

## Multiculturalism and Gender Equality in Vocational High Schools in Yogyakarta: A Phenomenological Study

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### ABSTRACT

*Multiculturalism is the most appropriate term to describe diversity in schools. Ethnic, religious, racial and gender diversity are recognized in educational practices involving teachers and students. This article aims to analyze the practice of multiculturalism in schools, exploring the various driving factors and barriers faced by teachers and students. This descriptive research used a phenomenological approach, data was obtained from 35 students and teachers using interviews and Google Forms. Data were analyzed by reduction, description, and conclusion based on the identification of significant themes. The main areas of multicultural categorization in vocational high schools: gender equality in educational practices, differences between rural and urban geographical backgrounds, socio-economic disparities, and educational content provided by educators. Muhammadiyah schools in Yogyakarta do not seem to have optimally implemented gender-equity-based multiculturalism. This study highlights the gender injustice to societal constructs, economic disparities that affect educational experiences, and geographical background of students.*

### Keywords:

Multiculturalism; Education; Gender Equality; Muhammadiyah.

### ABSTRAK

*Multikulturalisme adalah istilah yang paling tepat untuk menggambarkan adanya keragaman di sekolah. Keberagaman etnis, agama, ras, dan gender diakui dalam praktik pendidikan yang melibatkan guru dan siswa. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis praktik multikulturalisme di sekolah, mengeksplorasi berbagai faktor pendorong dan hambatan yang dihadapi*

*oleh guru dan siswa. Penelitian deskriptif ini menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi, data diperoleh dari 35 siswa dan guru dengan menggunakan wawancara dan Google Form. Analisis data dengan reduksi, deskripsi, dan kesimpulan berdasarkan identifikasi tema-tema yang signifikan. Area utama kategorisasi multikultural di sekolah menengah kejuruan: kesetaraan gender dalam praktik pendidikan, perbedaan antara latar belakang geografis pedesaan dan perkotaan, kesenjangan sosial-ekonomi, dan konten pendidikan yang diberikan oleh pendidik. Sekolah-sekolah Muhammadiyah di Yogyakarta tampaknya belum optimal dalam menerapkan multikulturalisme berbasis keadilan gender. Studi ini menyoroti ketidakadilan gender yang terjadi karena konstruksi masyarakat, kesenjangan ekonomi yang memengaruhi pengalaman pendidikan, dan latar belakang geografis yang memengaruhi perlakuan terhadap siswa.*

**Kata kunci:**

Multikulturalisme; Pendidikan; Kesetaraan Gender; Muhammadiyah.

## 1. Introduction

Multiculturalism is an undeniable social fact in Indonesia. Diversity and differences are social facts that have made humans who are present in historical and social contexts interconnected and compete with each other in social relations (Okin, 2012). The field of education is of great concern, because this is where citizens often acquire knowledge as a legacy, which is then widely disseminated to the community. Therefore, the inheritance of knowledge through education is very important to get the attention of many parties, especially educators and students. In particular, multicultural debates and practices often occur regarding social class and gender in relation to religious interpretations due to cultural and socio-political factors (Macey, 2009).

Multicultural education is still a concern for many parties because there are still many misunderstandings about the understanding of multiculturalism as one of the causes of the 'declining faith' of a person or group (Broekman, 2017). In fact, multiculturalism never questions the beliefs of a person or religious group. In fact, multiculturalism is the most concise vocabulary to describe the diversity of culture, social class, political background, religion, and gender. (García-Peter & Villavicencio-Miranda, 2016). Thus, multiculturalism is a concept that provides 'social space' for the existence of religions in society to live side by side, live side by side harmoniously and not conflict. It is known that schools, even though they have the status of Muhammadiyah schools, not all of their students have a Muhammadiyah background. They also have diverse family, socio-economic, and even cultural backgrounds, so that the practice of multiculturalism is one of the things that needs attention (Reitman, 2005). We know that in schools outside Java, namely in Ende, East Nusa Tenggara, Muhammadiyah schools are attended by many students with Christian backgrounds (both Catholic and Protestant). However, they still receive education at Muhammadiyah junior and senior high schools which are Muhammadiyah in nature. (Maksum, Febrianto, & Wahyuni, 2019).

