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Multicultural children's literature in Indonesia, children's responses, and teachers' perspectives

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of PhD in Education

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November 2022

Abstract

Amid global challenges on multicultural issues, multicultural children's literature that aims to reduce prejudice and promote diversity is hailed as "one of the most hopeful developments in children's literature" (Bishop, 2007, p. xiv). The same could be observed in Indonesia, a multicultural country that has witnessed growing ethno-religious conflicts after a regime change at the turn of the millennium. Since then, the increasing publication of multicultural books for children suggests a hopeful intervention to remedy the tensions between cultural groups.

As part of the multicultural education movement, multicultural children's literature has more of a pedagogical than a literary focus (Cai, 2002). Gopalakhrisnan (2011) points out that the goal of multicultural literature is to give voice to and empower the marginalised. Scholars (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Iwai, 2013) also maintains that multicultural texts hold vast potential to encourage development of positive perspectives about different cultures.

However, empirical research with children using multicultural literature indicates complicated results. Some studies suggest potential to certain extent, such as encouraging deeper understandings on cultural identities (Martens et al., 2015) and gaining perspective-taking skills (Thein et al., 2007). Meanwhile, some other studies suggest readers' resistance to perspective change and challenges to developing critical thinking might take place when presented with multicultural texts (Dressel, 2005; Hayik, 2015).

Underpinned by the theoretical framework of multicultural education, the study explores children's responses to multicultural children's literature and the teachers' perspectives in Indonesia, in which a contextualised research of reader response has been largely understudied. The approach used was literature circles with two groups of children in different schools, as well as focus group discussions with the teachers. To analyse the level of engagement of readers to multicultural texts from the data, James Banks's (2010) approaches to multicultural content integration was adapted.

The findings unpack the complex nature of children's responses to multicultural texts and highlight the significance of responses in engagement with literature. Key themes that emerged from the students' responses suggest the need for children to navigate the different cultures they encounter in the texts and to draw from their identities and social contexts as they construct meaning. The study advocates that children's curiosity for learning can become potential foundations for developing understanding towards a diversity of cultures. By examining the teachers' perspectives, the study makes a case for teachers to reflect on their understandings of diversity as they approach the use of multicultural literature for their classrooms. It also opens up avenues for pedagogical implications in implementing multicultural literature whilst addressing the challenges.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Table of Contents	4
List of Tables	9
List of Figures	10
Acknowledgement	11
Dedication	13
Author’s Declaration	14
Chapter One: Introduction	15
1. 1 Background and Motivation	15
1. 2 Indonesia: Context and Emerging Issues	17
1. 2. 1 “Unity in Diversity”	17
1. 2. 2 Religious Multiculturalism	22
1. 2. 3 Education System	23
1. 2. 4 Multicultural Children’s Literature	27
1. 3 Research Objectives	29
1. 4 Positionality	30
1. 5 Thesis Structure	31
Chapter Two: Literature Review	33
2. 1 Multiculturalism	33
2. 1. 1 Theoretical Conceptualizations	33
2. 1. 2 Critiques and Justifications	35
2. 1. 3 Multiculturalism in Indonesia	38
2. 2 Term Definitions	40
2. 2. 1 Culture	40
2. 2. 2 Diversity	41

2. 2. 3 Pluralism	41
2. 2. 4 Multiculturalism	42
2. 3 Children and Diversity	43
2. 3. 1 How Children Learn about Diversity	43
2. 3. 2 Multicultural Education	48
2. 3. 2. 1 Development and Theorizations	48
2. 3. 2. 2 Impacts and Challenges	52
2. 3. 2. 3 Multicultural Education in Global Context	55
2. 3. 2. 4 Multicultural Education in Indonesia	56
2. 4 The Texts	61
2. 4. 1 Defining Multicultural Children’s Literature	61
2. 4. 2 Key Issues	65
2. 4. 2. 1 Cultural Authenticity and Stereotypes	65
2. 4. 2. 2 Ideology and Didacticism	69
2. 5 The Readers	71
2. 5. 1 Readers and Multicultural Texts	71
2. 5. 2 Reader Response to Multicultural Children’s Literature	72
2. 5. 2. 1 Potential	73
2. 5. 2. 2 Discussion as Safe Space	77
2. 5. 2. 3 Resistance	79
2. 5. 2. 4 Perspective Change	81
2. 6 The Teachers	83
2. 6. 1 Teachers’ Roles in Multicultural Education	83
2. 6. 2 Teachers and Multicultural Children’s Literature	85
2. 7 Indonesian Context	87
2. 8 Chapter Summary	89
Chapter Three: Multicultural Text Set	90
3. 1 Text Selection	90
3. 1. 1 Literary Considerations	90
3. 1. 2 Practical Considerations	92
3. 2 Selected Multicultural Children’s Books	93
3. 2. 1 <i>Berani Menjadi Joki</i>	93

3. 2. 2 <i>Kisah dari Banggai</i>	95
3. 2. 3 <i>Kisah dari Sumba</i>	97
3. 2. 4 <i>Cap Go Meh</i>	98
3. 2. 5 <i>Joko dan Jenar Jalan-Jalan</i>	99
3. 3 Chapter Summary	100
Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology	102
4. 1 Conceptual Framework	102
4. 2 Research Design	103
4. 3 Participants	106
4. 3. 1 The Students	108
4. 3. 2 The Teachers	110
4. 4 Data Collection	112
4. 4. 1 Literature Circles	112
4. 4. 2 Creative Responses	115
4. 4. 2. 1 Annotations	116
4. 4. 2. 2 Drawing	117
4. 4. 2. 3 Writing	117
4. 4. 2. 4 Artefacts	118
4. 4. 3 Focus Group Discussions	120
4. 4. 4 Fieldwork Reflection	121
4. 5 Data Analysis	124
4. 5. 1 Analytical Framework 1: Approaches to Multicultural Content Integration	128
4. 5. 2 Analytical Framework 2: Culturally Situated Reader Response	132
4. 5. 3 Analytical Framework 3: Dimensions of Multicultural Education	133
4. 6 Chapter Summary	135
Chapter Five: Findings and Discussions: Teachers' Perspectives	137
5. 1 Perspectives on Diversity	138

5. 1. 1 Personal Background	138
5. 1. 2 Conceptualisation of Tolerance	141
5. 1. 3 School Culture	143
5. 2 Perspectives on Multicultural Literature	145
5. 2. 1 Awareness	145
5. 2. 2 Pedagogical Potential	147
5. 2. 3 Challenges	150
5. 3 Teachers' Perspectives & Analytical Framework 3	152
5. 4 Chapter Summary	155
Chapter Six: Findings and Discussions: Students' Responses	156
6. 1 Navigating Difference	157
6. 1. 1 Food as an Important Interest	157
6. 1. 2 Disorientation	159
6. 1. 3 Curiosity and Learning	164
6. 2 Navigating Difference & Analytical Framework 1	173
6. 3 Multi-layered Identity	176
6. 3. 1 Importance of Religion	176
6. 3. 2 Awareness of Multiculturalism	181
6. 3. 3 Pride of Chinese Indonesians	185
6. 4 Multi-layered Identity & Analytical Framework 2	186
6. 5 Chapter Summary	189
Chapter Seven: Conclusion	190
7. 1 The Message	191
7. 2 The Socializer	191
7. 3 The Child	193
7. 4 The Message, the Socializer, and the Child	196
7. 5 Pedagogical Reflection	197
7. 6 Final Thought and Recommendation	199
List of References	201

Appendices	226
Appendix 1: Ethical approval from University of Glasgow	226
Appendix 2: Plain Language Statement for students	227
Appendix 3: Consent Form for students	230
Appendix 4: Plain Language Statement for parents	231
Appendix 5: Consent Form for parents	234
Appendix 6: Plain Language Statement for teachers	235
Appendix 7: Consent Form for teachers	238
Appendix 8: List of books and response activities with students	239
Appendix 9: Focus Group Discussion material with teachers	240

List of Tables

Table 2. 1 Citizenship typology as proposed by James Banks (2017)	51
Table 4. 1 List of student participants	110
Table 4. 2 List of teacher participants.....	111
Table 4. 3 Reader responses to multicultural children’s books	131
Table 4. 4 Four cultural positions in culturally situated reader response	132
Table 5. 1 Key themes from teachers’ discussions	138
Table 5. 2 Teachers’ perspectives through Banks’s multicultural dimensions	153
Table 6. 1 Key themes from students’ responses	157
Table 6. 2 Navigating difference responses through Banks’s multicultural content integration	173
Table 6. 3 Multi-layered identity responses through Brooks & Browne’s culturally situated response	186

List of Figures

Figure 3. 1 <i>Front cover of Berani Menjadi Joki</i>	93
Figure 3. 2 <i>Front cover of Kisah dari Banggai</i>	95
Figure 3. 3 <i>Front cover of Kisah dari Sumba</i>	97
Figure 3. 4 <i>Front cover of Cap Go Meh</i>	98
Figure 3. 5 <i>Front cover of Joko dan Jenar Jalan-Jalan</i>	99
Figure 4. 1 Levels of students' participation in research	105
Figure 4. 2 Diagram of data analysis process	127
Figure 4. 3 Approaches to multicultural content integration	128
Figure 4. 4 Levels of multiculturalism and multicultural children's literature	130
Figure 4. 5 Dimensions of multicultural education	134
Figure 5. 1 Diagram of data analysis (teachers' perspectives)	137
Figure 6. 1 Diagram of data analysis (students' responses)	156
Figure 6. 2 Dahlia's post-it in <i>Pertunjukan Wayang Kulit</i>	158
Figure 6. 3 Damar's post-it in <i>Cap Go Meh</i>	159
Figure 6. 4 Jalak's annotation of a page from <i>Kisah dari Sumba</i>	164
Figure 6. 5 Gelatik's annotation of a page from <i>Kisah dari Sumba</i>	165
Figure 6. 6 Dahlia's annotation of a page from <i>Kisah dari Banggai</i>	166
Figure 6. 7 Multicultural artefacts brought by students in Sekolah Kerinci	179
Figure 6. 8 Elang's annotation of a page from <i>Kisah dari Sumba</i>	181

Acknowledgement

I can now attest to the statement that the journey of a PhD research is long and arduous, particularly with a global pandemic halfway through. Thankfully, I am blessed with an extensive network of supports that ensures this highly anxious person makes it to the end.

First and foremost, my grateful thanks to my supervisors, Prof Evelyn Arizpe and Dr Jennifer Farrar. They have become not only my scholarly inspiration in children's literature research, but also a source of strength whenever my self-doubt crept in. They maintained a difficult balance of pushing me to produce good quality research and to enjoy the experience, and their feedback throughout the writing of this thesis was beyond precious. My thanks to Prof Bob Davis as well for his valuable input on tolerance and multiculturalism.

Next, I would like to appreciate the children who have become important part of this research. My heartfelt thanks to them, the head teachers, the teachers, and the school staff who have kindly welcomed my project. The fieldwork was the best part of this journey! I am also very grateful to the Children's Literature and Literacies teaching team: Dr Julie McAdam, Dr Maureen Farrell, Dr Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, and Dr Elizabeth Nelson. Thank you for your supports throughout my PhD and for allowing me to be your teaching assistant. I learned a lot from all of you, in and out of the classrooms.

My thanks as well to the wonderful friends who have coloured my life in Glasgow: the CLL gals – Libby, Susanne, Dilla, Rabaha, Soumi, Sissil, and Yaxi; my Scottish family – my 'mammy' Sylvia and my big sister Lynn; the Sunday School team – David, Morag, Jan, Fran, and Heather; my fellow PhDs in room 683 who started the journey together – Miao and Nihaya; the hungry gals – Suzannah and Pamela; my fellow Indonesians – Arief, Bella, and Finda; the God's girls group – Abi, Becca, Nic, and Seonaid; and my proofreader Dave Gerow.

I would also like to thank the children's literature scholars I have had the privilege of meeting: Vanessa Joosen, who granted me the scholarship to attend the Children's Literature Summer School at University of Antwerp, where I met Michelle H. Martin, who has kindly supported my research and introduced me to Nadia Mansour, a fellow multicultural

children's literature researcher (it's a scholarly domino effect!), and Chrysogonus Siddha Malilang, a fellow Indonesian whom I met in the IRSCL Conference and has become a lovely friend.

A special acknowledgement to LPDP, the Ministry of Finance, and the Indonesian government that have put their faith in my decision to study children's literature and funded both my MEd and PhD in Glasgow.

Last but certainly not least, I owe the completion of my PhD to my parents and my sister: Melinda, Anton, and Olivia, whose consistent love and prayers, albeit from 7,380 miles away, have sustained me throughout my research journey.

Dedication

To my parents:

for making books a necessity in my childhood,

for trusting me to choose my own journey.

Author's Declaration

“I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.”

Printed Name: Herdiana

Signature:

Chapter One:

Introduction

1. 1 Background and Motivation

Growing up as an ethnic and religious minority in Indonesia has brought me through a dynamic journey of learning during which I have experienced issues of diversity on both the personal and social levels. Born and raised in Jakarta, the capital city to which people from across the archipelago migrate in search of a better life, there was vast opportunity to learn about diversity. However, I lived in a bubble of Catholic schools throughout my primary and secondary education, with a homogenous circle of friends who mostly shared my ethnicity and religion. The bubble burst when I went to the state university, Universitas Indonesia, to study English Literature. My small cohort of 20 young people came from different cultural groups and as we went through four years of undergraduate study, I found that I was not the only one experiencing “diversity shock”. Many of my classmates were devout Muslims who graduated from *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and had never interacted with a Christian who also happened to have Chinese lineage.

An authoritarian regime meant that multiculturalism was not something I saw in the media or heard openly discussed in society. The acronym SARA (*Suku* or ethnicity, *Agama* or religion, *Ras* or race, *Antar-golongan* or social class) was well-known among Indonesians at the time as an official regulation that discouraged public discussions of diversity for fear of segregation. Although the rule was particularly intended for Chinese Indonesians in order to forcibly assimilate them with “native” Indonesia, it affected the wider discourse around diversity, with both state and private media producing content that focused on unity over diversity. Ethnic and religious group representations were heavily moderated and open discussions about diversity were discouraged.

Since the authoritarian regime collapsed in 1998, the democratisation process in Indonesia has been marred by growing identity politics and ethno-religious conflicts (Sebastian & Arifianto, 2020). A turn towards conservative and fundamental Islam has also emerged,

provoking persecution against minorities, even within Islam itself, as the Ahmadis and Shias are subject to discrimination. I have experienced name-calling and microaggression in public places for looking visibly different, and this has increased my awareness of the complex relations between the majority and minorities. Issues of cultural differences and recognition of minority groups constantly occupied my mind as I witnessed the awkward management of the country's "superdiversity" (Goebel, 2017) by the continuously changing government and its policies regarding multiculturalism.

I first came across the term *multicultural children's literature* in 2014. I had just set up a blog for reviewing Indonesian children's books and was particularly fascinated by the increasing representation of cultural diversity in contemporary children's books in Indonesia. As I was looking for readings about this issue, I found Mingshui Cai's monograph, *Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults* (2002), and learned about the issues and debates regarding diversity and children's books. When an opportunity to attend the regional International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Congress came up in May 2015, I decided to submit an abstract on contemporary multicultural children's books from Indonesia. My presentation at the IBBY Congress, held in the neighbouring country of Malaysia, marked my first official foray into children's literature research.

In the same year, I got a scholarship from the Indonesia government to do an MEd in Children's Literature and Literacies at the University of Glasgow. My interest in multicultural children's literature increased, particularly during the Texts for Diversity class, in which we explored not only a variety of culturally diverse children's texts, but also theoretical frameworks for examining them. It was in Dr Julie McAdam's class that I encountered James Banks and multicultural education, and I remember feeling very inspired by Banks's approaches of multicultural content integration as I reflected on the ways the Indonesian government mediated students' learning of cultural diversity. Meanwhile, in Professor Evelyn Arizpe's class, *Critical Enquiry to Children's Literature*, I learned about reader response theory and the importance of children's voices in children's literature research. This was ground-breaking to me, as to my knowledge children were very rarely included in social research in Indonesia. I could see the critical value of children's responses because my experience as an oral storyteller back home had revealed that children's natural responses as they listened to stories were beyond fascinating. Thinking about this as I read

further about reader response research motivated me to involve children in studying multicultural children's books.

1. 2 Indonesia: Context and Emerging Issues

1. 2. 1 “Unity in Diversity”

When talking about Indonesia one must inevitably acknowledge its extensive heterogeneity: the world's largest archipelagic state comprises 17,000 islands, 700 regional languages, 300 ethnicities, and hundreds of local beliefs alongside the state-acknowledged religions, i.e., Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Scholars interested in the democratic nation have marvelled at its vast complexity and written of its “impossible diversity” (Vatikiotis, 1993) and “the improbability of Indonesia” (Cribb, 1999).

Born from the ancient kingdoms of the Hindu-Buddhist Srivijaya and Majapahit, for hundreds of years the country had been colonised by various rulers (the Portuguese, the British, the Dutch, and the Japanese) attracted by its rich natural resources and strategic maritime location. For hundreds of years, battles erupted across the archipelago as separate movements to liberate the region from foreign controllers with no success until the founding fathers recognised the strategic significance of joining forces.

Indonesia's diversity has been recognised as a source of power as well as destruction. The 300-year colonisation by the Netherlands was based on a strategy known as *divide et impera*, or divide and conquer, aimed at preventing the indigenous people from uniting against the Dutch. In 1928, 17 years before independence, young people from various ethnic groups all over the archipelago conferred and created the youth pledge that proclaimed the Indonesians' vow of one land, one nation and one language. The pledge proved to be critical in fostering a national consciousness that propelled the Indonesian National Awakening and eventually culminated in the country's independence in 1945 (Vickers, 2005).

The national motto adopted immediately after independence is “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika”, Sanskrit for “unity in diversity”. Like the youth pledge, the slogan was chosen in full awareness that the archipelago's vast diversity would always pose the potential risk of

segregation. As Darmaputera (1988) points out, Indonesia's diversity is far more distinct than its uniting aspects, and thus the "potential hazard of disintegrations is indeed very real" (p. 19). Various precepts have been implemented to overcome this, from the popular adage memorised by primary students, "*bersatu kita teguh, bercerai kita runtuh*" ("united we stand, divided we fall"), to *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), a celebrated national culture focusing on collective and communitarian values (Bowen, 1986).

