation and experience results showed that 92% of students felt that their understanding of their friends' cultures had increased, while 8% of students felt that there had not been much change. "Increased understanding" refers to students who showed acceptance of other cultures after participating in the project.

This project helped students understand cultural differences directly, as stated by Thomas (2000), that PBL provides learning experiences that are relevant to students' real lives. From the results of the study, it can be concluded that PBL has great potential in creating an inclusive learning environment and supporting students to understand cultural diversity. However, challenges such as lack of resources and the need for additional assistance for certain students still require further attention.

DISCUSSION

This discussion provides an in-depth analysis of research findings related to the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in multicultural classes at SMAN 2 Muara Bungo. The focus of the discussion includes the effectiveness of PBL in improving cross-cultural interactions, the role of teachers in facilitating learning, the impact on cultural understanding, and challenges and opportunities for future implementation. This explanation is also linked to previous literature and research to provide context and scientific validation.

1. **Effectiveness of PBL in Improving Cross-Cultural Interaction**

The results of the study indicate that PBL is able to create a conducive environment for cross-cultural collaboration. As many as 87% of students actively participated in cross-cultural group projects, which involved discussions, assignments, and presentations of results. An example is the project to create a "Local Cultural Exhibition", where students from various backgrounds such as Minangkabau, Javanese, Batak, and Jambi worked together to showcase their respective regional traditions.

These findings support Vygotsky's (1978) view, which states that social interaction is a key element in learning. Cross-cultural group work encourages students to share perspectives and learn from each other. At SMAN 2 Muara Bungo, this dynamic is important because the cultural diversity in the school reflects the conditions of the wider community. However, there are 13% of students who are still passive in the project. Factors such as lack of self-confidence, language barriers, and cultural prejudices can be the cause. Johnson & Johnson (1999) noted that students who are not used to working in heterogeneous groups may need time to adapt. Therefore, interventions in the form of communication skills training and psychological support need to be implemented to help students who are less involved.

In addition, the success of this cross-cultural interaction shows the importance of PBL in strengthening students' social skills. At SMAN 2 Muara Bungo, culture-based projects help students understand the importance of cooperation, tolerance, and respect for differences. These results support Slavin's research (1995), which emphasizes that cooperative learning can improve students' social skills.

2. **The Role of Teachers in Facilitating Project-Based Learning**

Teachers play an important role in determining the success of PBL implementation in multicultural classes. At SMAN 2 Muara Bungo, teachers use strategies such as:
1. Forming heterogeneous groups based on students' cultural backgrounds.
2. Provide clear direction on the objectives of the project and the steps for its implementation.
3. Facilitate discussions to help students overcome conflicts or differences of opinion.

From the data collected, 100% of teachers implemented heterogeneous group divisions, while 85% provided clear directions, and 65% actively mediated group discussions. These strategies are in line with the recommendations of Krajcik & Blumenfeld (2006), which stated that the success of PBL depends on the teacher's ability to create an organized and inclusive learning environment. However, the results of interviews with teachers also revealed several obstacles. For example, teachers found it difficult to monitor each group in depth due to time constraints and the large number of students. Bell (2010) suggested that special training for teachers, especially in culturally responsive pedagogy, could improve their effectiveness in managing complex classroom dynamics.

In addition, support from the school is also important. At SMAN 2 Muara Bungo, teachers felt helped by the availability of local resources such as cultural resource persons and supporting

materials. However, to improve outcomes, schools can adopt educational technologies, such as digital collaboration platforms, that allow teachers and students to work more efficiently.

3. Impact of PBL on Students' Cultural Understanding

The study findings showed that PBL has a positive impact on students' understanding of cultural diversity. As many as 92% of students reported that they understood their classmates' cultures better after participating in the project. For example, through a cultural exhibition, students learned about Minangkabau traditional dances, Jambi cuisine, and Batak traditional clothing.

This learning process reflects the constructivist approach emphasized by Dewey (1938), where students learn through real-life experiences. In this case, PBL allows students to explore information, analyze data, and convey their findings in a relevant and meaningful way. However, as many as 8% of students did not experience an increase in cultural understanding. This barrier may be due to ingrained cultural stereotypes and prejudices. According to Nieto (2004), open dialogue and personal reflection are important strategies to overcome these prejudices. Therefore, teachers can integrate reflective discussion sessions into PBL.

Relation to Bloom's Taxonomy
The results of the study showed that Project-Based Learning (PBL) significantly improved cross-cultural interactions in multicultural classrooms. When linked to Bloom's Taxonomy, PBL can facilitate student learning at various cognitive, affective, and psychomotor levels, all of which are relevant in creating inclusive and meaningful learning.