Multicultural practices are very important in education (Kistoro, 2023). This is because education is one of the means to create respect, appreciation, and recognition of diverse people.

(Broekman, 2017). Multicultural practices have actually been carried out in various countries, especially in countries with large migrant populations such as Europe, America, Australia, and even Canada. (Williams & Enns, 2012). However, the practice of multiculturalism in these countries is different from the practice of multiculturalism in Indonesia, as a country that is not a destination for immigrants like European and American countries. (Agboola, 2012). Indonesia has the cultural characteristics and social construction of European and American countries which are countries of migrants from various countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia (Zarbaliyev, 2017). Cultural differences are one factor in the practice of multiculturalism. Indonesia, European countries, and America need attention because they often foster tension in the wider community (Tam, 2009).

However, multicultural practices also occur in Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia whose populations consist of multiethnic groups like Indonesia. (Alberta, 2021). It is known that Singapore is inhabited by ethnic Chinese, Malays, Indians, Europeans, and Americans, although they are minorities. Singapore implements multicultural politics in its national life and educational institutions such as junior high schools, high schools, and universities. (Karim & Nasir, 2014). Singapore, which is dominated by ethnic Chinese and Malays, is undoubtedly different in practicing multiculturalism in government and educational institutions like in Europe and America. (Alberta, 2019).

Likewise, Malaysia, whose majority population is Malay Muslims, followed by Chinese, Indians, Bengalis, Arabs, Bugis, and Bataks, has a policy in the practice of multiculturalism both in state policies and in educational institutions. (Karim & Nasir, 2014). Malaysia is characterized as a semi-governmental state, with the Prime Minister serving as its highest leader. Nonetheless, there are regions, such as the Kingdom of Malacca and Sarawak, where royal authority operates independently of the Prime Minister. Additionally, Malaysia is recognized as a kingdom that formally incorporates Islamic sharia law into its state legal practices. (Okin, 2012).

The Philippines, a nation with a predominantly Christian-Catholic population, stands apart from Malaysia and Singapore, both of which are governed by a Prime Minister. In contrast, the Philippines is led by a president who serves as both the head of state and head of government. The primary ethnic groups in the Philippines include the Tagalog, Bisaya, and Cebuano, who represent the indigenous tribes of the country. Other notable ethnic groups are the Mestizo (Spanish Malay), Negrito (indigenous inland inhabitants), Moro from Mindanao, and the Aeta, another group of indigenous Filipinos. (García-Peter & Villavicencio-Miranda, 2016). With its ethnic diversity, the Philippines manages this diversity differently from Malaysia and Singapore, which have relatively few ethnic groups. The diverse groups challenge the state's policies in managing ethnic groups in the Philippines, so that wisdom is needed to provide policies that are willing to be obeyed and implemented by all ethnic groups. This of course has an impact on schools in the Philippines which have ethnic diversity. The Philippines has also implemented multiculturalism in schools from junior high schools to universities to this day. (Robert, 2001).

Meanwhile, Indonesia is known as a country with a very diverse ethnicity, culture, tribe, social class, and religion (Hopid & Kistoro, 2022), all of which are united in one building called the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia which is based on Pancasila. (Robert, 2001). Indonesia is not a religious state (Islam), although Islam is the majority religion of the Indonesian population (88.7%)

of the total population of Indonesia which currently numbers 274 million people. With more than 500 ethnicities and more than 600 regional languages, Indonesia is one of the countries with the richest culture in Southeast Asia. (Grishaeva, 2012).

The state policy of not choosing one religion as the basis of the state is an authentic choice of the founding fathers who were very nationalistic, prioritizing the interests of the nation above the interests of groups and religions (Kistoro, 2021). Indonesia can be described as a multicultural 'teacher,' despite not being a primary destination for immigrants like many European or American countries. The country's multiculturalism is evident in its rich diversity of ethnicities, languages, cultures, religions, social classes, and political affiliations. While Indonesia is generally recognized as a harmonious multicultural society, it does experience occasional socio-political outbursts stemming from dissatisfaction with how the state manages societal issues. Nevertheless, Indonesia remains committed to building a nation that is not based on religion. (Kastoryano, 2018).