For many years, Indonesia has been proud of being a tolerant society (Qurtuby, 2012). Benedict Anderson (1996) observed that tolerance has long been a celebrated virtue in the Javanese culture – the largest ethnic group in the country. Rooted in the *wayang* mythology, tolerance is practised by living with people with different religions. Other regions also hold their own wisdom of tolerance: Maluku has *pela gandong*, defined as "an alliance between the villages whose inhabitants generally embrace different religions" (Titahelu et al., 2015, p. 418), while Alor practises *bela baja*, a "brotherhood" between inland and coastal people (Gomang, 2006).

On a national level, Indonesia boasts an indigenous principle dubbed "the ideology of tolerance" (Ramage, 1995): "Pancasila". The brainchild of Soekarno, one of the principal founding fathers who became the nation's first president, *Pancasila* is a Sanskrit word for the "five principles" that provide the basic tenets for Indonesian citizens. Stated in the preamble to the Constitution of 1945, the principles are, in order of importance: belief in one God, a just and civilized humanitarianism, national unity, Indonesian democracy through consultation and consensus, and social justice.

Darmaputera (1988) argues that Pancasila has been effective as the national ideology despite several constitutional alterations and coup attempts: "History has proven again and again, that Pancasila is the only viable alternative if Indonesia is to maintain its unity and diversity. The other alternatives would be Islam or secular ideologies" (p. 179). Since Pancasila is not based on one dominant religion or cultural principle, Jones (2005) maintains that it remains the most appropriate tool for managing the co-existence of the vastly pluralistic Indonesian citizens. Implicit in Pancasila's first principle (belief in one God) is the assertion that Indonesia is a religious country but not an Islamic state, despite the fact that majority of the population is Muslim and demands for an Islamic state has taken place since independence. This is what makes Indonesia unique compared to other Muslim countries: it does not base its

constitution on Islam nor employ *Shari'a* law (apart from one province, Aceh, nicknamed “The Terrace of Mecca”).

Nevertheless, scholars have argued that the noble principles of Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (unity in diversity) have not been meaningfully translated into policies or deeply implemented in society (Jones, 2005; Seo, 2015; Hoon, 2017). This has resulted in religious and ethnic conflicts in various regions that challenge the nation’s agenda of being a tolerant community (Afrianty, 2012; Nurrohman, 2014). Various institutions have reported that Indonesia has become more intolerant (Bagir & Ahnaf, 2022; Convey Indonesia, 2018; PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2018), and The National Commission on Human Rights reports an increase in the number of cases of religious conflicts (Hamayotsu, 2017). Such civil frictions particularly started occurring after the New Order, the three decades of authoritarian rule of the military general Suharto, Indonesia’s second president after Sukarno, which lasted from 1966 to 1998. The New Order was known for not only vast economic growth, but also the stifling of freedom, including the restriction of expressions of diversity in the name of harmony under the SARA regulation (Parker, 2010). The opportunity to acknowledge different social, cultural, and religious groups in Indonesia has been undermined in order to enforce unity (Hoon, 2013).

One of the cultural groups that were marginalised under Suharto’s regime was Chinese Indonesians. Under the 14/1967 law, they were prohibited to express their culture, language, and religion in public. As Arifin et al. (2017) affirms, “being and identified as ‘Chinese’ was not socially and politically correct.” (p. 311) Abdurrahman Wahid, the first democratically elected Indonesian president after the fall of Suharto, annulled the 14/1967 law with a presidential decree in 2000. Since then, Chinese Indonesians have been able to publicly observe their religion, language, and culture.

The end of the authoritarian era as Suharto was forced to step down in 1998 has brought Indonesia to the state of increasing extremism and conflicts. This is despite the fact that the elected leaders after Suharto have attempted to implement various policies to manage intergroup relations in Indonesia. Abdurrahman Wahid, for example, was well-known as an advocate of pluralism who welcomed the expressions of minority religions and cultures previously forbidden under the authoritarian regime. The increasing violation of religious freedom is seen as an outcome of the New Order’s failure to recognise the needs for individual rights (Iskandar, 2016). Meanwhile, Raihani (2017) noted that the conservative

turn of Islam in the post-Suharto era has several causes, such as the increasing number of Indonesian scholars returning from the Middle East and the weakening of the moderate organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the two largest Islamic groups in Indonesia. The decentralisation of power that took place after the fall of Suharto caused regional policy-makers to favour Islamic laws without taking into account minority groups, such as Christians and Buddhists. According to Parker et al. (2014), “While Indonesia post-1998 is a much more open and democratic society [...] there are still several factors hindering open and tolerant multiculturalism” (p. 467). These factors include rising religious fundamentalism and intolerance towards various minority groups, either based on religion, ethnicity, or sexuality. Parker et al. (2014) argue that there is an “absent state” when it comes to the protection of minorities in Indonesia.

Laksana and Wood (2018) assert that the young Indonesian generation has been affected by the increasing cases of religious intolerance. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission reports multiplying cases of prejudiced behaviour among children, who show hostility towards their peers from different religions (Wiwoho, 2017), while educators report facing an enormous challenge in fostering tolerance among their youth (Aritonang, 2017). Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Perdamaian (The Institute of Peace and Islamic Studies) issued an alarming report in which a survey of 611,678 high school students in Jakarta revealed that almost 50% of the students expressed their willingness to participate in religious violence (BBC, 2011). Another study conducted by Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat Universitas Islam Negeri (Centre for the Study of Islam and Society) involving 1,522 students from 34 provinces found that nearly 60% of the students held intolerant views regarding relations between different religions, particularly Muslims and non-Muslims (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2018). Convey Indonesia (2018) identifies two key contributing factors to students’ intolerant views. The first is the textbooks used in the Islamic Religious Education class, which they argue have become “the entry gate of radical ideologies” (p. 2) in schools. Analysis of the textbooks reveals that many of them embolden students to be intolerant towards people with different beliefs. This is exacerbated by the second factor identified by Convey Indonesia, which is teachers who seem to endorse the textbooks instead of countering the intolerant views.

The discourse of multiculturalism began to emerge in Indonesia after the downfall of the authoritarian New Order regime in 1998. Lan (2011) argues that multiculturalism was

considered as a more favourable approach compared to the New Order's assimilation policy. However, although there have been continuous discussions regarding the potential benefits of multiculturalism in academic conferences and the media, it has never been officially adopted as a policy in Indonesia (Wildan, 2020), and Hoon (2017) points out that "there is ostensibly a lack of multiculturalism in practice in Indonesia, especially in public policy, civic consciousness and minority rights." (p. 478)

One possible reason for the lack of official adoption of multiculturalism as a policy is that it appears within scholarly discourse rather than public discourse, as it is considered a foreign concept imported from the West (Parker, 2017). Additionally, there is a belief that the national ideology of Pancasila and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* should suffice for managing diversity in Indonesia, rather than using Western-originated multiculturalism (Hoon, 2017). Religious groups in Indonesia are also hesitant to adopt multiculturalism due to a lack of understanding of what it entails (Raihani, 2012). In his ethnographic study in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), Raihani finds that instead of multiculturalism, his participants preferred local terms, such as *kebhinnekaan* (diversity) and *keragaman* (heterogeneity). Additionally, the term multiculturalism "conjures up old fears of federalism, relativism, and disunity" (Hoon, 2017, p. 485), which has further restrained the development of the concept.

However, more explicit attempts at adopting the principles of multiculturalism have taken place in the field of education (Jones, 2017). Since the fall of the New Order, scholars from across the country have been advocating for the implementation of multicultural education for tackling religious intolerance and extremism among young people (c.f. Baidhawry 2007; Fatoni et al. 2021; Fauzan et al. 2021; Firdaus & Rohmadi 2021; Harjatanaya & Hoon 2018; Nakaya, 2018; Syahrul 2021). The Indonesian government has demonstrated the need to promote multiculturalism to the young generation through the 2013 Curriculum, in which the word multiculturalism is mentioned in the learning objectives of the subject of Citizenship. The Education Law of 2003 also "provides sufficient basis for developing multicultural education" (Raihani, 2017, p. 6) as it becomes the first regulation after the New Order that shows a strong indication on the significance of education that nurtures tolerance and diversity.

1. 2. 2 Religious Multiculturalism

Originating in the Western school of thought, the term *multiculturalism* has been “internationalised” and has driven a global trend in recognition for cultural diversity and minorities (Kymlicka & He, 2005). However, as “a fundamentally *liberal* discourse” (Kymlicka, 2005, p. 29), implementing the Western model of multiculturalism in the Asian context comes with certain challenges, particularly because most Asian countries have different patterns and trajectories regarding diversity compared to their Western counterparts. The Western model of multiculturalism has several factors that are not as relevant in the Asian context, such as minority nationalisms, indigenous peoples, and immigrant groups.

Rather than multiculturalism, tolerance is a more familiar and ubiquitous concept in Indonesia. It is perceived as having the more positive connotation of respecting differences, as opposed to the Western understanding of the term, which seems to be more conflictual. These contrasting ideas might be due to different conceptions of tolerance and the various justifications made for it. Opponents of tolerance consider it a passive action. Hoon (2017) views tolerance as a mere virtue that does not involve active understanding of differences: “The consequence of mere tolerance is ‘ignorance of one another’, ‘stereotype’, ‘fears’, and ‘half-truths’ about the other” (p. 481). In contrast, proponents of tolerance (Cohen, 2014; Forst, 2013) argue that tolerance is more than just “putting up with” and actually contains an element of “active recognition”. Cohen (2014) defines tolerance as intentionally refraining from interference with something that we disapprove of. Indeed, one important characteristic of “tolerance” shared by the advocates is the objection component: the tolerator has to see the tolerated's beliefs or practices as wrong or bad. (Cohen, 2014; Forst, 2013, 2016; McKinnon, 2008)

Multiculturalism as a discourse entered Indonesia after the authoritarian regime of the New Order had ended in 1998. It is considered to offer the potential for diversity management in Indonesia, along with the indigenous concepts of tolerance embedded in Pancasila and some local principles. However, Raihani points out (2012) that “discussions of multiculturalism in the Indonesian context cannot be separated from the role of religion” (p. 602). He further argues that discussions of multiculturalism and multicultural education in Indonesia cannot leave out issues of religion and religious diversity (Raihani, 2017). This is particularly caused by the context of religion as a critical aspect of diversity in Indonesia, more than ethnicity

and language (Bagir & Cholil, 2008; Hoon, 2017). Hefner (1999) asserts that religion in Indonesia is “not only a matter of personal conviction or choice. It is also a public, even governmental, affair” (p. 206). This is visible in several facts, such as that Indonesian citizens have to believe in one religion and state it on their identity cards; that all six state-acknowledged religions’ holidays are national holidays; and that religious observances and practices are highly visible in society. Menchik (2014) argues that “Indonesia contains a form of nationalism that is neither Islamic nor secular, but rather exclusively and assertively religious” (p. 599). It is this godly nationalism that Menchik suggests might help explain the “intolerance toward heterodoxy” that seems to be a common phenomenon in Indonesia, revealing that “Indonesia’s successful transition to democracy has not been accompanied by an increase in individual religious freedom” (p. 619).

To address this challenge, Hoon (2017) suggests the term *religious multiculturalism* to represent the shape of Indonesia’s particular form of multiculturalism. He argues that the term *multiculturalism* on its own poses a challenge for the Indonesian context that prioritises religion over other social dimensions. With *religious multiculturalism*, the potential of multiculturalism, which mainly deals with culture, can be adopted while still accounting for the importance of religion in the Indonesian context. Hoon credits the origin of the term to a paper presented by Syuan-Yuan Chiou at the EUROSEAS Conference in 2007 and posits that it offers a suitable model for Indonesia as it attempts to promote “the idea of an active state that protects religious minorities and incorporates the inclusive Pancasila national ideology in its framework” (Hoon, 2017, p. 490). As someone who grew up in Indonesia, experienced the prominence of religion, and is interested in the principles of multicultural education, my thinking was informed by Hoon’s proposition of religious multiculturalism as I embarked on this research project.

1. 2. 3 Education System

Scholars have argued that education offers a powerful remedy for the increasing cases of intolerance and tensions among cultural groups in Indonesia (Parker, 2014; Pohl, 2011). The Indonesian education system is currently the third-largest in Asia and the fourth-largest globally, with one of the most diverse student populations in the world, either from the standpoint of ethnicity, language, culture, or religion (Kuipers & Yulaelawati, 2009). More

than 60 million of the total population of 270 million in Indonesia are students or school-aged.

Under the authoritarian regime of the New Order (1966-1998), the goal of education was to create students who would “conform to the political will of the state, us[ing] a highly centralised, teacher-and-textbook-focused system” (Hoon, 2013, p. 491). In keeping with the political ideology of unity over diversity, lessons on the country’s vast range of cultural groups were reduced to rote learning of the 27 provinces at the time through their traditional food, clothes, dances, and houses. These tangible cultural aspects are dubbed by Begler (1998) as the “Five Fs” to refer to presentations of cultural diversity that focus on the surface elements of food, fashion, fiestas, folklore, and famous people. Textbooks and classroom posters in Indonesia during the New Order, including the ones I encountered during my own school years, contained these “travelogue” type of cultural introductions, which students were expected to memorise for oral and written examinations. There was no room for discussions beyond the “touristic view” of the various cultures or learning about the cultural groups’ experiences or struggles to gain a more in-depth understanding of culture and diversity. I acknowledge that this approach is not unique to Indonesia and occurs in the education systems of other countries when it comes to teaching about different cultures.

Consequently, since the authoritarian regime of the New Order collapsed in 1998, the Indonesian education system has grappled with the issues of diversity learning. Despite the significant growth in education during the New Order (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006), the report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has called for more actions to bridge disparities and further social justice, which is considered “important to sustaining social cohesion in such a plural society” (2015, p. 24). As Parker (2018) states, since the downfall of the authoritarian regime, which ushered in the era of democracy in Indonesia, there has been a necessity for significant transformations in the education system. These changes have included the decentralisation of the education policies and the attempts to acknowledge Indonesia’s diversity in the curriculum.

Multicultural education offers much promise for pluralistic societies (Banks, 2010), which is why scholars have argued that it might be the most appropriate type of education for Indonesia in the democratic era (Hoon, 2013; Raihani, 2017; Harjatanaya & Hoon, 2018). Raihani (2017) maintains that there is an “urgency” to apply multicultural education in Indonesia as the conservative turn of Islam grows stronger and impacts on young people’s

intolerant tendencies. Several post-authoritarian educational policies have indicated the government's inclination towards the values of multicultural education. The introduction of the National Education Act 2003 brought a remarkable change in Indonesian education, as it explicitly states the importance of acknowledging the country's diversity in the education system and that education should be carried in democratic, non-discriminative ways, as well as paying attention to human rights, religious values, cultural values, and the nation's diversity (Raihani, 2017). The Ministry of National Education's Decree No. 23 (2006) suggests the importance of multicultural education in the standardisation of graduates' competencies, as can be seen in the list of competencies for all levels, which contains at least one multicultural competency, which is "to respect the diversity of religion, culture, ethnicity, race, and social and economic groups/classes". This is further supported in the publication of the Curriculum Centre (2007) which offers guidelines on implementing multicultural education in secondary schools. Perhaps the most significant policy regarding diversity since Indonesia's democratisation is the 2013 Curriculum, which represents a development on the one from 2006. The main objectives of education in the 2013 Curriculum are to educate students to be pious and faithful to God, as well as tolerant and democratic (Ministry of National Education, 2013).

Despite a few policies that suggest endorsement of its principles, multicultural education has never been explicitly conceptualised in the Indonesian education system. There have been no clear guidelines on the implementation of multicultural education in schools. Raihani (2011) maintains that the government has not developed a clear vision for multicultural education which can tie other components of schools cohesively to educating pupils about multiculturalism. Hoon (2013) implies the absence of dedicated teachers in teaching multicultural values in students. Other studies (Listia et al., 2007; Lie, 2000) concerned with the school curriculum have found that its contents do not provide enough room for teaching multicultural concepts and values. In his examination of the 2013 Curriculum, Parker (2018) points out the discrepancy between two key subjects in the national curriculum regarding education for tolerance. While Citizenship Education endorses tolerance as a desirable competence for Indonesian citizens, Religious Education remains focused on being pious towards one's confessed religion rather than learning about other religions and developing interreligious tolerance.

As Hoon's argument for *religious multiculturalism* in the previous section demonstrated, multicultural education in Indonesia has to account for religion, which has not been the primary focus of multicultural education in Western countries. Banks (2013) asserts that religion is not a major component of multicultural education in the US, prompting a growing call for the inclusion of religion as a focus, particularly in societies where religiosity is prominent. In Indonesia, religion is not only paramount in society at large, but is also an integral part of its education system. There are two equal strands of basic education that run parallel in the country: the secular public schools administered by the Ministry of Education, and the Islamic schools administered by the Ministry of Religion. In both the public and Islamic schools, religious education is a compulsory subject at all levels, from primary school to undergraduate programmes in universities. Education Law No. 20/2003 mentions that achieving a strong "religious commitment" and "religious devotion" are the goals of the national education system. The five elements of character education emphasised by the Ministry of Education in 2017 emphasise that "being religious" is the first desired characteristic in Indonesian children. However, there are no regulations about the implementation of learning about religious diversity in preparation for the students to be citizens in a multicultural society.

Religious education in Indonesia applies the "mono-religious model" that focuses on inculcating piety and loyalty to one's own confessional faith (Nurwanto & Cusack, 2017). The danger of this model, argues Sterkens and Yusuf (2015), is the feeling of the superiority of one's own religion since knowledge about other religions is limited, as well as the challenge of accepting other beliefs as alternative perspectives. A few studies about religion teaching in Indonesian schools show how harmful this approach can be. Research on the teaching of religion in the city of Yogyakarta (Listia & Gogali, 2007) and a survey of 500 Islamic Religious Education teachers in senior high schools in several cities in Java conducted by the Centre for Islamic and Social Studies at the State Islamic University (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2008) reveal that religion teachers have a high level of rigidity of perspectives. This impacts the teachers' beliefs regarding religious diversity. Sakai and Isbah (2014) find that the mono-religious model in the Indonesian education system has restrained the development of religious diversity in the country. It is imperative that schools in Indonesia become a safe space to prepare students to be more multicultural and tolerant, but these recent studies show that this potential remains overlooked.