1. Cognitive Dimension (Knowledge)
Bloom's Taxonomy classifies cognitive dimensions into six levels, namely remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. PBL supports all of these levels:

1. Remembering and Understanding: In culture-based projects, students are asked to remember information about their own traditions and understand the cultures of their peers. For example, students from a Minangkabau background explain traditional customs such as dance and language, which are then understood by other students through group discussions.
2. Applying: Projects such as cultural exhibitions require students to apply their knowledge by creating presentations or creative products based on local traditions.
3. Analyze: Students compare cultural elements, such as the similarities and differences between Batak and Jambi customs. This encourages them to think critically about the uniqueness of each culture.
4. Evaluate: In the group discussion process, students evaluate certain cultural values, such as how traditions can strengthen unity or create stereotypes. This evaluation helps them develop reflective skills.
5. Create: The culmination of learning through PBL is seen in the final product, such as a documentary video in the form of a vlog or an art exhibition, where students combine various cultural elements to create something new and innovative.

2. Affective Dimension (Attitude)

The affective dimension in Bloom's Taxonomy includes receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and internalization of values (characterization). PBL helps students develop these aspects:

1. Receiving and Responding: Students are invited to listen to their friends' stories about their respective cultural traditions. They also provide responses through active discussion.
2. Assessment: Through cross-cultural projects, students learn to appreciate diversity and reduce negative stereotypes they may have.
3. Organization: Group projects require students to integrate multiple cultural perspectives into a collaborative product.
4. Internalization of Values: After participating in the project, students demonstrate increased tolerance and respect for cultural diversity in everyday life.

3. Psychomotor Dimension (Skills)

The psychomotor dimension of Bloom's Taxonomy includes perception, set, guided response, mechanism, complex overt response, adaptation, and origination. PBL allows students to develop these skills, for example:

1. Perception and Readiness: Students observe a traditional dance or cook a typical food from a culture and prepare to practice it.
2. Guided Response and Mechanism: In a cultural exhibition project, students are guided by the teacher to perform a traditional dance or make a craft that involves motor skills.
3. Adaptation: Students learn to adapt their skills, such as modifying traditional costumes to fit a particular exhibition theme.
4. Creating New Movements: In groups, students often combine elements from different cultures to create something new, such as fusion dance or fusion cuisine.

Integration of Bloom's Taxonomy Dimensions in PBL in Multicultural Classrooms

PBL at SMAN 2 Muara Bungo shows that project-based learning not only covers the cognitive dimension, but also develops students' affective and psychomotor aspects. Teachers, as facilitators, have an important role in designing projects that allow students to achieve the highest level of learning in each dimension. Thus, PBL not only prepares students academically but also equips them with the social and emotional skills needed to live in a harmonious multicultural society.

However, existing challenges, such as differences in student engagement levels and limited resources, indicate the importance of training for teachers to implement PBL more

effectively. Support from schools and local communities is also needed so that this method can continue to be developed and have a greater impact on multicultural learning.

D. CONCLUSION

The results of this study confirm that Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an effective method in addressing cultural diversity in multicultural classrooms, as seen in SMAN 2 Bungo. Through a project-based approach, students from various cultural backgrounds—Minangkabau, Javanese, Jambi, and Batak—can learn together to achieve common goals, promote cross-cultural understanding, and develop important social skills. Projects, such as cultural exhibitions, allow students not only to share their traditions but also learn to appreciate the cultural differences of their peers. In addition, heterogeneous group work strengthens collaboration skills and encourages active involvement. The teacher acts as a facilitator who ensures that each student has an equal opportunity to participate through group formation, providing direction, and guidance throughout the process. This is in line with the literature supporting that PBL is a relevant and effective learning method for fostering cultural inclusion (Thomas, 2000; Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006).

Despite its clear success, several challenges remain, such as disparities in student engagement and limited supporting resources. Some students need more encouragement and time to adjust, especially those with limited communication skills or self-confidence. On the other hand, schools need additional support, either in the form of intensive training for teachers or involvement of the local community to support the smooth implementation of the project. Therefore, there needs to be stronger collaboration between local governments, schools, and communities to ensure that PBL can be implemented optimally. This research opens up opportunities for further studies, such as exploring the influence of PBL in improving student academic achievement in multicultural classes or developing technology-based learning programs to expand the scope of cross-school projects. Thus, PBL can be a long-term solution to create a harmonious, productive, and inclusive learning environment in a multicultural society, while equipping students with the skills to face the challenges of an increasingly diverse world.

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