The policies taken by the country are also very different from Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines in managing society. Indonesia adopts a multi-party and presidential system, not a prime minister or a kingdom, even though Indonesia originated from kingdoms in the archipelago. (Mechraoui, 2019). Indonesia is now a unitary state comprising numerous islands. Aceh Province is unique in that it has special laws and regulations that officially implement Islamic law within its government and is home to a local political party. It stands as the only province with such arrangements. Meanwhile, DKI Jakarta, the nation's capital, continues to have a governor elected by the people.

Yogyakarta, as the sole active kingdom in Indonesia, is governed by a Governor who also holds the title of King of the Yogyakarta Palace. Other provinces with royal significance, such as Ternate, Tidore, Surakarta, and Cirebon, have local monarchies but do not share the same prominence. In addition to the King, there are also Regents, Mayors, and Governors in these regions. This diversity showcases how Indonesia is distinct from other Southeast Asian countries. (Berry & Ward, 2016). Yogyakarta is one of the areas that has a lot of diversity and differences in its society. The diversity of religion, ethnicity, culture, and social class cannot be avoided. Yogyakarta itself is said to be a city of tolerance (Masduki, Kistoro, Ru'iyah, Sutarman, & Sukirman, 2020) that respects all citizens in its area. (Abdullah, Hudayana, Setiadi, Kutaneegara, & Indiyanto, 2019).

The presence of Muhammadiyah in Indonesia and especially in Yogyakarta certainly faces various challenges and situations that must be negotiated in practicing multiculturalism in schools. (Efendi & Suswanta, 2017). With such conditions, Muhammadiyah, which is an Islamic mass organization with 25 million followers, the second largest after NU which has 45 million followers, is of course in a very religious country in terms of ethnicity, religion, social group, culture, and educational background. (Ahmad, 2019). As such, multiculturalism within Muhammadiyah, particularly in its educational endeavors, serves as a prime example of how effective multicultural practices can mitigate friction and prevent social conflict in Indonesia. Indeed, Muhammadiyah collaborates with the state to enhance national development through education. (Kastoryano, 2018).

The study of education in Muhammadiyah that supports the practice of multiculturalism can be an example of how to appreciate and respect diversity (Widiyanto, 2019). With this study, Muhammadiyah recognizes multiculturalism even though its practice has not spread to all

Muhammadiyah schools due to several obstacles faced by teachers and students. (Wajdi & Tobroni, 2020). Thus, we can learn that Muhammadiyah must further strengthen the practice of multiculturalism in schools so that Muhammadiyah schools truly have a vision of multiculturalism as the founder of Muhammadiyah (Mechraoui, 2019).

Considering the existing literature, there appears to be a deficiency in studies examining the practice of multiculturalism within Muhammadiyah education, despite the fact that Muhammadiyah schools have implemented multicultural principles. Unfortunately, few researchers have offered a thorough explanation and analysis of this topic. Thus, this article aims to provide a detailed examination and analysis of multicultural education practices in Muhammadiyah schools, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of multiculturalism in this educational context.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research Design

This study utilizes a phenomenological qualitative approach to investigate multicultural practices and gender equality in vocational high schools. The phenomenological method aims to comprehend participants' lived experiences concerning multiculturalism within their educational environment. This descriptive-analytical study seeks to interpret how both students and teachers perceive and implement multiculturalism and gender equality in education.

### 2.2 Research Location

This research employs an analytical-qualitative methodology with a case study approach focused on SMK Muhammadiyah Berbah. The choice of this school as the research subject stems from its strategic location on the outskirts of Yogyakarta City, situated between Sleman and Bantul Regencies. Sleman is known for its development and hosts several universities, while Bantul does not share the same level of development. Students at SMK Muhammadiyah Berbah come from both the Sleman and Bantul districts, which differ economically, culturally, and geographically. It is therefore assumed that these differences may influence student behavior regarding multiculturalism at the school.