In 2017, Raihani conducted a study in three different schools. He found that very few teachers consider cultural diversity to be a significant lesson, with some expressing opposition to it, regarding it as a threat to their own faiths and identities. Furthermore, students are taught the importance of preserving their own faiths, although they are also expected to be aware of their “different” neighbours or friends (Raihani, 2017). This is a demonstration of what Vatikiotis (1993) posits regarding the application of the national principle of Pancasila in a religious Indonesia: “Pancasila is a great leveller; tolerant of diversity, but insisting on beliefs. Muslim must tolerate his Christian brother but never slacken the practice of his faith” (p. 95). These dual attitudes of being loyal to one’s own faith while being mindful (and tolerant) of others who follow different beliefs seems to be expected, and it can be argued that this can be a source of perpetual dilemma for young people (“*How do I be religious but also tolerant?*”) as they navigate their lives in Indonesia.

1. 2. 4 Multicultural Children’s Literature

Under three decades of authoritarian regime, expressions of diversity were forbidden in the Indonesian media, including in literature. After the regime ended, children’s books gradually came to reflect the shift in ideology in Indonesian society, although it took a decade for the first children’s books that attempt to reflect the nation’s diversity to be published. Although there is now a growing number of multicultural books, they are not the dominant stories in the children’s books of Indonesia, where religious books, comics, and non-fiction (encyclopaedia and science books) remain the bestsellers.

Two contexts might present the influential factors behind the publication of multicultural books. The first is a response to the increasing fundamentalism and intolerance of minorities after the New Order (Parker, 2018). Children’s texts are vehicles for socialisation, and in Indonesia this didactic purpose is prominent. This explains the “tolerance promotion” label on the majority of the covers of multicultural books. The second factor is the enactment of 2013 Curriculum which, I argue, has been critical for the development of multicultural children’s literature in Indonesia. As mentioned in the previous section on the Indonesian education system, the 2013 Curriculum is arguably the first since the country’s independence that explicitly mentions tolerance as a desirable trait in Indonesian citizens. This has manifested in the government textbooks for primary level students, which contain units on Indonesia’s diversity of culture, ethnicities, and religions. It was immediately after the 2013

Curriculum was implemented that a number of picturebooks and children's novels with notable cultural diversity representation emerged in the market.

My observations of children's books about diversity reveal that they can largely be divided into two sub-categories: books that focus on diverse cultural groups, and books depicting intercultural friendship. The first type of books ranges from travelogues showcasing Indonesia's provinces and their local food, clothing, and dance (a reminder of Begler's "Five Fs"), to fully developed stories exploring the lives of the cultural groups. The cultural groups are those that were heavily underrepresented during the New Order, such as the ethnic groups in the remote islands of Eastern Indonesia. These are mostly written by cultural outsiders. The second sub-category, books about intercultural relations, has the explicit agenda of promoting tolerance, as stated overtly on their covers. Compared to books focusing on particular cultures, intercultural books are fewer in number, and unfortunately still feature tokenistic representations of the different cultures without going beyond the visible cultural characteristics.

I have been studying children's books about diversity in Indonesia and have published in-depth examinations of them (Hakim, 2020a; Hakim, 2020b). In these two publications, I commend the representation of marginalised and politically silenced cultural groups in contemporary children's stories, criticise the abundant stereotypes of ethnic groups and emphasis on unity over diversity, and call for authentic and nuanced portrayals of cultural groups. While the intention of the publication of multicultural books for children is noble, there seems to be an assumption that the understanding of multicultural issues and the acceptance of diversity will be acquired through the texts. This raises the questions of how the intended meaning of the texts are read and interpreted by the target readers.

A few of the multicultural books demonstrate more integrated multicultural content with quality narratives, and they seem to possess potential for literary discussion. One example is the publication of the *Lintas Anak Nusantara (Children Across the Archipelago)* series by the notable children's publisher, Bhuana Ilmu Populer. The series presents stories of children's lives in remote areas, who are mostly underrepresented in literature. These are the stories that I find to be authentic multicultural children's literature and raise questions about how their target readers perceive and interpret these stories.

1. 3 Research Objectives

Despite the increasing publication of multicultural children's books, there have been very few studies that analyse the books and observe the nature of children's responses to multicultural texts. At the time of this research, there has only been one publication of an empirical study of children reading multicultural texts (Brown et al., 2018). In examining multicultural children's literature, which is particularly didactic as it aims to inform and empower children on cultural diversity (Cai, 2002), reader response is particularly critical. Scholars of children's literature and childhood studies propose that children have active relationships with texts and construct their meaning (Gubar, 2013), thus I consider it imperative to hear children's voices as the target readers of multicultural literature. I am also motivated by the fact that discussions on diversity that involve children and young people remains scarce in Indonesia (Laksana & Wood, 2019).

The first objective of this thesis is to provide an exploration of selected multicultural children's books in Indonesia and children's responses to the books. I am inspired by the scholarship on reader response to culturally diverse literature, such as the one conducted by Arizpe, Colomer and Martinez-Roldan (2014), which argues for reader responses to "develop both their literacy learning and cultural understanding." (p. 5) For my thesis, I chose to examine a group of fourth graders (nine- to ten-year-olds) as they read and respond to selected multicultural texts. In addition to oral interviews, creative responses such as annotation and photographs were employed to examine the ways children respond to and construct meaning from texts, in this case the complex narrative of multicultural children's books.

The second purpose of the study is to explore teachers' perspectives on the potential and challenges of using multicultural texts in the classrooms. Just as research with children and multicultural texts is scarce in Indonesia, studies that explore teachers' opinions are also limited. This is in stark contrast to existing research from other countries, particularly where multicultural education and multicultural children's literature have thrived, with abundant research with teachers on the instruction and implementation of multicultural texts. My hope is that the findings can be useful as preliminary data for educators interested in multicultural texts and their potential in a multicultural context such as Indonesia. In addition, I hope to contribute to the rich discussion of multicultural literature and multicultural education

globally and generally, particularly through providing perspectives from a naturally diverse society.

To address these objectives, I developed two research questions:

Research Question One: *How do children read and respond to multicultural children's literature in Indonesia?*

Research Question Two: *What are teachers' perspectives on multicultural children's literature in Indonesia?*

1. 4 Positionality

Positionality refers to “an individual’s world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (Holmes, 2020, p. 1). It demonstrates “the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 p. 71) and influences the researcher’s decisions on how to conduct the study and interpret the findings. Examining their own positionality would empower researchers with heightened awareness regarding their inherent biases, enabling them to acknowledge and mitigate these biases when making sense of their collected data (Holmes, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, my doctoral research was partly inspired by my personal experiences growing up as a minority in Indonesia, encompassing both ethnicity and religion. My maternal grandmother journeyed from China to Java as the new bride of my grandfather, whose family had immigrated to Indonesia much earlier. To this day, my extended family upholds Chinese cultural practices and retains Chinese names. Growing up during the New Order era exposed me to the discrimination faced by Chinese Indonesians, which led to my reluctance in identifying myself as one. From a religious perspective, I was born into a Protestant family. Both my mother and father individually converted to Christianity in their youth, and I personally affirmed my faith within the church when I was a teenager. As a Christian within the context of the world’s largest Muslim population, I continued to encounter various challenges concerning relations between minority and majority groups.

Throughout my academic journey, this awareness of my ethnicity and religion has remained with me, including when I embarked on this study. I acknowledge that my positionality, intentionally or not, has influenced my research. One evident instance is my different approach towards the teachers in one of the two schools, which occurred due to my acute consciousness of being a minority navigating a predominantly majority space. This will be discussed in my discussion of the teachers' perspectives in Chapter Five. Another notable impact of my positionality manifested in the identification of the students' profound pride in their Chinese Indonesian heritage as a pivotal theme. This observation arises from my analysis of the students' responses, which will be elaborated on in Chapter Six.

1. 5 Thesis Structure

After introducing my research context and objectives in this chapter, the thesis will unfold in the following structure:

Chapter Two reviews the literature in five sections. It opens with theories and empirical studies on children's learning and understanding of diversity in order to prepare the ground for the role of multicultural texts in children's socialisation towards multiculturalism. The next three sections focus on the three individual strands comprising this research: the texts, the children, and the teachers. The texts section argues for the definition of multicultural children's literature for this research and summarises the key issues raised by various research on multicultural texts. The children section shifts the focus to the readers of the texts and how reader response theory offers a critical framework. This is followed by an identification of key themes from empirical research involving child readers and multicultural literature. The teachers section reviews the important roles of teachers as gatekeepers of multicultural texts. The fifth and final section concludes the review by placing it within the Indonesian context.

Chapter Three introduces the selected multicultural children's texts from Indonesia that were used in the study and the selection process. There were five books discussed and analysed, followed by the criteria I applied in text selection.

Chapter Four begins with the research design, which outlines my approach in conducting the fieldwork over the course of five months in two schools in Indonesia. This is followed by an elaboration on the study participants, both the students and the teachers. Next, I provide a discussion of the selected multicultural texts and justify their importance for the reading sessions. The next section elaborates the data collection process, followed by the challenges that arose during data analysis. The chapter concludes with the analytical framework I applied for the students' responses and teachers' perspectives.

Chapter Five presents the main findings from the focus group with the teachers and, like the chapter on the students' responses, is structured in two parts. This is based on the identification of key themes emerging from my discussion with the teachers. The first part consists of the teachers' perspectives on diversity and how their backgrounds shaped their teaching. The second part comprises the teachers' views on the potential and challenges of multicultural texts for their classrooms.

Chapter Six is a discussion of the key themes from students' responses to multicultural texts. It is broken into two parts: The first part comprises responses that demonstrated the ways children navigated differences they encountered in the texts, and the second part focuses on responses that reveal the multi-layered identities children brought to the texts and the reading.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by returning to the research objectives and summarising the main findings of the research. This is where I reflect on the final journey of my project, identify limitations, and offer recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two:

Literature Review

This chapter will outline the scholarly research on multicultural children's literature and children's responses to these texts, as well as teachers' perspectives. Before delving into these issues in depth, I will begin with a review on multiculturalism, and follow this with an overview of theories on children's learning about diversity and the principles of multicultural education to lay the groundwork for the project. From there, I will review the empirical studies on texts, readers, and teachers that are pertinent to the research. Finally, I will bring the discussion to the Indonesian context in order to set the stage for my empirical fieldwork.

2. 1 Multiculturalism

This thesis examines multicultural children's literature in the context of a multicultural country that has not yet officially adopted multiculturalism as a policy. To foreground my research, a review of key issues in multiculturalism is necessary. This section is organized as follows: I begin with theoretical conceptualizations of multiculturalism, followed by its critiques and justifications. Next, I explore the contextualization of multiculturalism in Asia and situate the discussion within the Indonesian context.

2. 1. 1 Theoretical Conceptualizations

There are currently "multiple modes of multiculturalism" (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010) that suggest the term's variety of meanings. For the purpose of this thesis, I am following the common approach that acknowledges two primary dimensions of multiculturalism, namely, the descriptive and the normative. The descriptive dimension refers to the empirical fact of diverse cultural groups coexisting in a society (Vertovec, 2007). Meanwhile, the normative dimension pertains to multiculturalism as a theoretical concept and policy in addressing the challenges presented by cultural diversity. While descriptive multiculturalism has existed for centuries, the normative dimension is much more recent (Kymlicka, 2012).

As a theoretical concept, multiculturalism began to attract discussions among liberal philosophers in the twentieth century. In the late 1960s, the term “multiculturalism” was officially used for the first time by the Canadian government, followed by the Australian government in the 1970s. In those documents, multiculturalism was meant as a form of recognition of cultural diversity within society. As Abu-Laban et al. (2023) assert, the concept emerged in response to the growing awareness of the cultural differences between different ethnic and racial groups in Western societies and the need for social policies that would acknowledge and celebrate these differences. For the next two decades, as Kymlicka (2010) notes, “there was a clear trend across the Western democracies towards the increased recognition and accommodation of diversity through a range of multiculturalism policies and minority rights” (p. 32).

Parekh’s definition of multiculturalism asserts that it is about proper norms governing relationships between cultural groups, with “an open and equal dialogue” as the key principle of maintaining relations between different groups (2006, p. 13). Likewise, Kymlicka (2012) argues that “multiculturalism is first and foremost about developing new models of democratic citizenship, grounded in human-rights ideals, to replace earlier uncivil and undemocratic relations of hierarchy and exclusion” (p. 8). This view emphasizes the importance of recognizing minority groups in a democratic citizenship that considers all cultural groups as equal. Like Kymlicka, Modood (2013) acknowledges the contributions of diverse cultural groups that equally shape the society. He maintains that multiculturalism is different from integration because multiculturalism “appreciates that groups vary in all kinds of ways and so will become part of the social landscape in different ways” (p. 45). Kymlicka further contends that multiculturalism is “a fundamentally *liberal* discourse” in which minority rights are situated “within a larger framework of human rights and liberal-democratic constitutionalism” (2005, p. 29). Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism also advocates for the protection of minority groups under the constitutions, in conjunction with the traditional liberal-democratic values of freedom, equality, and solidarity.

That said, multiculturalism remains a contested term within the wider discussions on cultural diversity. Gunew (2005) asserts that multiculturalism is a “floating signifier,” and Joppke (2017) contends that multiculturalism “means different things in different parts of the world” (n.p.). Instead of a fixed and universal concept applicable to different contexts, multiculturalism is “always contextual to particular localities and cultural experiences” (Nye,

2007, p. 116). Johansson (2022) points out that “[t]he elasticity and fluidity of the concept of multiculturalism, which enables and supports differing political purposes, complicate its use as a fixed policy practice” (p. 2). The key issue here seems to be the discrepancy on the theorizations of multiculturalism by academics and the discussions among media and public. In other words, there is a gap of understandings between multiculturalism as ideal and multiculturalism as reality. To remedy this, Johansson (2022) offers a useful suggestion that we consider multiculturalism as “a point of departure for dialogue, compromise and critical discussion about identity, recognition and community” (p. 3). This conceptualization of multiculturalism as a “dialogue” suggests a more inclusive and dynamic discourse that welcomes various interpretations to the table, with the hope of bridging our differences.

2. 1. 2 Critiques and Justifications

Multiculturalism is not without its many critics (Abu-Laban et al., 2023; Feichtinger & Cohen, 2014; Joppke, 2017; Modood, 2013; Murphy, 2012; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). Known as “the multiculturalism backlash”, this criticism emerged in the 1990s and continues to the present day.

In a volume commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of multiculturalism as the first official policy, Abu-Laban et al. (2023) assert that the current global challenges to multiculturalism have been triggered by the rise of populism, white supremacy, and xenophobia. Additionally, there is a growing number of social movements addressing issues of diversity and discrimination, with the Black Lives Matter movement being the most prominent. Interestingly, these movements do not adopt multiculturalism as their framework for inclusion; instead, they choose other concepts like anti-racism and decolonization. In the following, I will assess the main critiques of multiculturalism found in key literature to date and explore the primary defences for multiculturalism.

In *The Multiculturalism Backlash*, Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010) summarize the main critiques towards multiculturalism in European countries as follows: first, it is viewed as a single ideology that restricts freedom of expression; second, it is accused of rejecting common values and promoting separation among communities; third, critics argue that it fails to acknowledge social problems regarding the minority groups. Furthermore, multiculturalism has been criticized for allegedly supporting repressive cultural practices in

minority groups. Shorten (2022) points out that the primary criticism of multiculturalism comes from Europe, but the opposition to multiculturalism has been more of a political rhetoric rather than a reflection of actual policy changes. Notably, the backlash against multiculturalism in Europe seems to be particularly focused on Muslim immigrants (Murphy, 2012). Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010) argue that while multicultural policies are not explicitly stated in Europe, multicultural programs and initiatives have been implemented across the continent. Shorten (2022) supports this view, claiming that “there is only limited evidence of a genuine retreat from multiculturalism as a public policy orientation” (p. 118).

Murphy (2012) warns against two sources of misunderstandings in the multiculturalism debate. The first one is the tendency to draw broad conclusions about the dangers of cultural diversity based on limited evidence. The second source of misunderstanding is the failure to recognize the diverse range of perspectives within the broader school of multicultural political philosophy.

Instead of simply attacking multiculturalism, critics and scholars need to consider several key points in critical debates on the subject. Firstly, there are differing opinions among multiculturalists regarding which cultural groups should be recognised and how that recognition should be implemented in policies. Secondly, it is critical to distinguish between multiculturalism as a political philosophy and the multicultural policies adopted by different states. Various countries may implement significantly different types of multiculturalism (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010), and these policies may not necessarily align with a broader concept of multiculturalism or a specific political philosophy. Misunderstandings can arise when these distinctions are not made clear.

Murphy (2012) warns against making a general assessment of whether multiculturalism as a concept strengthens or weakens social cohesion. This is because the impact of multiculturalism on social cohesion is contingent on specific factors, such as the particular multicultural policies being implemented, the specific minority groups involved, and the unique political and social contexts in which these policies are applied. These factors can vary significantly across different cases, making it challenging to provide a universal answer to the question. According to Murphy (2012), instead of singular and comprehensive multicultural theorization, there are numerous continuing multicultural experiments, diverse multicultural policies, and various unique contributions to the political philosophy of

multiculturalism. This highlights the importance of avoiding oversimplification and recognizing the diversity of perspectives within the multiculturalism debate.

Despite facing a backlash against its successful implementation, some scholars maintain that multiculturalism remains relevant for addressing today's issues of diversity. Abu-Laban et al. (2023) maintain that multiculturalism still has the potential to serve as a framework for inclusion. They advocate for new approaches to multiculturalism that are more responsive to the needs and experiences of marginalized communities. Additionally, they suggest adopting an international comparative perspective to assess multiculturalism, which allows for a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which it is shaped by local, national, and global factors.

Will Kymlicka, a staunch defender of multiculturalism, asserts its critical role in managing cultural diversity. Drawing upon his work on minority rights, Kymlicka (2012) argues that multiculturalism can play constructive roles in achieving individual acculturation and fostering greater inclusion and equality at broader societal levels. He points out that the Western model of liberal multiculturalism has demonstrated a shift from the perspective of centralized nation-states to multinational states, and from assimilation or exclusion towards recognizing and valuing ethnocultural diversity within a single country. Kymlicka's defence of multiculturalism emphasizes its potential for managing cultural diversity and promoting inclusion and equality.

According to Kymlicka (2012), there has been a lack of understanding in Europe about what multiculturalism truly entails. This has led policymakers to hastily declare the failure of multiculturalism. However, Kymlicka (2010) maintains that multiculturalism still has "a bright future" in Western countries, with "powerful forces at work" (p. 46) to move towards recognizing and accommodating diversity. Assessing multiculturalism's relevance for the twenty-first century, Modood (2007) argues that it is the "most timely and necessary, and that we need more not less" (p. 14) of it. Similarly, Joppke (2017) argues that while multiculturalism may face opposition at the policy level, at present there is no alternative to multiculturalism at the level of liberal-constitutional law. The success, failure, and public acceptance of multiculturalism vary depending on the specific issues and countries involved. To find a more sustainable model for accommodating diversity, it is essential to comprehend these variations and their underlying factors influencing multiculturalism's outcomes (Kymlicka, 2012).

2. 1. 3 Multiculturalism in Indonesia

The discourse of multiculturalism has spread internationally from Western societies to other parts of the world, facilitated by global networks of academia and activists (Kymlicka, 2005). In Southeast Asia, multiculturalism and pluralism were discouraged during the initial decades after gaining independence from colonization. The priority at the time was to foster unity among the newly sovereign states. However, in more recent times, the region has faced growing challenges related to its diversity and minority groups. For instance, Myanmar has seen persecution against the Rohingyas, and Indonesia has experienced rising ethno-religious tensions. Hefner (2001) argues that “[f]ew areas of the non-Western world illustrate the legacy and challenge of cultural pluralism in a manner more striking than the Southeast Asian countries of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia” (p. 4). The context and challenges faced by Southeast Asian countries has led to considerations of adopting multiculturalism as a diversity management approach. As mentioned in Chapter One, multiculturalism emerged in Indonesia as a potential approach to manage diversity following the collapse of the authoritarian regime in 1998.

As a Western concept, multiculturalism is not readily accepted in Asian countries without raising debates or controversies. The first challenge of adopting multiculturalism is that many Asian cultures already possess their own principles of harmonious coexistence. As Kymlicka and He (2005) argue:

All of the major ethical and religious traditions in the region—from Confucian and Buddhist to Islamic and Hindu—have their own conceptions of the value of tolerance, and their own recipes for sustaining unity diversity. These traditions continue to shape people's beliefs and practices in the region. (p. 1)

Indeed, as I have mentioned in the contextual background in Chapter One, cultural groups in Indonesia have their own indigenous concepts of tolerance. Nevertheless, Kymlicka and He (2005) observe that while these cultural traditions promote tolerance, they may not fully encompass the democratic negotiation of diversity and minority rights. This has created a space for alternative approaches in managing diversity, including multiculturalism.

Wasino (2013) and Putra (2021) argue that multiculturalism is not a new concept in Indonesia. Rather, it represents a continuation and transformation of the pluralistic society that existed under the Dutch colonial rule and the subsequent New Order regime. Both

scholars emphasize the need for a broader understanding of multiculturalism in Indonesian context in order to effectively manage its cultural groups. According to Budiman (2014), Indonesia has made attempts to adopt multicultural principles through various regulations that aim to address issues of diversity. However, throughout different eras, “preserving political sovereignty” has consistently remained a priority for Indonesian leaders. Budiman (2014) notes that “[t]he renegotiation of unity and diversity in post-Suharto Indonesia has brought the country onto the long and winding road of problematic multiculturalism” (n.p.).

Scholars have highlighted several challenges in implementing multiculturalism in Indonesia (Anggraheni et al., 2022; Azra, 2004; Sundrijo, 2007). Hoon (2017) argues that the term “multiculturalism” carries negative connotations in Indonesia as it can evoke “fears of federalism, relativism and disunity” (p. 485). On the other hand, Putra (2021) cautions that discussions of multiculturalism in Indonesia must be approached with caution because it is often confused with “pluralism.” Pluralism is associated with religious relativism or syncretism, perceived as a threat to the orthodoxy of Islam by conservative or radical groups. Consequently, multiculturalism faces resistance and criticism, particularly from groups who view it as a challenge to their identities or interests. Furthermore, Putra (2021) contends that multicultural awareness in Indonesia remains low as evident in several aspects. Primarily, there is a lack of understanding, learning about, and respect for other cultures or religions. Another contributing factor is lack of multicultural knowledge, which is further exacerbated by the limited discussions about multiculturalism, mainly confined to academic contexts. Additionally, a challenge to multiculturalism in Indonesia comes from the absence of “a clear strategy or guideline to institutionalize multiculturalism” (Anggraheni et al., 2022, p. 63).

A prominent scholar who explores conceptualizations of multiculturalism within the Indonesian context is Azyumardi Azra. He has authored numerous books and scholarly articles on the role of religion in shaping Indonesian society and politics. According to Azra (2004), a critical turning point for multicultural awareness in Indonesia occurred during the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid, an Islamic religious leader who served as the country’s fourth president after the fall of Suharto’s authoritarian regime. Wahid, known for promoting interfaith dialogue, played an instrumental role in protecting minority rights in Indonesia. His decision to lift the ban on the Chinese New Year celebration in 2000 and establish Confucianism as the country’s sixth official religion symbolized a new vision of harmonious coexistence.

Azra's view on multiculturalism centers on "an acceptance of diversity" (2019, p. 190). He argues that diversity should not be reduced to a single interpretation but should instead be understood as a complex and multifaceted concept, requiring nuanced interpretation that acknowledges its complexity. Recognition of diversity involves acknowledging "various symbols, values, structures and institutions in common life that bind diverse groups" (Azra, 2019, p. 189). This echoes the importance of shared values that unite diverse cultural groups as mentioned by Budiman (2014). In recognizing diversity, it becomes essential to have a unifying element – the "unity" in Indonesian national motto of "unity in diversity." This prioritization of "political sovereignty" remains a persistent factor that complicates the challenges of effectively implementing multiculturalism in Indonesia, even with various efforts to adopt multicultural principles.

This review has demonstrated that multiculturalism remains a complicated and contested concept that faces numerous obstacles in Indonesia. Scholars emphasize that to achieve a meaningful understanding of the principles of multiculturalism, multicultural education is crucial (Azra, 2019; Gollnick & Chinn, 2017; Race, 2015). I will explore this further in the upcoming section on Multicultural Education.

2. 2 Term Definitions

In the following sub-sections, I define terms as they are used in this thesis.

2. 2. 1 Culture

This thesis centres on culture: how it is represented in children's literature and read by children. My understanding of culture for this research is informed by Nieto and Bode (2018), who define culture as "values, traditions, worldview, and social and political relationships created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, religion, or other shared identity" (p. 137). These shared values distinguish one group of people from another, and scholars have increasingly considered culture to encompass not only material aspects, such as food and clothes, but also less tangible ones, such as attitudes and beliefs (Banks, 2018). Two things to be mindful of as I talk about culture are that it is fluid (Nieto & Bode, 2018) – as Nieto and Bode assert, "culture is neither static nor deterministic" (p. 140) – and that it is

closely related to power, particularly in considering whose culture is seen as the norm and superior, subordinating cultural groups that are “different”.

2. 2. 2 Diversity

I use the term ‘diversity’ to indicate the empirical fact of Indonesian society. Wood (2003) argues that there are two meanings of ‘diversity’, an old one and a new one. The old meaning stays true to its semantic content, i.e., diversity is the existence of various groups in society. Here, diversity is understood as “a simple fact of life” which is “as inevitable and as restrictive as gravity” (Blommaert & Verschueren, 2002, p. 14). Blommaert and Verschueren maintain that diversity itself is not the trigger of conflicts, but rather that it is its management that causes tensions. Meanwhile, the new interpretation of ‘diversity’ argues for recognition of differences in society. It is perceived as “a tool for knocking down the door to exclusive enclaves ... of the favored groups” (Wood, 2013, p. 12). The ideal goal of the new construct of diversity is to bring about a transformation in people’s perceptions as they are connected with others from diverse backgrounds. Nevertheless, this interpretation carries the risks of producing “artificial diversity”, by which people are regarded as objects to fulfil certain quotas. Cantle (2012) also mentions a phenomenon called the “paradox of diversity” that still needs to be comprehensively addressed: “The more diverse societies have become and the more people have been exposed to difference and become accustomed to it, the more they seem to retreat into their own identity, embrace identity politics and support separatist ideologies. This may, in part, be due to the lack of engagement with difference, a rather wary detachment that makes us more determined to cling to our own community’s certainties” (p. 13). In this study, I refer to the ‘old’ meaning of diversity, which is to signify the presence of various social groups in a society, particularly in Indonesia, where diversity is really understood as ‘many-ness’.

2. 2. 3 Pluralism

Much like diversity, pluralism can be perceived in two ways: as an empirical fact, or as a normative value. As an empirical fact, pluralism defines the social reality of different cultural groups in the society, such as most countries in Southeast Asia. As a normative value, pluralism signifies a strategy for responding to diversity in society so different groups can peacefully coexist. Giordan (2014) stresses the significance of engagement in pluralism in

order to break down barriers between different groups: “[Pluralism] is a continuous process of negotiation and re-negotiation, in an ongoing effort to maintain and preserve the boundaries between the different social spheres in a world that makes these boundaries ever more porous and fragile” (p. 9). Hoon (2017) argues that pluralism tends to focus on searching for the common ground and achieving consensus, but allows little interaction among different groups. In Indonesia, pluralism is seen with suspicion by the religious communities (Hoon, 2017) as it connotes that “all beliefs as equally valid” (p. 479) and that truth is relative. It is for this reason that pluralism suggests all religions are the same that the Indonesian Council of Ulama considers pluralism as “a ‘dangerous’ affirmation” (Hoon, 2017, p. 480). In this thesis, I use ‘pluralism’ to denote the strategy by authorities to peacefully accommodate diversity.

2. 2. 4 Multiculturalism

Indonesia is multicultural in the sense that the country has comprised multiple cultural groups since the precolonial era, making multiculturalism is an empirical fact. However, Parekh (2006) argues that multiculturalism is also “a normative response to that fact” (p. 6). Crowder’s (2013) three-part definition of multiculturalism proposes that multiculturalism is a fact, an approval to the fact, and a positive recognition of the fact in policy. It is the positive response to cultural diversity as manifested in public policies, as opposed to negative responses or mere toleration, in which “minority cultures are not approved, but not actively discouraged or assimilated either” (Crowder, 2013, p. 12), and in which forced assimilation, discrimination, and ethnic cleansing may occur. Hoon (2017) argues that multiculturalism “espouses postmodern theories that accentuate the notion that people’s differences are more important than their similarities” (p. 482), while Gopalakhrisnan (2011) points out that multiculturalism is employed as “an action term” to fight for the rights of previously marginalized groups and to achieve social justice. Kymlicka argues (2005) that multiculturalism displays a shifting trend in responding to diversity, from the old ways of assimilation and exclusion to the recognition and accommodation of differences. With such criticism and perspective shifts, which may portend some societies leaving multiculturalism behind in favour of other policies for managing diversity – most notably is interculturalism in Europe – Crowder (2013) maintains that “the debate over multiculturalism is far from settled” (p. 5). In this thesis, I am following Crowder’s three-part definition as it is in

accordance with the principles of multicultural education and multicultural children's literature.

2. 3 Children and Diversity

2. 3. 1 How Children Learn about Diversity

Growing research reveals the nature of children's development of perceptions and attitudes towards human differences. Seminal publications on this matter are mostly situated in the field of social and developmental psychology, such as *Handbook of Race, Racism, and the Developing Child* (Quintana & McKown, 2008), *The Oxford Handbook of Multicultural Identity* (Benet-Martínez & Hong, 2014), and *Handbook of Children and Prejudice: Integrating Research, Practice, and Policy* (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Featuring the ongoing studies on children and diversity by the leading researchers in the field, these publications reveal the complicated nature of child development and socialization when it comes to multiculturalism.

It was once assumed that children were too young to be exposed to racial issues (Barta & Gindler, 1996) or that they were incapable of prejudice (Aboud, 2009). These days, the wider assumption among scholars is that children are aware of human diversity and that their cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural development affect how they respond to it (Ramsey, 2009). As Ramsey et al. (2003) asserts, "Children are not color blind; at an early age they notice race and absorb and begin to express racially defined images and assumptions that are present in their social environment". Studies suggest that children are aware of human differences at as early an age as two years old (Augoustinos & Rosewarne, 2001), particularly distinctive perceptual cues such as skin colour, and race becomes one of the first social categories that children learn early in life (Quintana, 2008). From this awareness, children then start to make classifications as they seek to construct meaning from their observations (Aboud, 2003).

The literature so far indicates that two primary factors play critical roles in children's attitudes towards human differences. The first is the innate developmental aspect, and the second is the child's social and cultural learning environment. The ways in which children respond to human diversity are affected by a combination of their cognitive, affective, and behavioural development, and are further complicated by the social and cultural environment

in which children are socialised. Quintana asserts that “[c]hildren’s developmental understanding of race appears to be a dynamic interaction of their natural curiosity about their social world and the complex ways in which they are exposed to race” (2008, p. 17).

Consequently, studies on children’s understanding of diversity can contradict each other, particularly with younger children, although as children grow up, their attitudes to diversity become more consistent (Ramsey et al., 2003). Prejudicial attitudes can result from the judgments children form as they make sense of the differences. Prejudice, defined as “an organized predisposition to respond in an unfavourable manner toward people from an ethnic group because of their ethnic affiliation” (Aboud, 1988, p. 4), can manifest in negative stereotyping or discrimination. These detrimental consequences of negative racial attitudes make it crucial for scholars to study prejudice in children (Bigler & Hughes, 2009).

Various research from the field of psychology throughout the years has argued that children demonstrate more positive attitudes towards people from their own social groups (in-group; e.g., ethnicities, religions, or nationalities) than to people from outside these groups (out-group) (Stathi et al., 2014). This becomes the motivation for various intervention programmes, such as prejudice reduction (Aboud, 2009) and anti-racist education (Vera et al., 2017). It is important to recognise that these intervention programmes are dominantly conducted in Western countries, and although there are shared aspects within children’s development across geographical spaces, culture and context are influential in shaping “developmental specificity” (McCoy, 2022).

One of the seminal studies for understanding children’s attitudes towards diversity is Frances A. Aboud’s *Children and Prejudice* (1989). Although Aboud’s research is limited to a Western context, it has been notably influential over the decades in discussions about children’s racial attitudes, and continues to inform present studies (see for example, Brown & Bigler, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Aboud herself has continued to publish more on the issue, continuously building upon her first publication. One of her papers published two decades later (Aboud, 2009) supports her earlier assertion that children are predisposed to prejudice, which is considered a natural human behaviour that begins to develop as young as the age of four. She maintains that children’s prejudice is seldom malicious and children’s perceptions of different racial groups become increasingly negative when compared to perception about their own group. Studies by Graves and Graves (2008) and Ramsey (2009) indicate that prejudice does increase with age in children, but Juvonen et al. (2017) argue that

children's cognitive and affective development enable them to understand multiple perspectives and develop empathy for people from different cultural groups, mitigating their prejudice. These disparate results suggest the complexity of children's negative attitudes towards people different from them, as well as the potential for intervention to remedy negative perceptions in children.

Quintana et al.'s (2006) review of the developmental dimension of children's understanding of diversity suggests that the critical cognitive and affective development take place at primary school ages. Quintana (2008) proposes a developmental model of children's understanding of human differences, particularly race. This model shows that children's understandings of race, as expressed through their oral utterances, progress through four stages that correspond to their cognitive and socio-emotional development. The stages start with children's basic recognition of distinctive physical cues of human differences and end with their ability to develop racial group identity and understand associations between social attitudes and racial issues, such as racism and discrimination. Although Quintana does not specify the age that corresponds to each stage, the first stage indicates pre-school age and the fourth stage takes place in "adolescence", which suggests that the major growth from a literal perspective of race to a social perspective take place within the primary school age range. Similarly, in another review of research on the topic, Ramsey et al. (2003) argue that it is during their primary education that children's racial understanding grows from physical cues to "social connotations of racial distinctions" (p. 83) and they demonstrate curiosities towards cases of injustices caused by racial inequalities. This suggests that conversation and inquiries regarding diversity can be fruitful at the primary level of education, when children's developmental stages seem to facilitate learning about differences beyond literal perspectives.

In addition to their cognitive and affective development, children's attitudes to human differences are influenced by external factors during their "primary socialisation" (Vuckovic, 2008). Harrell and Gallardo (2008) argue that the development of children's multicultural worldviews is largely affected by the cultural contexts that children are exposed to during their childhood. They maintain that socio-political and cultural factors play a critical role during the socialization process of children in society, including how society values and marginalises one cultural group over another. They conclude that the role of society, transmitted through media and the Internet, can even be stronger than parents' influence (Harrell & Gallardo, 2008). Bigler (1999) and Quintana (2008) argue that, contrary to

common assumptions, research suggests the influence of parents on their children's attitudes towards diversity is not straightforward. Bigler's (1999) review of studies involving parents finds a stark difference between parental racial attitudes and their children's, and a decade later, another review by Quintana (2008) contends that parents "[do] not appear to account for the efficiency of children's learning about racial differences nor the prevalence of racial bias" (p. 17). Ramsey et al. (2003) point out that instead of direct influence, parents might affect their children's racial beliefs indirectly through subtle and implicit views embedded in their behaviour.