### 2.3 Population and Sample

The study was carried out at SMK Muhammadiyah Berbah, a vocational high school situated on the outskirts of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The population of interest included both students and teachers at the institution, while the sample comprised 30 students and 5 teachers, selected through purposive sampling. Students were chosen from grades 10, 11, and 12, with 10 representatives from each grade to ensure adequate representation across different levels of academic progression. The teachers selected were those instructing subjects related to social interaction, religious education, and civic education, as these areas are closely associated with themes of multiculturalism and gender perspectives in education. The characteristics of the informants involved in data collection for this study are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Research informant information

No	Informant	Data Collection Technique	Data Collection Time
1	Students of grades 10,11,12	Google form and interview	March-May-June 2023
2	Teacher	Interview	August 2023

#### 2.4 Data Collection

Prior to conducting field research, the researcher gathered materials pertinent to the research theme by reviewing articles authored by previous scholars. Subsequently, the researcher carried out field research from March to May 2023 to observe conditions related to the practice of multiculturalism among students and between educators and students. The goal was to determine whether both students and educators possess a multicultural perspective in their teaching and learning practices. Following this, the researcher distributed questionnaires via Google Forms to collect insights from students that complemented the findings obtained through field observations.

Data collection was performed by conducting interviews through the distribution of Google Forms to 30 students from grades 10, 11, and 12 at SMK Muhammadiyah Berbah Yogyakarta. A total of 10 students were selected from each grade, resulting in 30 informants. The selection process was random, focusing on students who had access to gadgets to facilitate contact for the completion of the Google Forms distributed by the researcher. This approach was in line with the research objectives, effectively serving as a closed interview method. The students selected for interviews and observations were chosen based on the assumption that they possessed sufficient knowledge and field experience within their schools. Their interactions with both peers and educators enabled them to provide comprehensive information on the research topic. Similarly, the educators interviewed were those who taught subjects related to social interaction and religious and social practices, specifically Pancasila and Citizenship education, as well as Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah lessons. These subjects are closely related to multicultural practices within schools.

Meanwhile, interviews with educators totaled five people. The educators interviewed were social studies educators, Al Islam and Muhammadiyah educators, and Indonesian language educators. They were chosen because they were considered to have information about teaching issues related to the socio-religious, economic, educational, socio-cultural, and gender backgrounds of students. As well as understanding the shortcomings, challenges, and obstacles in practicing multiculturalism in schools. Interviews were conducted over a period of three months, from March to May 2023, allowing for a timely collection of data that could be analyzed and integrated with information from journals and articles related to the research theme. This approach aims to ensure that the data gathered complements one another, contributing to a comprehensive qualitative analysis aligned with the research objectives.

#### 2.5 Data Analysis

Once all the data is collected through literature review, observations, and questionnaire distribution, the researcher proceeds to reduce the data and organize it according to the relevant topics outlined in the theoretical framework. A qualitative approach is then employed for analysis. The study utilizes thematic analysis, beginning with data reduction, where collected data is transcribed, and

irrelevant or unnecessary information is removed. Following this, categorization is performed, with emerging themes identified from the responses, including gender equality in education, socio-economic disparities, and cultural differences between rural and urban settings. During the interpretation phase, the categorized data is analyzed in the context of multicultural education theories and existing research on gender equity. To ensure reliability, a member-checking process is implemented, in which selected participants review the interpretations to confirm their accuracy.

**3. Results and Discussion**

Based on field data and analysis, the research reveals noteworthy findings regarding vocational high school education. It identifies three multicultural categorizations within these institutions: gender equality, the economic disparities between affluent and underprivileged students, and demographic differences, particularly between urban and rural areas.

*3.1 Increasing Students' Interest in Reading and Writing through Literacy in Islamic Education*

The social and biological contexts of gender frequently contribute to gender injustice, as societal structures continue to enforce a clear distinction between men and women based on physical differences. Men are often perceived to possess greater physical strength, leading to a pronounced division in tasks and responsibilities associated with physical work. This differentiation can even be seen in educational settings, where seating arrangements are frequently designed to separate men and women, rooted in the assumption that they should not occupy the same space. Beyond these physical distinctions, gender injustice is often exacerbated by varying perceptions of men's and women's roles within society and their social environments. The segregation of seating and the allocation of tasks are both influenced by persistent gender biases, highlighting an ongoing inequality in how men and women are treated. (Ancis & Phillips, 2005)

In many cases, men's and women's jobs are differentiated because women and men are considered genders that must be sharply differentiated, which has implications for salary issues. In schools, male students are differentiated because of their gender. Women are feminine, while men are masculine (García-Peter & Villavicencio-Miranda, 2016). This of course creates sharp gender inequities in society and schools. Educators sometimes fall into the trap of disciplining men and women in discriminatory ways.

**Tabel 2.** Gender equality

Gender	Attitude	Perspective	Result
Men	Strong	Bias Gender	50% (15 Student)
Women	Harmony	Gender justice	47% (13 Student)
Men and Women	Slow	Confuse	3% (3 Student)

Students have expressed concerns about educators exhibiting discriminatory attitudes and behaviors towards male and female students. It seems that girls are often treated as if they should be submissive within the school environment. However, girls can make significant positive contributions,

particularly in areas such as maintaining order, cleanliness, and discipline, as well as in inter-school competitions. This perspective was shared by Siska Maharani, a third-grade student, below:

"As female students, we sometimes feel belittled by certain male teachers when we encounter challenges at school. In reality, we are capable of making positive contributions to the school community, whether by organizing inter-school competitions or helping to maintain classroom order. Discriminatory behavior from teachers is never justified. However, it seems that some male teachers may not fully comprehend the concept of gender equity, leading them to believe that boys and girls should be treated differently in an educational setting."

The comments made by female students regarding the behavior of some male educators highlight the ongoing need to enhance understanding of gender justice. It is evident that improving literacy around the concept of gender is essential for effectively implementing gender justice initiatives in schools. Frequently, discussions about gender revolve around a perceived conflict between women and men. Therefore, it is crucial to provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender issues.

The data indicates that male students exhibit harsher behavior towards their peers, regardless of gender. From a gender perspective, male students appear to be more biased compared to their female counterparts, who tend to demonstrate greater gender fairness. Among the respondents, three students seem uncertain about the principles of multiculturalism within educational settings. This evidence suggests that male students may possess a stronger sense of dominance than female students, coupled with a tendency towards gender bias. These attitudes could be influenced by their family economic background and cultural traditions, which may limit their understanding of gender fairness. In contrast, female students often grow up in environments that promote gender equitable practices and engage more positively with their peers.

Research supports the notion that a family background fostering gender-equitable practices significantly influences children's behavior toward gender equality in school settings. Gender equality is of utmost importance, and its effects are often more pronounced in girls than in boys, as boys may exhibit dominant behaviors while girls tend to be more accommodating to their family and social environments. Children raised in an environment that promotes gender fairness are likely to interact positively with others. Conversely, those who are nurtured in a culture of dominance are more likely to display dominating behaviors outside the home. Additionally, children from affluent or middle-to-upper-class backgrounds often exhibit discriminatory attitudes toward those who are different from themselves. The distinction in the research conducted above lies in the observation that, regardless of whether school children come from rural backgrounds or navigate between rural and urban environments, a lack of understanding related to multiculturalism can still lead them to adopt a gender-biased perspective. Students from both impoverished and affluent family backgrounds can display similar rigid attitudes, often failing to treat genders equitably, which ultimately impacts their relationships. This situation is further exacerbated when economic disparities and traditional customs within their families create divisions.

### 3.2 *Rich and Poor Students*

The economic background of students is an important consideration for educators and schools in promoting gender justice and ensuring that no discrimination arises due to students' financial



circumstances. The existence of international schools, with their exorbitant fees, creates an environment that discriminates against economically disadvantaged citizens. Those lacking financial resources are often excluded from these so-called international institutions, while individuals with greater financial means can easily gain admission to schools marketed as global.

This phenomenon also occurs in national schools. Even within these institutions, students from affluent backgrounds and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds experience negative discrimination, often being treated differently by both teachers and their peers. Students from well-off families tend to gravitate towards one another, while those from less privileged backgrounds similarly associate among themselves. Furthermore, during school events, teachers frequently show preferential treatment towards students from upper and middle economic backgrounds as opposed to those from lower economic backgrounds.