The media might have more influence than parental influence in shaping children's perception of diversity. Berry (2008) asserts that "social cognitive theory suggests that cross-culture attitudes related to gender, ethnic, religious, class, and other beliefs can be acquired from observations growing out of television and other media through the process of modeling" (pp. xxiv-xxv). The primary ideology that takes centre stage during the socialisation of the child plays a major role in shaping the child's perspective of multiculturalism, whether this dominant ideology is assimilationist, pluralist, or multiculturalist, and one of the prominent ways this ideology is socialised to children in their current "media-saturated lives" (Berry, 2008, p. xxiv) is through media.

Ramsey et al.'s (2003) review reveals the important role of schools, either in terms of school demography or school ideology, in shaping children's perspectives towards diversity. They point out that a monoracial school demography yields aversion between different race groups in the students' attitudes, while a multiracial school encourages children to develop trust for people from different racial groups. Ramsey et al. (2003) argue that this finding is in accordance with the social contact theory, first proposed by Gordon Allport in 1954, which posits that direct contact between people from different groups can alleviate prejudice, and has inspired research on relations between different cultural groups, particularly in school settings. Research conducted by Burns et al. (2017) with primary school children in Northern Ireland to explore their understanding of diversity suggests similar findings. The study reveals that personal experiences with people from different cultural groups plays a major role in shaping children's perspective of diversity. Aboud (2009) and Vuckovic (2008) argue that schools' ideologies – i.e., how schools condone prejudice or promote diversity – is a major aspect that shape children's attitudes. Hajisoteriou et al.'s (2017) study with several primary schools with a large demography of immigrants in Cyprus seems to support this

argument. The researchers' interviews with children aged nine to eleven from diverse ethnic backgrounds finds that the schools' management of conflicts when tensions arise between the Cypriot and the immigrant students affect the students' perspectives on diversity. The study also reveals that teachers play critical roles in facilitating learning that supports children's understanding of cultural diversity.

Scholars have advocated for the use of multicultural content to encourage positive attitudes towards diversity in young people (Banks & Banks, 2010). Ramsey (2009) calls for multicultural content that focuses on both the similarities and differences between different groups as an effective tool for encouraging positive attitudes towards diversity. Lowery (2011) argues that it is pivotal for children to be exposed to the accurate portrayal of various cultures in order to counter the impact of the overwhelming information from media and the Internet.

Nevertheless, studies suggest that intervention is complex and can be ineffective in changing children's perspectives. Bigler and Hughes (2009) argue that children and young people can resist perspective change and often maintain their negative stereotypes and biases towards people from different social groups. Ramsey et al.'s (2003) review of studies that apply intervention with multicultural material in several primary schools seems to support this. The studies find that after learning about the harmful effects of stereotypes, children still participate in name-calling in the playgrounds.

Aboud (2009) points out that modifying attitudes in children who have negative perspectives towards people from different social groups is challenging, and therefore, the intervention needs to consider how to counter the current bias and encourage positive attitudes. She posits that intervention to support the development of positive multicultural perspective in children must involve three important aspects: 1) the message, 2) the children, and 3) the socializer of the message. Keeping this in mind, I employ Aboud's recommendation for the framework of my research by examining the three aspects: the multicultural children's books as "the message", the primary students as "the children", and their teachers as "the socializer".

All the studies discussed in this section suggest that conducting research in school can be beneficial in involving students and their peers in exploring and understanding children's perceptions of diversity. The use of multicultural pedagogy and teaching leads to the next section, which considers the wider field of multicultural education.

2. 3. 2 Multicultural Education

One of the most prominent interventions in addressing issues related to diversity and prejudice among children and young people is through the implementation of multicultural education – a broad field that encompasses various definitions, theoretical concepts, and pedagogical strategies. This subsection aims to critically examine the key literature and existing research on this topic to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept. I begin with an overview of the historical development and conceptual frameworks and proceed with an examination of its impacts and challenges. Subsequently, I explore the globalization of the movement before concluding with a review of how multicultural education is conceptualised within the context of Indonesia.

2. 3. 2. 1 Development and Theorizations

As a movement, multicultural education emerged in the United States in the 1970s, with its origins deeply rooted in African-American activism aimed at achieving equality. Its foundation can be traced back to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, which led to the development of ethnic studies and eventually paved the way for multicultural education as a scholarship. The primary goal of this educational approach was to address the injustice and marginalisation experienced by African Americans in the United States as a result of slavery and segregation. Nieto (2017) argues:

Multicultural education as a separate field began in earnest in the early 1970s as a result of increased attention by African American and other scholars to the education of African American and other students of color who had long been poorly served by public schools. (p. 1)

The primary focus of early multicultural education activists, Nieto (2017) maintains, was to address educational inequality resulting from the exclusion and lack of representation of minority cultures in the curriculum. Starting from this foundation, multicultural education gradually extended its scope to encompass other oppressed groups (Gay, 2021). As Native Americans, Latinx, and Asian-Americans became engaged with the movement, multicultural education became more inclusive and broadened its reach to advocate for equal opportunities for all marginalised communities.

Over the next two decades, multicultural education has “established itself as a serious scholarly endeavour with a sound theoretical foundation and solid research base” (Nieto, 2017, p. 3). Reflecting on the past, present, and future of multicultural education, Gay (2021) argues that it remains a relevant and evolving field. Throughout the years, multicultural education has undergone several changes in response to shifts in socio-political contexts. Moreover, it has evolved to include other aspects of identity, such as gender, social class, and religion (Nieto, 2017).

Scholars and researchers have contributed various theoretical frameworks to conceptualise multicultural education. Nieto et al. (2008) posit that “the evolution of the field has been characterized by slow but steady expansion of its boundaries not only in terms of who and what are included in the field, but also in its very definition” (p. 179). James Banks, a founding figure and prominent scholar in the field, theorises that multicultural education is “at least three things: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process” (2016a, p. 2). This definition serves as the foundational principle for researchers and practitioners, highlighting that multicultural education is not merely a theoretical concept but also a dynamic movement and an ongoing process. Its primary objective is to bring about major transformations in education (Banks, 2014). Multicultural education embraces diversity as an essential element in enriching a nation, recognising that diversity offers individuals the opportunity to experience various cultures and, in turn, enables them to grow “more fulfilled as human beings” (Banks, 2014, p. 1). Banks (2013) emphasises the critical advancement in the field lies in acknowledging the intersectionality of students’ identities. These identities encompass a range of aspects, including race, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, as well as sexual orientation. Students often belong to multiple groups simultaneously, and these intersecting variables of identity mutually interact and influence their behaviour.

Since its inception, multicultural education has branched into different models, each with its distinct approaches. These diverse approaches are based on the theoretical conceptions of scholars such as Banks (2016a), Sleeter and Grant (2009), and Nieto and Bode (2018). Among these scholars, Banks’s theory appears to be the most widely adopted, encompassing five dimensions that capture the nuanced aspects of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure. Sleeter and Grant (2009) point out that there

is no “single, unified plan for multicultural education” (p. 33). Instead, educators construct their own approaches tailored to their specific educational contexts and needs. Nieto and Bode (2018) succinctly sum it up: “The point is not to develop just one way to understand multicultural education but instead to encourage you to think about the interplay of societal and school structures and contexts and how they influence learning” (p. 31). They advocate for “a more nuanced understanding of key concepts in multicultural education,” asserting that the definition of multicultural education should consider “the varying contexts of communities and the changing process of education” (Nieto et al., 2008, p. 180). Banks (2006) emphasizes that multicultural education is a movement not only for the marginalised or underrepresented, but also for the majority and most powerful group. The movement argues for the importance of “empower[ing] all students to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world” (p. 129). Nieto and Bode (2018) concur that there has been a misperception that multicultural education is only for the marginalised group. On the contrary, it is the students from the dominant culture who need to learn about different cultural groups and their experiences.

Another significant contribution to the theorisation of multicultural education comes from Gloria Ladson-Billings, who introduced culturally relevant pedagogy in 1988. Rooted in the principles of multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy is a teaching approach that places a strong emphasis on critical thinking and social action. Its primary goal is to empower students from diverse cultural backgrounds and encourage them to challenge social injustices. To achieve these goals, three practises are essential for educators: 1) focusing on student learning and academic success, 2) developing students’ cultural competence to help them cultivate positive ethnic and social identities, and 3) supporting students’ critical consciousness, which involves their ability to challenge the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995). By adopting these practices, culturally relevant pedagogy not only addresses student achievement and cultural competence but also helps students to recognize and critique societal inequalities.

Culturally relevant pedagogy has gained widespread recognition and has been extensively explored (Muñiz, 2019). In a recent interview with Madeline Will (2022), Ladson-Billings discussed the significance of culturally relevant pedagogy in the twenty-first century. She highlighted the crucial role of youth culture in shaping students’ experiences and emphasised

the importance of incorporating elements of youth culture, such as music, art, fashion, and language, into culturally relevant teaching practices. In the United States, there has been a notable resistance against approaches that promote greater participation and strive for equity (Ladson-Billings in Will, 2022), with Critical Race Theory being a prominent example facing challenges in several states. This suggests an even greater need for a strong culturally relevant pedagogy that can empower students “to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciation for) culture” (p. 77).

In his later work, Banks shifted his focus towards transformative citizenship education (2017; 2020). This approach aims to tackle the “citizenship-education dilemma”, which refers to the challenge faced by educational programs when attempting to teach democratic values and ideals within social and political contexts that contradict these very values. As a resolution to this dilemma, Banks (2020) advocates for citizenship education that empowers students “to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values needed to participate in their own governance within their cultural communities as well as within the nation-state” (p. 96). This implies that students must grasp how knowledge is constructed and how power operates within this process, enabling them to realize their nations’ democratic ideals effectively. Banks’s transition towards a greater emphasis on transformative citizenship education signifies a move towards a more comprehensive approach to promoting inclusion and equity for individuals from diverse groups. While his earlier work on multicultural education aimed at establishing equal educational opportunities through the implementation of multicultural education programs, his subsequent focus on transformative citizenship education centres on addressing the broader societal context.

To scrutinize citizenship education within schools, Banks (2017) introduces the Citizenship Typology, a framework that classifies citizenship into four distinct levels:

Table 2. 1 *Citizenship typology as proposed by James Banks (2017)*

Failed Citizenship	Citizens are denied full access to the rights, resources, and opportunities available to the dominant groups in a society.
Recognized Citizenship	Citizens have legal rights and status but lack social and economic power.
Participatory Citizenship	Citizens can actively engage in the civic affairs and social life of the community at local, state, and national levels.
Transformative Citizenship	Citizens who critically analyses and challenges social structures and seeks to address the root causes of social problems.

Note. Reprinted from *Failed Citizenship and Transformative Civic Education* (p. 367), by J. A.

Banks, 2017. Copyright 2017 by J. A. Banks.

This framework serves as a valuable tool for evaluating the various methods through which individuals are included or excluded in terms of their complete engagement in the civic life of their nation-states. Banks (2017) emphasizes that these four categories can “overlap and are interrelated in a dynamic way” (p. 367). Furthermore, he contends that to attain transformative citizenship, it is crucial to recognize both students’ cultural heritage and national principles.

While Banks’s *Dimensions of Multicultural Education* focuses on creating equal educational opportunities for all students through the implementation of multicultural education programs, the *Citizenship Typology* focuses on understanding the levels of citizenship and civic participation of individuals from diverse groups. Both frameworks share a common goal of promoting inclusion and equity for individuals from diverse groups. However, they approach this goal from different angles and with different tools.

2. 3. 2. 2 Impacts and Challenges

Multiple empirical studies have supported the potential of multicultural education. Verkuyten and Thijs (2013) conducted a study in twenty-six primary schools in the Netherlands to examine the effects of multicultural education on inter-ethnic attitudes. The study concluded that multicultural education could improve intergroup relations by enhancing children’s awareness and appreciation of cultural differences. Likewise, Al Sadi and Basit’s (2012) analysis of the impact of a school-based intervention on 10th grade Omani students’ religious tolerance found a notable improvement in the students’ tolerance levels towards their peer with differing religious beliefs. A study by Chung (2019) revealed that multicultural education has a positive effect on students’ academic performance, social skills, and civic engagement. The study also found that multicultural education increased students’ appreciation of their own and others’ cultures, as well as their sense of belonging and responsibility to their communities. The mentioned studies demonstrate the potential of multicultural education to enhance intergroup relations, promote religious tolerance, and foster a sense of belonging within diverse communities.

Research involving educators also yields promising results. Vervaeet et al. (2018) investigates the concept of “multicultural teacher culture”, which refers to teachers’ positive intercultural attitudes as they incorporate multicultural teaching practices into their classrooms. Their

study found that a stronger multicultural teacher culture correlated with reduced ethnic prejudice among students, thereby reinforcing the case for multicultural education. In a study by Choi and Lee (2020), the impacts of professional development in multicultural education on teacher self-efficacy were explored across secondary schools in the United States and South Korea. The study's findings indicated that providing teachers with multicultural education training improved their confidence in teaching diverse students, while also contributing to the establishment of a more supportive school culture. These findings point to the necessity for additional professional development and support for educators to effectively implement multicultural education.

Nevertheless, despite its potential benefits, multicultural education has encountered substantial challenges. Nieto (2017) emphasizes that “backlash and controversy have followed multicultural education from its very beginnings” (p. 2), primarily because it confronts racism and biases within the curriculum and questions “*how* education was done, and *who* benefited, and *why*” (p. 3). In the United States, multicultural education has faced opposition from groups across the ideological spectrum, both conservative and progressive (Banks, 2006; Nieto, 2009). The conservative group, which comprises a significant portion of critics, consistently condemns multicultural education for fostering division rather than fostering a shared cultural identity. On the other hand, progressive voices contend that the movement has not been sufficiently radical in reshaping the system or addressing core power imbalances. Nieto (2009) argues that despite the evolution of multicultural education over time, marginalized students continue to be excluded from equitable education due to their cultural differences. Gollnick and Chinn (2017) point out that the limitations of multicultural education in addressing these concerns have spurred the development of alternative theories within the movement. These theories encompass critical pedagogy, antiracist education, and critical race theory.

A recurrent theme in studies addressing challenges related to implementation of multicultural education is the persistent ambiguity surrounding its definition. In a comprehensive review spanning eighteen years of multicultural education in China, Liu et al. (2020) discovered that “theorists and educators continue to interpret multicultural education differently, resulting in conceptual vagueness and confusion” (p. 280). This sentiment was echoed by Watkins and Noble (2021) in their ethnographic study on multicultural education in Australian schools. The lack of a clear understanding regarding the essence of multicultural education led to

variations in how teachers comprehend and apply the concept. Watkins and Noble (2021) argue that this was caused by the absence of a unified public language on multiculturalism and multicultural education, despite the existence of multicultural policies in Australia for over four decades.

Another prevalent challenge in the implementation of multicultural education is the disconnect between theoretical principles and practical application. Nieto et al. (2008) assert:

the political and transformative theories of multicultural education have often been neglected when translated into practice. As a result, even though multicultural education has made an important contribution to schools and communities, few long-term institutional changes have taken root. (p. 178)

The statement underscores the central challenge: the impediment in effectively translating theory into practice, which has obstructed the creation of enduring institutional transformations. Similarly, Liu et al. (2020) illuminate that there is a “significant gap between the fruitful theory progress and the limited educational practice in the multicultural education” (p. 280). Ladson-Billings (2014) highlights that numerous educators striving to embrace culturally relevant pedagogy often possess “limited and superficial notions of culture” and thus form “a static conception of what it means to be culturally relevant” (p. 77).

This leads to the next significant challenge: the lack of teacher preparation. This is evident in a review of diverse practices of multicultural education at university levels in the United States by Peters-Davis and Shultz (2016). The study revealed that the insufficiency of teacher preparation and professional development often leaves educators without the essential knowledge and skills required for effective multicultural education. Teacher preparation programs may overlook matters concerning multicultural education, leaving educators ill-equipped to address the diverse needs of their students. Additionally, teachers may feel unsupported due to insufficient resources and materials.

Several empirical research also reveal challenging findings regarding multicultural education, including the risk from multicultural practices to inadvertently contribute to exposure to Othering and resistance. This phenomenon was observed by D’hondt et al. (2021) in their study conducted within secondary schools in Belgium. Their research unveiled that students were more likely to report instances of ethnic discrimination by fellow students and teachers if the school employed a multicultural approach in their curriculum. This indicates that there

is a risk associated with multicultural education that it might intensify interethnic tensions rather than alleviating them. The use of multicultural materials could reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate cultural misunderstandings, leading the researchers to conclude that “the relationship between multicultural education and ethnic discrimination is complex” (p. 1235). Bekerman (2004) examined multicultural education in Cyprus, where the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities have been in conflict for decades. The study revealed that nationalist and ethnocentric discourses often prevailed, reinforcing prejudices against the other community. However, the research also uncovered instances of positive attitudes and expectations from teachers, parents, and students. Similarly, Hummelstedt’s doctoral research (2022) centred on multicultural education in Finland identified a tendency to acknowledge diversity while concurrently perpetuating the “Othering” of minority groups, especially immigrants and refugees. Hummelstedt (2022) advocates for a more holistic and transformative approach to multicultural education, emphasizing the necessity to reimagine and reform the concept to address these pressing challenges.

2. 3. 2. 3 Multicultural Education in Global Context

One of the significant developments of multicultural education is what Nieto (2009) calls “the globalization of the field”, propelled by the increasing diversity and immigration across nations. Banks (2013) also notes that “the global dimension of multicultural education is the field’s most notable recent focus” (p. 77). Several Asian countries have engaged in discussions about the necessity of multicultural education and have integrated its principles into their national curricula. Notable examples include Taiwan, Japan, and Korea, as highlighted by Kim (2020). In China, scholars from the field of ethnic minority education began incorporating multicultural education concepts from the early 2000s onwards. Liu et al. (2020) point out that the term “multicultural education” was officially included in China’s National Education Development plan in 2017. They argue that although Western conceptualization on multicultural education has been valuable, current debates from the field are still dominated by Eurocentric perspectives and thus limit “our understanding of how multicultural education intersects with the specific historical and socio-political factors in non-Western contexts” (Liu et al., 2020, p. 280). Two major publications from 2018 – the *Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education* (edited by James Banks) and the *Routledge International Handbook of Multicultural Education Research in Asia Pacific*

(edited by Yun-Kyung Cha, Seung-Hwan Ham, and Moosung Lee) – demonstrate how multicultural education and its principles and practice have spread and been adapted in various countries across the world. Each publication includes an entry about Indonesia.