**Tabel 3.** Data of Social Class Student

Gender	Social Class	Attitude	Results
Men	Middle Class	Discriminative	55%
Women	Lower Class	Respective	25%
Men and Women	Upper Class	Discriminative	15%

In Muhammadiyah Berbah School, the majority of students come from lower middle-class economic backgrounds. As a result, they often receive less attention from teachers, which can lead to a sense of apathy among these students. They tend to approach school with a more relaxed attitude compared to their peers from wealthier families. In contrast, students from well-off backgrounds typically attend school with enthusiasm and are more engaged with their assignments, particularly during practical fieldwork experiences. As one 2nd-grade elementary school student, Rizal Maulana, expressed, this difference in attitudes is quite noticeable, below:

“In schools, students from lower economic backgrounds often experience different treatment compared to their more affluent peers. It appears that schools tend to foster closer relationships with those who are well-off, leaving those from disadvantaged backgrounds at a disadvantage. This discrepancy is evident when friends from lower-income families struggle to participate in activities that incur practical costs. Conversely, students from wealthier families can easily contribute financially to support field trips and other initiatives organized by the school.”

Maulana's statement highlights that the practice of gender justice in schools, which should be upheld regardless of students' economic backgrounds, is often hindered by those very backgrounds. The presence of students from both stable and disadvantaged economic situations can lead to instances of gender injustice within the school environment. This, in turn, undermines the effective implementation of gender justice in schools with a diverse economic student population. Students from upper-middle-class backgrounds often exhibit discriminatory behaviors toward their peers as a means of showcasing their family's wealth. While not all individuals from this group behave in this manner, such tendencies are more prevalent among them. Similarly, those from the upper class also display significant discriminatory attitudes toward their peers. Consequently, the issue of social class poses a serious challenge when implementing multicultural education in schools, as these discriminatory attitudes can hinder progress. This presents a significant obstacle to establishing

gender-equitable and socially conscious education as foundational principles within the educational system.

In certain instances, the middle class exhibits a different attitude compared to what is observed here. They often show genuine concern for those who are less fortunate. In fact, both the middle and upper classes strive to assist those in need. In contrast, at SMK Berbah, it appears that the higher the social class, the more discriminatory individuals become toward their peers. This is what is different from the conditions of the middle class in developed and well-educated countries such as Japan, Korea, Australia and England like Suzan Moller, 2019, Michael A Dover 2019 and Valeria Meckhova 2023.

### 3.3 *Conditions of Cities and Villages*

Education should not give negative prejudice to students based on their origin. Negative prejudice against students, for example, assumes that students from the city are better, more polite, and smarter than students from the village who look dirty, stupid, and less intelligent.

The geographical background of students should not create differences in the way teachers treat students at school. This is because geographical background does not necessarily reflect the negative prejudice that those from rural backgrounds are students who are less educated or less capable in education. Meanwhile, those from urban backgrounds are students who have better abilities in terms of schooling. This kind of prejudice is of course a discriminatory prejudice against students at school that should not occur. However, sometimes there are still educators who assume that students from urban areas are much better than students from rural areas at school. Mutmainah Azzahra, a second grade student, said:

“We students at this school come from diverse backgrounds, not all hailing from the village or the city. While some students do come from nearby urban areas, the majority are from rural regions surrounding the school. This diversity in daily life experiences leads to varying perspectives among us. However, it appears that teachers perceive village students as less disciplined, less obedient to the rules, and less neat in comparison to their city counterparts. Although city students are generally viewed as cleaner and more polite, it is important to note that there are city students who also disregard school rules. Their smaller numbers may make them less noticeable, but the perception of disobedience tends to fall more heavily on village students. We, as students, desire fair treatment regardless of whether we come from the city or the village, as we all contribute to the school community.”

Azzahra's statement highlights the importance of practicing gender equality towards students from both rural and urban backgrounds, as each can make valuable contributions to the school environment. It is crucial to recognize that students from diverse geographic backgrounds should not be discriminated against on any grounds.

Students' geographical backgrounds significantly influence their attitudes and perspectives toward their peers. Those hailing from rural areas tend to be more open and easily connect with one another, fostering a friendly environment without feelings of awkwardness or suspicion. In contrast, students from urban backgrounds often exhibit a more closed demeanor, primarily socializing within their own demographic. This reluctance to engage with rural students stems from an underlying assumption that rural children may be less compatible in social settings. Such attitudes present a serious challenge in the realm of education, particularly for schools striving to promote multiculturalism.