A common thread through different conceptions of multicultural education, either in the United States or globally, including Asia, is that they share the common goal of transforming society through education (Yahya, 2021). This major goal is “to provide all students with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed to function within their community cultures, within the mainstream cultures, and within and across other ethnic cultures” (Banks, 2014, p. 4). Nieto and Bode (2018) call these skills “multicultural literacy” and consider them indispensable in today’s world, as vital as other types of literacy. Knowledge is central to multicultural literacy, but it is not sufficient to help children navigate their ways within a world of diversity, as knowledge has to come hand in hand with empathy that will motivate children to act (Banks, 2014).

2. 3. 2. 4 Multicultural Education in Indonesia

Numerous scholars have deliberated on the potential implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia, often converging on the notion that this pedagogical approach has gained importance, particularly following the collapse of the authoritarian regime in 1998. Raihani (2017) and Parker (2018) concur in their assertion that the urgency of implementing multicultural education has risen due to the growing influence of Islamic conservatism and fundamentalism, which poses a threat to the harmonious coexistence of Indonesia’s diverse cultural groups. Nevertheless, the existing literature and research concerning multicultural education in Indonesia have highlighted three pivotal issues that demand attention and discussion if the country is to officially adopt the approach. Firstly, there is an absence of clear governmental guidelines on the implementation of the concept. Secondly, there is a need to assess the compatibility of multicultural education within the Indonesian context, particularly considering the existence of the distinct ideologies of Pancasila and Islam. Thirdly and finally, there is a palpable tension between the aspirations for national unity and the recognition for cultural diversity. In the following, I will explore these three themes in more depth before presenting the potential for multicultural education in Indonesia.

Scholars contend that there exists significant potential for the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia through a range of policies. The key policy that serves as the focal point for scholars' arguments in favour of establishing a solid groundwork for multicultural education is the Education Act No 20/2003 (Baihaqi, 2021; Gunawan & Jaya, 2023; Raihani, 2017; Rosyad, 2020). Raihani (2017) emphasises that "although the Education Law of 2003 does not explicitly mandate a programme of multicultural education, there are strong indications in the law that suggest the importance of education that promotes diversity, tolerance and peace." (p. 1) One of the notable indicators is found in Chapter 3, Article 4, Clause 1, which declares: "Education is conducted democratically, equally and non-discriminatorily based on human rights, religious values, cultural values, and national pluralism" (Harjatanaya & Hoon, 2018, p. 1). Moreover, Jayadi et al. (2022) assert that a total of six state documents advocate the multicultural paradigm, spanning from the 1945 Constitution to various laws regulating higher education. Within these documents, Jayadi et al. (2022) have identified several core values of multicultural education, such as cultural preservation, social justice, and equality.

However, even though these policies appear to endorse the integration of multicultural education, the absence of explicit definitions or guidelines results in considerable leeway for sporadic interpretations and a lack of "consistent articulation in the implementation of multicultural education at the level of schools" (Raihani, 2017, p. 14). This discrepancy has led to inconsistencies between policies and actual practices, as schools and educators are compelled to navigate their own paths in incorporating the principles of multicultural education into their classrooms.

The second crucial challenge in implementing multicultural education in Indonesia revolves around the alignment of the concept with national ideologies and the significant role of religion within the Indonesian context. As highlighted by Asra (2019), "multicultural perspective is not something substantially new in Indonesia, as it has an indigenous principle of harmonious co-existence in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. However, multicultural education is a new concept" (p. 186). This statement is reinforced in the work of Sahal et al. (2018), who contend:

Multicultural education is relatively newly recognized as an approach that is considered necessary for heterogeneous Indonesian society, especially during the new

autonomy and decentralization period, a period in which Indonesia needs prudence not to fall into national disunity. (p. 116)

As I have outlined in the research context in Chapter One, Indonesia embraces the national motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which means Unity in Diversity. Azra's assertion implies that while multiculturalism aligns with the national motto, multicultural education presents an entirely novel concept that requires comprehension to fully harness its benefits within the Indonesian context. Azra contends that multicultural education acts as an augmentation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, furthering the shared objective of educating the nation about Indonesia's cultural diversity.

Concerning the role of Pancasila, the national philosophy remains the unifying force for the diverse cultural groups in Indonesia. Nevertheless, more than three decades of authoritarian rule (1966-1998) distorted the meaning of Pancasila, with it being manipulated to preserve the status quo and bolster the regime's authority. To rectify this, Azra (2019) calls for the rejuvenation and revitalisation of Pancasila by situating it within the context of multiculturalism and socializing it through the implementation of multicultural education.

Azra (2004) argues that despite being the world's most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia does not identify as an Islamic state. Instead, it adopts Pancasila as its foundational ideology, a stance that Azra regards as a catalyst for tolerance towards diversity: "Muslims' acceptance of Pancasila is no doubt one of the most important Indonesian Islamic roots of pluralism" (p. 49). He further explains that a substantial majority of Indonesian Muslims adhere to a moderate Islam that support democracy.

The pertinent question remains: Is multicultural education compatible with Islamic teachings? According to Rosyad (2020) and Azmi (2022), Islam and multicultural education share common values like justice, fairness, humanity, and the acknowledgment of cultural diversity. Baidhawiy (2007) maintains that "Islam has provided the basis for understanding pluralism and multiculturalism within its own teaching and values in the Qu'ran and Sunnah" (p. 22). Likewise, Gunawan and Jaya (2023) assert that Quran and Hadith endorse multicultural values like tolerance (*tasamuh*) and justice (*'adalah*), and that the teachings of the Prophet in Mecca and Medina exemplify the Islamic approach to multicultural education. Corroborating this view, Azra (2007) outlines five Islamic values in alignment with the tenets of multicultural education. The first is *tasamuh* or tolerance for differences, wherein education should foster respect for minority groups. The second is *wasathiyah*, meaning

moderate Islam, followed by the third value of *takriim*, emphasizing mutual respect particularly across diverse backgrounds. The fourth value is humanity, urging education to humanize individual. Lastly, the fifth Islamic value is *ilahiyah* or peace, emphasizing peace as the key to resolving tensions stemming from differences. The arguments presented by these scholars can establish a strong basis for embracing multicultural education within a predominantly Muslim society like Indonesia.

The third key issue in the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia revolves around the delicate balance between unity and diversity. Throughout the extended era of authoritarian rule (1966-1998), the prevailing narrative was one of assimilation, placing unity *above* diversity rather than embracing the national motto of unity *in* diversity (Hoon, 2017, emphasis added). This approach necessitated the sacrifice of diversity in favour of unity (Hoon, 2008; Raihani, 2014). Raihani (2017) elaborates that “the New Order’s policies on culture stressed uniformity in order to impose the country’s unity [...] practically neglected the growth of ethnic identities and diversity” (p. 589). One plausible explanation for this emphasis on unity during the New Order era is that the preceding regime, the Old Order (1945-1966), failed to effectively preserve national unity, bequeathing a “vulnerable Indonesia” to its successor (Raihani, 2017). As articulated by Parker (2003), the primary political agenda of the New Order was centred around “maintaining order – *stabilitas* [stability] and *aman* [security]” (p. 246).

Consequently, this ideology manifested in the classroom settings of the New Order era, where the focal point shifted towards cultivating national identity, often at the expense of acknowledging and embracing diversity. Baidhaway (2007) contends:

During the New Order era, education in Indonesia paid scant attention to how we appreciate and respect religious and cultural diversity. The trend was towards homogenization in the guise of national cultural protection, systematically introduced through education. (p. 18)

Parker (2018) emphasizes a similar argument:

Indonesia has always used its education system as a unifying force, to create patriotic citizens and inculcate each new generation with the ideology of national unity. The education system has been the most important state element in the construction of the

imagined community that is Indonesia and with the creation of “Unity in Diversity” under Pancasila. (p. 123)

The two statements illustrate how education in Indonesia has been utilised as an attempt to cultivate a sense of national unity among its young generation. This “homogenization” was instilled through civic education and religious education (Baidhawiy, 2007), wherein the curriculum served as an “indoctrination by the government to create loyal, nationalist citizens” (Raihani, 2014, p. 30). In line with this, Harjatanaya and Hoon (2020) assert that civic education during the New Order era transformed into “the government’s educational vehicle to disseminate this idea of monocultural national identity instead of a multicultural one” (p. 28).

Following the dissolution of the New Order regime in 1998 and the subsequent emergence of the discourse on multicultural education in Indonesia, a series of deliberate efforts by successive governments have been undertaken to integrate the concept diversity into the educational framework. Raihani (2017) notably posits that the educational landscape in Indonesia has undergone substantial transformations in the aftermath of the regime change and the reinstatement of democratic governance. In a similar vein, Baidhawiy (2007) and Rachmawati et al. (2014) emphasize the pivotal role of education in shaping Indonesia’s future, asserting that the nation’s trajectory hinges upon cultivating mutual understanding and embracing cultural diversity.

Nevertheless, while the advent of post-New Order governance marked a departure from previous dogmatic tendencies, traces of the former paradigm persist. This is observed by Parker (2018), who points out that successive governments in Indonesia have conveyed ambivalent messages regarding their stance on the management of ethnic and religious diversity. One example of this can be found within the religious education after the New Order, where the confessional mode of mono-religious instruction persists, promoting piety and morality instead of a comprehensive understanding of multiple faiths (Nurwanto & Cusack, 2017). Adding to this complexity, the principles of multicultural education have not been explicitly integrated into the Indonesian curriculum. The pivotal concepts encapsulated within multicultural education find themselves in a state of implicit presence rather than over inclusion (Harjatanaya & Hoon, 2020).

The palpable struggle to strike a delicate equilibrium between unity and diversity in Indonesia (Azra, 2019; Budiman, 2014), as I have discussed in the previous subsection on

Multiculturalism, serves as a tangible manifestation or a broader predicament encountered in various countries across the world. Banks (2020) contends that the historical role of citizenship education encompassed the cultivation of citizens who internalized and upheld national values, revered national heroes, and embraced glorified renditions of their country's history. However, this juxtaposition between an emphasis on nationalism and the forces of globalization has yielded educational complexities within schools, especially apparent when students hailing from minority cultural backgrounds find themselves relegated to the periphery and labelled as the "Other". Consequently, these marginalized students often accentuate their ethnic identities while nurturing feeble attachments to the nation state. To rectify this, Banks (2020) emphasizes a crucial departure from this traditional approach, positing that the contemporary purpose of citizenship education should no longer be centred on instilling nationalism. In light of an increasingly globalized world and the emergence of cosmopolitan identities, Banks advocates for a transformative multicultural education that aspires to achieve "a delicate balance of identifications" (p. 116). This nuanced perspective is summed up in Banks's (2020) assertion: "*Diversity and unity should coexist in a delicate balance in democratic multicultural nations*" (p. 114, emphasis original).

In what follows, I present an overview of the three key aspects in supporting children's positive cultural perspectives as conceptualised by Aboud (2009), starting with "the message": multicultural children's literature.

2. 4 The Texts

2. 4. 1 Defining Multicultural Children's Literature

"Multicultural children's literature can be situated in multiculturalism, the result of the civil rights movement, which touched many fields in an effort to give voice and equal rights to previously underrepresented people" (Gopalakhrisnan, 2011, p. 21).

As stated in the above quote, multicultural children's literature gained its footing during the Civil Rights movement in the United States. This was during the 1950s and 1960s when African-Americans protested against racial segregation and demanded equal rights. The movement comprised a variety of activism, including in children's publishing, which responded with a call for positive representations of Black people in children's stories. The

year 1965 became a critical milestone with the publication of Nancy Larrick's article "The All-White World of Children's Books" and the founding of the Council on Interracial Books for Children, which aimed "to promote a literature for children that better reflects the realities of a multicultural society" (Council, 1976, p. vii).

Rudine Sims Bishop, the leading scholar in multicultural children's literature, who proposed the famous metaphor of "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" (1990), regards this historical backdrop as "one of the most hopeful developments in children's literature" (2007, p. xiv). It is due to this context that Cai (2002) considers the growth of multicultural children's literature to be part of a political movement rather than a literary one: "It is a movement to claim space in literature and in education for the historically marginalized social groups, rather than to renovate the craft of literature itself" (p. xiii).

In her exhaustive history of multicultural children's literature in *The Horn Book*, Barbara Bader (2002, 2003a, 2003b) asserts that the dawn of multicultural children's literature can be traced back to the publication of books about school integration and African-American biographies in the 1960s. She points out that while the quality of the books was uninspired, their publication brought attention to the importance of Black representation in children's books and became a "revolutionary breakthrough" (2002, p. 673). Some of these early multicultural children's books focused on the colour-blind approach, with an emphasis on similarities rather than differences. As multicultural children's books increased, the inclusion of marginalised groups widened to other people of colour, such as Asian-Americans and Latinx Americans, as well as other marginalised groups, such as gays and lesbians (Bader, 2003a). The quality also improved, with more complex story and richer illustrations.

Today, multicultural children's literature is considered a valuable component of multicultural education that can potentially develop children's perspectives about their cultures and provide insights about other people's cultures (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Iwai, 2013). As part of the movement of multicultural education, multicultural children's literature has more of a pedagogical than a literary focus (Cai, 2002), which is to strive for the inclusion of marginalised cultural groups in the literary canon (Cai & Bishop, 1994). Scholars argue that multicultural texts play critical roles in helping children develop respect and understanding towards diversity (Bishop, 1990; Dressel, 2005). Bishop (2012) asserts that multicultural children's books offer aesthetic experiences and multiple perspectives that are imperative to equipping children "to function effectively in a pluralistic society and become advocates for

social justice” (p. 9). Gopalakhrisnan (2011) emphasizes the significance of multicultural literature to empower and give voice to the marginalised.

However, multicultural literature is complex and not always effective in achieving these goals (Cai & Bishop, 1994). I will elaborate on the issues and problems relevant to multicultural children’s literature after the next section, but first, I will explore the various definitions attributed to multicultural literature.

In his exhaustive review of various definitions of multicultural children’s literature, Cai argues that multicultural literature means “different things to different people” (2002, p. 3), and that it is critical to examine one’s choice of definition as it has implications for its use in education because “the definition of multicultural literature points to a direction for the choice and use of multicultural literature” (Cai, 2002, p. 3). Gopalakhrisnan (2011) defines multicultural children’s literature as literature “about groups who have been previously underrepresented and often marginalized by society as a whole” (p. 5). Yokota (1993) highlights the literary elements and emphasises that multicultural children’s literature is a “literature that represents any distinct cultural group through accurate portrayal and rich detail” (p. 157).

The contestation around the definition of multicultural texts seems to centre on the different interpretations of who is included in the *multi* in “multicultural”. Cai maintains that different definitions of multicultural children’s literature reveal its varying degrees of inclusion, from the lowest extent (stories that focus on one racial group) to the highest (literature that encompasses all marginalised and underrepresented groups from different aspects of cultural identity). Some scholars insist upon the importance of race and racial issues in multicultural literature (Harris, 1992; Bishop, 1994), while others call for an expanding representation that includes other cultural groups, such as religion (Hoosain & Salili, 2006).

The variation seems to centre around how different cultures are represented. Some books focus on one cultural group, and some others promote harmony through portrayals of interracial relations. In 1994, Cai and Bishop (1994) provide a taxonomy of multicultural children’s literature which consists of three kinds of cultural representations: world literature, cross-cultural literature (stories depicting intercultural relationships), and parallel cultural literature (stories focusing on a particular cultural group that has been marginalised or underrepresented). The extent to which the experience of marginalized groups is represented

is the focus of Bishop's analysis of 150 children's books about African-Americans published between 1965 and 1979. The result is a categorisation of multicultural children's literature that hones in on the cultural representation: from the melting pot, to the socially conscience, to the culturally conscious. Bishop's taxonomy has been applied by scholars looking at different cultural groups representations to assess their degrees of inclusion in literature (Botelho and Rudman, 2009; Cart & Jenkins, 2018; Chaudhri, 2017).

There have been other terms attributed to children's literature that is "multicultural" in nature, such as *diverse literature* (Thomas, 2016), *multiethnic literature* (Barker, 2010), *global literature* (Short, 2018), *international literature* (Yokota & Teale, 2017), and *inclusive literature* (Möller, 2020). While some scholars use these other terms interchangeably with multicultural children's literature – e.g., Jones and Petty (2018) explicitly mention that they use *multiethnic literature* to mean *multicultural literature* – some others use them to refer to *multicultural literature* but with a slight distinction or inclination. *Inclusive children's literature*, for example, seems to be the preferred term among scholars who focus on literature featuring LGBTQ+ groups (Ryan, 2021), while *global children's literature* is used to define "books set in global cultures outside the United States" (Short, 2018, p. 294) or "books that are *international* either by topic or origin of publication or author" (Lehman et al., 2010, p. 17, emphasis in original). Thomas (2016) points out that the shift in terminology from *multicultural* to *diverse children's literature* was made to acknowledge the intersectional dimensions of human identities, as the term *multicultural* was deemed lacking in its ability to include identities beyond race and ethnicity. However, she argues that *diverse children's literature* also "fails in our purportedly post-racial era to challenge White privilege and structures of race and power" (Thomas, 2016, p. 115).

For the purpose of my thesis, I choose the term *multicultural children's literature* to refer to "books that reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world" (Bishop, 1997, p. 3) and "a group of works used to break the monopoly of the mainstream culture and make the curriculum pluralistic" (Cai, 2002, p. 4). Following the arguments of Short and Fox (2003), who maintain that "the definition of multicultural literature has more to do with its ultimate purpose than with its literary characteristics" (p. 8), I consider stories that focus on the inclusion of underrepresented groups and that contest the mainstream narrative in children's stories as important in the context of Indonesia.

2. 4. 2 Key Issues

The political nature of multicultural texts has divided scholars in their discussions about these texts (Cai, 2002; Gopalakhrisnan, 2011). These debates are based on ideological differences among text creators, gatekeepers, and readers, as well as the different focuses on the texts, which may be on their literary, socio-political, or educational aspects. In this section, I review the key issues in research on multicultural children's literature that I consider relevant to my research.

2. 4. 2. 1 Cultural Authenticity and Stereotypes

As a significant aspect of a quality multicultural literature (Yokota, 1993), cultural authenticity is one of the most fiercely disputed issues in examining multicultural children's literature. *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature* (Fox & Short, 2003) provides a survey of the debates surrounding cultural authenticity in children's texts from various viewpoints, all arguing that the issue is complex yet pervasive. Ramsey (2009) points out that “[e]ven some popular award-winning picture books that have been hailed as ‘multicultural’ have misappropriated and misrepresented material from marginalized groups” (p. 229).

Yokota (1993) argues that cultural accuracy is an umbrella criterion for “richness of cultural details, authentic dialogue and relationships, in-depth treatment of cultural issues, and the inclusion of members of ‘minority groups’ for a purpose” (pp. 159-160). Calling for cultural authenticity to be considered an equally important criteria as literary excellence, Cai (2002) posits that a literature “should be rejected if it *seriously* violates the integrity of a culture” (p. 38, emphasis in original). The goal is to create culturally authentic materials for children that can provide vicarious experiences of different cultures and influence children's perspectives and attitudes living in culturally diverse world.

At the centre of the cultural authenticity debate is the question of insiders versus outsiders: Is it possible for someone outside the cultural group to write authentically about their story? Is there any risk of an insider writing cultural inaccuracies? The discussion seems to be basically about who has the rights to tell which stories. Cai (2002) warns that “[a]uthors of multicultural literature are acting as cultural messengers, but they may unconsciously impose

their cultural beliefs and values on the culture they try to recreate, exhibiting what Nodelman (1988) called ‘cultural arrogance.’” (p. 41) He further stresses that:

The subtleties and nuances of cultural beliefs and behaviors can be elusive to an outsider. In order to give authentic representation to an ethnic culture, an author must make the effort to enter the world of that culture, which cannot be entered simply on the wings of imagination, no matter how imaginative the author. Insiders who want to write about their own ethnic cultures have great advantages over outsiders, but they also need to observe and learn. An ethnic group's perspective is not inherited through genes, but acquired through direct and indirect experiences. (Cai, 2002, p. 42)

Yokota (1993) maintains that outsiders can write good multicultural children’s literature provided that they develop “sensitivity gained through extensive research and participation in cultural groups outside their own” (p. 159). Cai suggests that writers, illustrators, and publishers from the mainstream culture who are interested in writing about the minority cultures have to “closely examine the social effects their books have produced and listen attentively to criticism from the people whom they portray” (2002, p. 49).

Cultural authenticity is about how well an author represent the perspectives of the culture in the story, and the judge for that is the readers from the group (Bishop, 2003). Other scholars have supported this argument and contended that only the insiders from the culture that is presented in the texts can identify the authenticity of the story (Fox & Short, 2003; Yoo-Lee et al., 2014). Torres’s (2016) analysis of the depictions of Muslims in 56 picturebooks revealed that the vast majority of the books (90%) were written by “authors who are not adherents of the Islamic faith and are writing books for non-Muslim children” (p. 203). Torres argues for multicultural books that are written by and from the insiders’ perspective, quoting Uma Narayan, who dubs insider knowledge as *epistemic privilege*, the particular knowledge that can only be identified by cultural insiders. Zhang and Wang (2021) call this the “cultural insiders’ judgment” (p. 3) and argue that “culturally authentic elements in literature would fulfil the roles of cultural windows and mirrors for readers” (p. 4).

Bishop (2003) suggests that we reframe the debate of cultural authenticity that is often limited to the issues of insiders versus outsiders. She suggests that we critically rethink what we mean by cultural authenticity and acknowledge the challenges of writing about different cultures. We should examine the ideological stance that motivates the writer with the

following question: “Whose perspectives are privileged in the publishing of so-called multicultural children's literature?” (p. 35)

Cultural authenticity is closely related to the issue of stereotypes. Several studies that examine cultural authenticity in multicultural children's literature find the form of inauthenticity in the texts to be stereotypical images. Stereotyping has been a prominent issue since the early days of multicultural children's literature in the USA, when children's books were utilized as space for positive representations of Black characters to counter decades of harmful caricatures (Thomas, 2016). According to Cai (2002), stereotype refers to “an oversimplified generalization that trivializes individual differences and complexities” (p. 69). He further warns of the danger of stereotyping in children's books, as it “not only injure[s] dominated cultural groups mentally, but also breed[s] ignorance and prejudice in children of the mainstream culture” (2002, p. 71).

Research on cultural authenticity and stereotype seems to follow two strands: those that focus on investigating books for their negative stereotypes, and those that analyse and recommend multicultural children's literature considered to promote positive representations of cultural groups.

Zhang and Wang's analysis of 53 picturebooks depicting Chinese culture (2021) finds that “incorrect, stereotyped or outdated information” is pervasive despite the authentic portrayal of Chinese culture in some of the books. Some of the negative stereotypes found include “exaggerated depiction of certain Chinese/Asian physical traits” (p. 12). More recently, an analysis of three award-winning picturebooks featuring Muslim characters published in USA finds that the books depict the stereotype of female oppression/lacking agency and “perpetuate dominant curricular narratives through subtle idealizations of white Christian values and sustainment of Muslim stereotypes” (Liou & Cutler, 2021, p. 420).

In order to counter stereotypes, scholars have called for representation of cultural groups that is more nuanced and complex. One such study is by Wee et al. (2015), who analysed 33 picturebooks featuring Korean culture published in the United States between 1990 and 2012. They found that the way Korean culture is represented mostly focuses on food and festivals, limiting a thorough and nuanced portrayal of Koreans: “Accurate, in-depth information about contemporary life in Korea was lacking” (p. 83), while “[i]ntroducing Korean culture by stressing its differences and exotic aspects can prevent readers from understanding the real

lives of ordinary people in contemporary Korean society” (p. 84). This is what Cai (2002) refers to as “stereotypes as partial truth”: “The problem with stereotypes is that they present limited, partial truth as the whole truth” (p. 74).

Yoo-Lee et al. (2014) examined 45 picturebooks published from 2000-2009 featuring three ethnic groups in the United States: African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans. Nine reviewers from the groups that were represented in the texts conducted the content analysis. They revealed that the majority of the picturebooks examined were generally culturally authentic, but “various levels of stereotypical elements still exist in some text and illustrations” (Yoo-Lee et al., 2014, p. 342). Fifteen books (one third of total) about African-Americans were found to contain stereotypes such as “athleticism, rhythmic or musical attributes, lack of intelligence, poverty, loud or boisterous behavior, criminal elements, hostile attitudes, profound religious beliefs, loyalty to family, and dirty/filthy appearance or environment” (Yoo-Lee et al., 2014, p. 337). For the Asian-American representation, the books were considered to feature authentic depictions of the ethnic group, although “[s]tereotypes or subtle inaccuracies [...] are unavoidable” (Yoo-Lee et al., 2014, p. 338). The same applies to the Hispanic American books. “The factors identified by coders as ‘cultural authenticity’ were generally values, e.g., love of family, respect for elders, the value of hard work. These values are not as easily portrayed as stereotypes that can be pointed to and are generally depicted through text” (Yoo-Lee et al., 2014, p. 340).

In Torres’s (2016) previously mentioned study, the picturebooks analysed were informational rather than stories about Muslims’ lived experiences. There was a heavy focus on festivals (Eid al Fitr and Ramadan) and a lack of diversity within Islam itself:

Many of the informational books give no cultural identifying markers, such as where the characters live, or what ethnicity they might be. The result is a rather homogeneous vision of Islam that belies the diversity within the faith. [...] To be authentic, authors must go beyond surface elements of culture to include ways of thinking, values, beliefs, and norms of behavior. Given the complexity and diversity of experiences within any culture, it is difficult even for cultural insiders to agree on what is considered authentic, thus challenging authors in their efforts to portray a culture with truth and sensitivity, especially authors who were not raised within the worldview and constructs of a particular culture. (Torres, 2016, p. 203)

The findings show that some of the books present “a single generalized representation of Islamic life, and elements that contribute to the ‘othering’ and misrepresentation of Muslims”. However, there were also books “that portrayed positive, critically conscious images that provide a diverse view of Muslims, but not many” (Torres, 2016, p. 205).

Studies by Cook (2017) and Rodríguez (2018) examine representations of minority groups and demonstrate the importance of positive representations to counter stereotypes. Motivated by the constant negative stereotyping of Arabs in popular culture, Cook (2017) set out to introduce selected picturebooks and novels with positive portrayals of Arab characters. She argues that promoting multicultural books with positive representation is “a powerful act of resistance to pervasive negative stereotyping” (Cook, 2017, p. 161). Likewise, Rodríguez (2018) discusses a list of recommended children’s books featuring Asian-Americans that show them as active citizens who contribute to society. The list is meant to demonstrate a selection of multicultural stories about Asian-Americans with positive representation, as there are still contemporary children’s books that “maintain harmful stereotypes” (Rodríguez, 2018, p. 32) about the cultural group. These studies emphasise the urgency to examine multicultural books, as stories featuring marginalised social and cultural groups can carry harmful stereotypes.

2. 4. 2. 2 Ideology and Didacticism

Scholars such as Yoon et al. (2010) and Pesonen (2015) point out the importance of exploring ideology, particularly regarding cultural pluralism, in multicultural children’s literature. It is critical to investigate how diversity is presented in children’s books as they might perpetuate the marginalisation of social and cultural groups that are considered different (Pesonen, 2015). These types of books might promote the ideology of assimilation as a solution to differences in the society. As Yokota (2009) observes, there are children’s books that promote “misguided beliefs about cultural assimilation” and “the idea that we should be proud when we can ‘blend in’ with others” (p. 16). This, argues Yokota, does not encourage positive attitudes about cultural diversity.

Yoon et al. (2010) argue for analysing multicultural texts to reveal whether the ideology embedded in the texts promotes assimilation or cultural pluralism. They warn that “certain multicultural texts deliver the messages of underrepresented groups’ assimilation into a mainstream culture, which is implicitly described as superior” (p. 110). When multicultural

literature promotes assimilation, minority groups are encouraged to conform to the dominant cultural norm. In Yoon et al.'s examination of a set of multicultural picturebooks published in the US, the researchers found that several books about immigrant children adjusting to life and school in their new homes in the US show the characters assimilating into the mainstream culture in order to be accepted by their peers and teachers. Even when the cultural references of the immigrants are mentioned and recognised, they are not used to support the view of cultural diversity because the peers and teachers do not display interest in the immigrants' cultural backgrounds. What the books communicate is that the assimilation of immigrants into the mainstream norm is highly valued and can be the measure of success and achievement for minority groups. Multicultural literature that promotes assimilation contradicts the goal of multicultural literature, which is to advocate for cultural diversity rather than monoculturalism (Nieto & Bode, 2018).

In addition to the ideology of the texts, Ramsey (2004) points out that didacticism in multicultural children's literature needs to be examined. She argues that strong political messages that carry a heavy "dogmatic tone" (p. 39) would not be appealing to children. Other scholars (Pesonen, 2015; Pinsent, 2016) contend that strong emphasis on didacticism in multicultural texts can become counterproductive to the purpose of the texts. In her analysis of multiculturalism in contemporary Finnish picturebooks, Pesonen (2015) finds that didacticism in multicultural texts can impede the objective of conveying an anti-racist message. Pesonen (2015) argues that "even well-intended didacticism can lead to patronising representations of 'others' if the morality is strongly underlined in the texts" (p. 98). She suggests that "more subtle ways of presenting differences are needed" when it comes to multicultural texts. (p. 100) Likewise, Pinsent (2016) warns that "messages about anti-racism and cultural differences are most effective if conveyed incidentally rather than in a blatantly didactic manner" (p. 156).

In this section, I have explored the contested definitions of multicultural children's literature and argued for the one I use for this research. I have also identified the important issues to examine from this type of literature. Next, I bring the focus to the readers of multicultural texts – "the children".

2. 5 The Readers

2. 5. 1 Readers and Multicultural Texts

“While the educative potential of literature is considerable, it relies on the meeting of minds” (Naidoo, 1992, p. 138).

Scholars have argued that bringing multicultural literature into the classrooms is not enough, as the transformation does not take place by merely reading it (Desai, 1997; Colby & Lyon, 2004; Cuperman, 2013). Cai (2002) asserts that to ensure we reap the benefits of multicultural literature, it is critical to understand not only the literature itself, but also how children respond to the texts. The argument dates to Rosenblatt’s transactional theory (1995), which holds that meaning is constructed through transaction between texts and readers, resulting in multiple readings and interpretations. The essay collection *Reading Across Cultures: Teaching Literature in a Diverse Society* (Rogers & Soter, 1997) aims to argue this by calling for the need “to move beyond simple assumptions about the value of multicultural literature” and pay more attention to “the ways readers respond to that literature” (p. 8).

Reader response is considered a suitable pedagogical strategy for tapping into the potential of multicultural texts, as it can encourage students to “recognize the specificity of their own cultural backgrounds and strive to understand the cultural backgrounds of others” (Glazier & Seo, 2005, p. 689). However, the nature of reader response to multicultural texts is “complex and multidimensional” (Cai, 2002, p. 171) and the relations between texts and readers are not straightforward (Cuperman, 2013). As has been discussed in the previous section on educational intervention using multicultural content, either the intended purpose does not always yield the expected outcome, or the “result” itself can be difficult to measure. Readers come to texts bringing their own diverse backgrounds, which can complicate the understanding of meaning construction as there is no one-size-fits-all strategy when it comes to reading and responding to multicultural texts.

In an attempt to determine the key aspects in reader response to multicultural texts, Cai (2002) proposes a multidimensional model that identifies three areas: cognitive-developmental, affective-attitudinal, and social-communal. The cognitive dimension focuses on the role of readers’ cultural backgrounds and their comprehension or interpretation of multicultural texts. The affective dimension is concerned with readers’ attitudes towards

multicultural texts, whether they demonstrate preference, resistance, engagement, or disengagement. The third dimension, the social-communal, deals with the influence of negotiation and interaction among readers, as well as the role of social contexts in readers' responses. Cai's multidimensional model does highlight the complexity of reader responses to multicultural literature and can be helpful in mapping out prior research or directing the course of future research. However, my observation of the model shows that there are some aspects that are left out or might not correspond to any of the three dimensions, such as the role of gatekeepers and readers' identity. It is also very rare to find a study that cover all three dimensions, and scholars generally have to limit the study to certain aspects to make sense of students' interactions with multicultural stories. That is why calls for more research on this issue has been put forward (Short & Fox, 2003; Short & Thomas, 2011).

In the following, I summarise and review prior research on reader response and multicultural literature.

2. 5. 2 Reader Response to Multicultural Children's Literature

Desai (1997) reviews research on reader response to multicultural literature and maps three areas. The first area is studies that look at how literature impacts children's cross-cultural attitudes and knowledge. Desai claims that these studies were the dominant trend during the 1960s and 1970s. The second area covers studies on reader response to culturally diverse literature, with a variety of research methodologies. These studies began at the end of 1970s and continued up to the time of Desai's publication in 1997. The third area looks at reader response through the lens of literary theory, focusing on how culture might impact meaning construction. Desai's review suggests how vast and varied the studies of reader response to multicultural literature can be. There are so many paths one can choose, depending on their context and goals.

A review of the research related to children as readers of multicultural stories identifies several key themes which I group into the following four categories: potential, resistance, critical dialogue, and safe space for multiple perspectives.

2. 5. 2. 1 Potential

There have been extensive studies on the application of multicultural literature that suggest its various areas of potential for children and young people. The majority of these studies are conducted within classroom settings and done by either the teachers or by researchers who work together with the teachers.

One of the earliest empirical studies to explore how multicultural texts can be used to support anti-racist education in school was carried out by Beverley Naidoo (1992). Naidoo's project involved 13- to 14-year-old Caucasian students in a secondary school in the UK. With the English teacher, Naidoo designed a year-long unit of reading multicultural literature (in Naidoo's terms, "culturally diverse novels") and responding through various activities, from book discussions, to writing journals, to performing drama. The unit had three objectives: extension of empathy, challenging of racist notions, and development of critical thinking. As the sessions involving the culturally diverse novels progressed, Naidoo observed that the students' initial perceptions on race were challenged and they demonstrated some empathy towards people of colour. However, Naidoo noted that the third goal – developing critical thinking – became the most challenging to achieve as students often showed defensive attitudes when the teacher encouraged them to examine the connection between the racial issues they encountered in the stories and what happened in society. Despite this limitation, Naidoo concludes that "it was evident that some students had moved forward in their thinking" (p. 141) and that multicultural texts can raise students' awareness of issues of race and discrimination.

Another study that examines reader response to multicultural literature focuses on the readers' aesthetic involvement and how this aspect might influence their understanding of the texts. In Altieri's study (1996), the researcher visited elementary and secondary students representing diverse cultural backgrounds in the US and read them short stories about various cultures. Afterwards, the students were asked to write any responses they had to the stories. These written responses were then analysed according to the six levels of aesthetic involvement developed by the researcher. The levels go from "little or no presence of story experience" to "highly inventive and mature presence of aesthetic elements which enhance the personal significance of the story experience" (p. 240). The findings suggest that students demonstrate aesthetic involvement even when the culture portrayed in the stories is different from their own background. The research further concludes that the students' aesthetic

transactions with the texts support their understanding and enable them to have “a rich literary experience” (p. 245).

When Macphee (1997) conducted a read-aloud of several multicultural picturebooks featuring African-American characters to 31 first graders of European American heritage, she reported what she called “encouraging responses”. During the reading sessions, Macphee encouraged the children’s responses through discussions and drawing activities. She observed that they demonstrated “a sensitivity for the feelings and actions of groups they seldom interact with or even think about” (p. 39). Hearing the stories about the struggles of a different cultural group encouraged the students to be more aware of “the diversity of human experience” (p. 39). The students also “picked up on the ramifications of racial discrimination and voiced their opinions” (p. 35), calling out unjust situations and discussing them with their friends. This led Macphee to conclude that issues of diversity were not too complex for young children, and that multicultural books could be the space for vicarious explorations of difference.