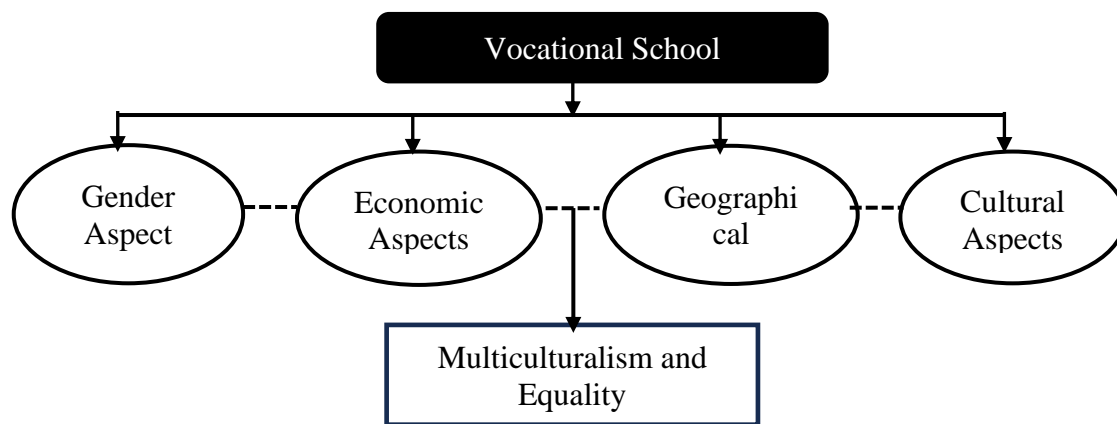
Research indicates that differences in geographical backgrounds can significantly influence a person's behavior. Individuals from rural mountainous areas often develop a resilient yet open attitude shaped by their environment, which requires them to be tough in the face of nature. They generally approach social interactions with confidence, feeling unthreatened by others, including city dwellers. In contrast, those who grow up in urban settings—characterized by bustling crowds—tend to be more cautious and selective about their social engagements. This vigilance is largely a response to the higher incidence of crime and the pressures of city life, which create a competitive atmosphere that they must navigate carefully.

### 3.4 Cultural Differences

In addition to the above factors, there is another factor, namely the existence of different cultures among students in vocational high schools. They have different regional bases, different habits in society and even from different economic aspects, forming different habits. The hope of respect for cultural diversity, as conveyed by Mohammad Said when interviewed by the author:

"As students from outside Yogyakarta, we seek to be respected and appreciated for our diverse cultural backgrounds. We recognize that the culture of Yogyakarta and Java differs from that of Banyumas in Central Java. While Central Javanese culture may seem more subdued, the Javanese culture in Yogyakarta holds significant importance. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to acknowledge and understand the cultural differences among their students to avoid any misunderstandings related to speech and behavior."

Several important findings are specifically described in chart 1 below to make it easier to observe the important results of the research that has been conducted.



**Figure 1.** Multiculturalism in Vocational High Schools

The differences in students' cultural backgrounds are a concern for educators (teachers) who provide lessons at school or in class. Cultural differences in students are very widespread because students come from various regions, religious backgrounds, ethnicities, and races. (Tan, 2017). The diversity of ethnicities, spirituality, culture, social class, and gender is a concern when looking at the background of school children or students. This is because multiculturalism is a method of habituation that can be used to recognize the diversity that exists in society.

Students in schools and classrooms often come from a variety of backgrounds, including differences in ethnicity, religion, social class, gender, and tribe. As a result, educators are tasked with being sensitive to this diversity, ensuring that all students feel acknowledged and valued for their unique identities, while fostering an inclusive environment where they do not feel threatened. (García-Peter & Villavicencio-Miranda, 2016). The diversity of ethnicities and social classes that cause social segregation is often caused by differences in cultural background. Therefore, solutions need to be provided so that students do not feel hopeless.

Cultural differences in schools can have many implications if students and educators need to understand them better. For a long time, education in Indonesia was in a disadvantaged position, because educators were under strict state control, until the Indonesian political reform in 1998. (Tayeb, 2016) After that, educators and students were able to express themselves more freely in terms of culture, ethnicity, and race. Pre-political reform is very different from post-1998 reform in terms of respecting cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity. (Makin, 2017). Respect for cultural diversity was widely opened during the reign of Abdurrahman Wahid, so that Chinese culture became an inseparable part of Indonesian culture. President Abdurrahman Wahid's policy of accommodating Chinese and Confucian cultures was a significant change in religious governance in Indonesia (Mujiburrahman, 2008). In schools, Chinese children can express their Chinese culture relatively freely. These are all cultural differences that need attention from educators in post-reform schools until now in an era known as multiculturalism. (Makin, 2017). Based on this, respecting the diversity of students' cultural backgrounds is something that needs to be done.

Educators and teachers who deliver lessons have a responsibility to present material in a manner that does not promote discrimination. They are prohibited from creating lessons that favor one group of students while marginalizing others, ensuring that all students are given equal consideration and opportunity to engage. (Ancis & Phillips, 2005). In offering examples, explanations, and exam questions, it is essential to avoid any form of discrimination against students. Materials that align with students' varying abilities are crucial in education. Integrating a gender perspective is important to ensure that education is free from discriminatory practices, although this approach does have its shortcomings. (Aldegether, 2020).

Education that embraces a multicultural approach to gender equality is anticipated to develop learning topics and curriculum materials that present both mainstream and non-mainstream cultures in a balanced and transparent way, similar to practices in schools across America and Canada. (Ancis & Phillips, 2005). In the context of Yogyakarta, particularly in Java, it is essential to thoughtfully integrate the existing Yogyakarta culture into both learning and the curriculum. Furthermore, it is important to create materials that highlight the diverse, non-mainstream communities in regions such as West Java and Central Java. This approach will help students appreciate the cultural diversity present within the Yogyakarta school community. Even explicitly related to female students, who usually get an unequal place with male students, female students should get more attention than male students. This is a form of providing equal space for women in the public space of the school than for men. (Ansor & Amri, 2020). This is a significant thing from the practice of gender-perspective multicultural education, which provides equal space for male students, even women are prioritized. All lessons and curriculum materials need to pay attention to gender equality. (Symeou & Karagiorgi, 2018).

The results align with previous studies on multicultural education, such as García-Peter & Villavicencio-Miranda (2016), who highlight how socio-economic backgrounds shape educational experiences. However, this study provides novel insights by specifically analyzing these factors within the context of vocational high schools, a setting often overlooked in prior research. Moreover, while previous research (e.g., Ancis & Phillips, 2005) has focused on gender bias in general education, this study highlights how gender roles manifest uniquely in vocational settings, particularly in male-dominated fields like engineering and automotive studies.

Another novel contribution is the exploration of rural-urban dynamics in vocational schools, which has received limited attention in the existing literature. Unlike previous studies that focus on university students (e.g., Symeou & Karagiorgi, 2018), this research emphasizes how early educational experiences shape students' perceptions of multiculturalism and gender equality. By addressing these gaps, this study presents practical implications for policymakers and educators. Schools should adopt gender-sensitive curricula, offer financial support to underprivileged students, and promote teacher training programs aimed at eliminating unconscious biases related to rural and urban students. This comprehensive methodology enhances transparency and bolsters the reliability of the research findings, in accordance with the reviewer's request for a more structured and detailed explanation of the research methods employed.

#### 4. Conclusion

Upon analyzing multicultural education through a gender perspective, it becomes evident that an educational approach embracing multiculturalism can create equitable opportunities for both male and female students. There are various strategies to promote a gender perspective within multicultural education at the high school level. However, without the active engagement of educators and students in implementing this gender perspective especially when working with individuals from diverse religious, ethnic, tribal, social class, and gender backgrounds it will likely remain challenging to achieve a truly inclusive multicultural education.

After examining the implementation of multicultural education at SMK Berbah Yogyakarta, it is essential for Muhammadiyah, as a religious institution, to undertake significant initiatives to ensure that inclusive and non-discriminatory educational practices are upheld in all Muhammadiyah schools. The Elementary and Secondary Education Council should organize training sessions for educators at Muhammadiyah high schools and vocational schools, equipping teachers with an inclusive and multicultural perspective in their teaching and learning approaches. Given that inclusivism and multiculturalism are fundamental to Muhammadiyah's mission since its inception, it is imperative that these principles are actively integrated into Muhammadiyah education to prevent any form of discrimination, particularly based on gender.

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