A study with younger children indicates an encouraging potential of multicultural texts. Chen and Browne (2015) implemented an interactive read-aloud of picturebooks representing diverse cultural representations to children aged three to five. As the students were invited to respond during the interactive read-aloud sessions, they were reported to demonstrate high levels of engagement with the stories and make personal connections to the “cultural moments and differences” presented in the texts (Chen & Browne, 2015, p. 24). Although the researchers admit that due to their young age, the children in their study tended to make more personal than critical responses, they conclude that “[e]arly exposure to quality multicultural literature can impact young children’s views” (p. 24) and support the development of awareness of cultural diversity.

A group of teachers and teacher educators from the United States applied a series of lessons incorporating two sets of picturebooks that they titled “The Cultural Identity Text Set” and “The Taking Action Text Set” (Martens et al., 2015) with students aged four to six. The Cultural Identity Text Set comprises books that invite the students to reflect on themselves as “cultural beings” and understand “the complexities in people and cultures” (p. 613), such as *Suki’s Kimono* by Chieri Uegaki (2015) and *My Name is Sangoel* by Karen Williams and Khadra Mohammed (2009). The teachers in the study chose any titles from the text set to read with their students, then asked the students to respond orally in book discussions and

through an art activity called “cultural x-rays” to encourage them to reflect “on the complexities of people and cultures” (p. 613). Meanwhile, the Taking Action Text Set consisted of books that show the characters taking initiatives to bring about change. Examples of picturebooks included this list are *Because Amelia Smiled* by David Ezra Stein (2012) and *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson (2012). As the teachers read the texts to their students, they conducted discussions about what it means to take action and the various ways they can do it. The teachers reported that the text sets were helpful for them to engage students in discussions and support “deeper understandings on cultural identity and taking action related to global issues” (Martens et al., 2015, p. 616).

The potential of multicultural texts has also been explored with bilingual readers by relating it to their cultural contexts, as presented in a study by Kim et al. (2019). Their study explores how six bilingual Korean children in the United States responded to 12 multicultural books written in either Korean or English. All these books dealt with racial or ethnic diversity issues. While reading the books, the children socially interacted with each other to make predictions, validating each other's predictions and creating new ones, often relating to issues of race, equity, and multiculturalism. The children's creative participation through social interactions was particularly evident on certain occasions, such as when they predicted the story before reading, when they tried to fill the textual gaps while reading, and when they personalized the story and identified themselves with the characters. The researchers concluded that read-alouds, where students are encouraged to participate creatively by making different predictions about the story, can act as “a powerful tool to help these young bilinguals engage in the topics of diversity, social justice, and equity embedded in multicultural books” (Kim et al., 2019, p. 6). The study also brought upon the important role of teachers in facilitating the use of multicultural texts, which I will discuss further in the next sub-section on teachers.

Thein et al. (2007) assert that more in-depth exploration of multicultural texts is possible with older children. Their study argues that multicultural texts offer the opportunity to provide students with alternative perspectives and develop perspective-taking, an important skill in interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. To explore this potential, the researchers asked a group of eleventh and twelfth graders to read multicultural novels written by cultural insiders, such as Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1993). They designed pedagogical strategies involving writing, drama, and

performance activities to help students develop perspective-taking and “acknowledge, respect, understand, and possibly still disagree with alternative perspectives” (p. 59). Thein et al. (2007) note that multicultural literature can potentially offer opportunities for perspective-taking, wherein students see the possibilities of alternative perspectives and recognise the diversity of these perspectives in the world, “even if they choose not to agree with those perspectives” (p. 55). The researchers advise that teachers should not aim for students to “make major changes in *what* they believe or value”. Instead, they suggest the goal should be to use multicultural picturebooks to help students “increase their understandings of *how* their beliefs and values are formed and *why* other people think differently” (Thein et al., 2007, p. 55, emphasis in original).

In addition to perspective-taking, empathy is considered to be a potential that can be supported through exposure to multicultural literature. However, fostering empathy for characters with different beliefs and values and who come from unfamiliar contexts can be challenging. In her study, Louie (2005) attempts to resolve this by pairing a multicultural text with non-fiction resources. The rationale behind the strategy is that students’ limited background knowledge on the context of the story might hinder their capacity to “adopt a character-centred perspective” (p. 567) that can help them empathise with the characters. In the study, a class of secondary students in a school the United States were asked to read a novella about the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1966. Anticipating their lack of prior knowledge, the class teacher assigned an accompanying book to aid with contextual information on the historical and cultural contexts. The students were asked to do a series of assignments as their responses: discussions, journals, essays, and posters. These assignments were then analysed for expressions of empathy. Louie (2005) concludes that the students showed enthusiasm in learning about the sociohistorical context which allowed them to understand the characters’ world, and they demonstrated different forms of empathy: cognitive, historical, parallel emotional, reactive emotional, and cross-cultural. She posits that providing contextual information can be effective in supporting empathy in reading multicultural texts, as the students are better able to “assume the literary characters’ positions, which reflected the characters’ sociopolitical background, their cultural norms, and their social values” (Louie, 2005, p. 577).

In another study exploring the possibility of empathy, Newstreet et al. (2019) suggests that introducing stories depicting the experiences and struggles faced by Muslims might help

develop empathy towards the religious group and tackle the growing Islamophobia in the United States. For the study, the researchers compiled a text set featuring 30 picturebooks representing Muslim characters and depicting their various realities, such as the experiences of Muslim refugees and immigrants as they adjust to life in new countries. These picturebooks were used in interactive read-aloud sessions in a classroom of sixth graders who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. With the researchers, the class teacher facilitated a set of response-inviting activities aimed at encouraging inquiry and exploring multiple perspectives, such as conducting research on the Internet, constructing a “character concept map” to identify characters’ traits and complex identities, and writing journals from different perspectives. They noted that “efforts to foster empathy in students can also include discussions of discriminatory experiences among the marginalized” (Newstreet et al., p. 564). Furthermore, the researchers devised a pen pal programme with students in a primary school in Bangladesh. The study reports that their exposure to the multicultural picturebooks and the response-inviting activities encouraged the growth of empathy in the students, which was “evident in the letters they wrote to their pen pals in the rural Bangladeshi primary school” (Newstreet et al., p. 561). However, the report does not mention exactly how empathy manifested in the students’ responses or their letters, as there are no excerpts provided.

The empirical studies reviewed in this sub-section suggest that there is much hope placed on the potential of multicultural literature; however, reaping the benefits of this type of text requires more than just reading the texts. As demonstrated by the variety of strategies employed by the teachers and researchers, the key question of *how* multicultural texts should be used with children and young people seems to underlie these studies.

2. 5. 2. 2 Discussion as a Safe Space

Many studies on multicultural literature advocate discussions as a particularly valuable way of using such texts with young people. Short (2010) argues that discussing multicultural texts not only “provides a means for readers to not merely ‘look in on others’ lives, but more importantly, to critique and inquire into their own world views, cultural values and possible biases” (p. 53).

Discussion was the primary method used to explore six multicultural picturebooks with Mexican-American third-graders in Lohfink and Loya’s study (2010) because it “encourages

students to think and learn together” (p. 359). After selecting a set of picturebooks that could reflect the students’ cultural backgrounds, the researchers conducted read-aloud sessions and invited the third-graders for a whole class discussion. To increase engagement with the texts, they applied “a partnership model of literature collaboration” (Lohfink & Loya, 2010, p. 352) in which the teachers prompted the students to respond by asking open-ended questions. This approach was considered effective in supporting the students’ engagement and they were found to be “more likely to share openly with others” (Lohfink & Loya, 2010, p. 360).

DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) put forward an argument for literature circles as the best method for exploring multicultural literature in a fourth-grade classroom with diverse ethnic backgrounds. In their study, the researchers worked with the English teacher to construct a lesson plan using student-led literature circles as they read and discussed the novel *Felita* by Nicholasa Mohr (1979). The novel was selected as it was a culturally specific book about the Puerto Ricans, which was the shared culture with majority of the students. Throughout the literature circles, the researchers observed how negotiations of meaning took place as the students “support[ed] one another in the development of critical lens” (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006, p. 168) and built collective understanding.

Researchers have also highlighted the role of the discussions as providing safe spaces for children to talk about what might be uncomfortable but important issues. When Enciso (1994) conducted a study with fourth- and fifth-graders who met over a period of one month to read and discuss a multicultural text titled *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli (1990), she wanted to emphasise the importance of welcoming different interpretations as valid responses. The discussion time with the students opened up spaces for personal responses and exploration of identities, allowing for more in-depth discussions on race and injustice.

Likewise, Copenhaver-Johnson's study (2006) with first-grade classrooms suggests that discussions can serve as the space to talk openly about multicultural issues such as race. The teachers found that majority of their Caucasian students tended to be reluctant to talk about racial issues. After reading multicultural picturebooks like *White Socks Only* by Evelyn Coleman (1996) and *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles (1995), the teachers encouraged discussions in which the students were invited to “voice wonderings and respond to each other about those wonderings” (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006, p. 18, emphasis in original). With the picturebooks serving as springboards, the teachers noted that discussion time allowed the first-graders to speak openly about race and enquire further about the issue.

Reporting on her study with pre-kindergarten classes in Colombia, Cuperman (2013) argues that the classroom environment often pressures students to be more refrained from participating. She argues that creating a non-judgmental environment could encourage more spontaneous and honest responses from students, including when it comes to cultural perceptions. In Cuperman's study, the teacher read three multicultural picturebooks aloud and initiated a class discussion. She played the role of a "Fellow Wonderer" and provided the children with opportunities to express their thoughts. Responses regarding negative stereotypes surrounding Afro hair came up in the discussions, and the teacher used the opportunity to talk about it with the students. Cuperman (2013) concludes that when "the students feel secure and calm, reader responses carry honest and true beliefs" (p. 137). This is in accordance with a much earlier study by Naidoo (1992) mentioned in the sub-section on the potential of multicultural literature. She points out that there should be "a trusting and supportive atmosphere" for students as they respond to what they read, otherwise "students will merely become defensive" (Naidoo, 1992, p. 146).

Working with bilingual immigrant children in the United States, Son (2022) found that a multicultural book club could function as a space for young people to speak up about their struggles. As the Asian-American primary school students in Son's study read multicultural picturebooks depicting their cultural group, they were encouraged to make connections between what they read in multicultural picturebooks and their experiences. The book club became "the space to reveal the marginalised experience and talk about different thoughts and ideas" (Son, 2022, p. 12) as the students discussed how to resolve their struggles.

2. 5. 2. 3 Resistance

Although scholars and practitioners have hoped multicultural literature would open up opportunities to learn about diversity and develop understanding of different cultural groups, some studies suggest that the students' responses can go in the opposite direction. As Cai (2008) points out, reading and responding to multicultural texts could risk opening "a Pandora's Box of misunderstandings, stereotypical perceptions, biases, and prejudices" (p. 212). Reading multicultural literature, argues Center (2005), might create challenges for children and young people because they "are asked to encounter strangers and strange experiences in their reading with no help in how to respond" (p. 226).

In their study with secondary students from various ethnic backgrounds in the United States, Jordan and Purves (1993) asked them to read a selection of multicultural novels and write down their thoughts about the stories. They were also interviewed before and after reading. As the researchers went through the students' writings and interview transcripts, they found that some of the students' responses showed their resistance to the multicultural content in the texts, which they perceived as "alien" and presenting "points of view that they [were] unfamiliar with" (Jordan & Purves, 1993, p. 10). Center's analysis (2005) of a compilation of written responses from her college students as they were asked to read multiethnic memoirs reveals that readers demonstrated various negative responses, from seeing the cultural differences in the texts as "incomprehensible Others" (p. 226) to valuing their own culture as the norm. These responses led Center to conclude that "[a]n engagement with multiethnic literature challenges that assumption of normality in ways that are productively disorienting" (2005, p. 228). These findings from Jordan and Purves (1993) and Center (2005) suggest that multicultural texts might be rejected by readers when they perceive the cultural aspects and values in the texts as very different from their own.

Some scholars argue that resistance to multicultural texts is caused by readers' tendency to read "egocentrically" (Cai, 2002; Dressel, 2003). Readers from the mainstream culture, for example, might assess a different culture they encounter in the texts through the lens of their own culture. In Dressel's study (2005), which involved eighth-graders reading multicultural novels, resistance to the values represented in the texts led to difficulty moving beyond aesthetical responses and reading against the text. Dressel points out that "[w]hen the ideas offered in the novels conflicted with their own cultural and social experiences, [...] students either rejected the text material or reshaped it, resulting in inconsistencies or illogical conclusions" (2005, p. 759). Cai (2002) maintains that "resistance to multicultural literature may stem from various causes and take different forms" (p. 164). Resistance can take place when the cultures reflected in the texts come from the same cultural background as the readers, but the readers consider the texts to misrepresent their experiences. Cai argues that readers' resistance towards multicultural literature is both complex and sensitive, and "reflects conflicts of ideological and political positions" (2002, p. 164).

Beach (1997) focuses on the complexity of resistance as he reviews his prior study with students from three secondary schools who read and responded to two short stories about African-Americans. Throughout the discussions of the stories, he identifies several forms of

resistance to multicultural literature demonstrated by his participants. The various resisting stances are rejection to challenges to White supremacy, denial of racial difference, voyeuristic interest in the Other, and reluctance to accept different cultural perspectives. Beach (1997) observes that the resistance to engagement to multicultural literature takes place due to the readers' stances, or the "subject positions" which readers bring to the texts. Beach (1997) argues that there is a need for an open discussion about how readers' perspectives are shaped but also limited by their backgrounds, before they can break down their attitudes and take up "transformational perspective" (p. 83). Similarly, Center (2005) recommends that when students demonstrate resistance to multicultural texts, teachers can "help students acknowledge their disorientation and their impulse to back away" (p. 227).

DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) maintain that readers' disorientation is necessary in order to allow for what they call *critical encounters* to take place. They define critical encounters as the moments in reading when "a word, concept, or event in a story surprises, shocks, or frightens the reader or readers to such a degree that they seek to inquire further about the vocabulary or event selected by the author" (p. 157). According to DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006), critical encounters are "pivotal moments that have transformative possibilities for student discussion and learning" (p. 157). They argue that it is important for students to be provided with opportunities to "delve into uncomfortable issues, share their confusions and concerns, question the author's perspective, and figure out collaboratively what perspectives make sense to them" (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006, p. 168).

2. 5. 2. 4 Perspective Change

Achieving critical thinking that challenges one's own perspective seems to be the biggest challenge in reading multicultural literature. As mentioned previously, Naidoo's study (1992) was unsuccessful in developing the participants' critical thinking regarding perspectives on issues of race and discrimination. More recently, a study by Short and Thomas (2011) affirms that while developing a critical stance in reading multicultural children's literature is essential, it remains a huge challenge for educators. In their study, students in a primary school with a diverse student demography found it difficult to adopt a critical stance as they read and responded to multicultural literature. The students were unable to move beyond commenting on the stories towards challenging their own assumptions. Short and Thomas's

work (2011) highlights the challenge of bringing multicultural literature to children, in terms of navigating children's engagement with texts about unfamiliar cultures. They argue that the challenges faced by teachers are finding ways to support children's engagement with multicultural texts that present experiences from people who are very different from the children's own backgrounds. They warn that children might consider what they encounter in multicultural texts as "exotic" and may not relate to the story or the people represented, resulting in resistance and confusion (Short, 2010; Short & Thomas, 2011).

Hayik's study (2015) is rare in that it involves empirical research of multicultural literature with a focus on religious diversity. She was a teacher and researcher, with young people aged 14 to 15 as her students, 10 of whom became the study participants. Motivated by ongoing conflicts between Muslims and Christians in her village in Israel, Hayik observed that her students did not mingle across religious groups during recess. Furthermore, she found a lack of representations of religious diversity in the school textbooks. Hayik designed a six-week unit with multicultural picturebooks for her EFL classroom. The students engaged with the texts through various responding activities, from sharing photographs of their religious traditions to creating slogans to promote tolerance and peace. Analysing the data through Luke and Freebody's four-resources model of critical literacy, Hayik (2015) concludes that challenging "deeply-rooted religious problems" is more complicated than she had assumed. She reflects that even though her intervention using multicultural texts might have prompted some feelings and thoughts within her students, "the visible and heard responses they produced did not reflect much change in their views towards religious diversity issues" (Hayik, 2015, p. 104).

I have reviewed the key issues from empirical research involving readers as they read and respond to multicultural literature. The overview in this section indicates the complexities in the relations between readers and multicultural literature, depending heavily on contexts, readers' backgrounds, and strategies. Educators are mentioned as being important in many of the studies discussed in this section with regards to the use of multicultural literature with children, and this is my focus for the next section: "the socializer".

2. 6 The Teachers

2. 6. 1 Teachers' Roles in Multicultural Education

The argument for involving teachers in research with multicultural texts and children goes back to the principles of multicultural education, which sees the teacher's role as prominent in a multicultural society (Convertino et al., 2016). As diversity becomes a more common aspect of the world, scholars have argued that teachers' work becomes more critical and complex because more than ever, children need to be equipped with the skills to live in a multicultural society.

Naidoo (1992) stresses that the role of teachers in addressing racism is "one both of support and challenge" (p. 146) as teachers are needed to be seen as trustworthy by students to open up to and learn from, but also to help students see different perspectives and challenge their biases. Naidoo further elaborates the difficult but important role of teachers to target students both cognitively and affectively, their "heart as well as head" (1992, p. 146), when it comes to issues of diversity, prejudice, and racism. She notes they have to be role models themselves of the multicultural values they want to promote, from tolerance to open-mindedness to fighting for equality.

Other important roles of teachers are identified in the existing literature. In his study of students' various forms of resistance to multicultural texts, Beach (1997) emphasises that teachers need to encourage students to move beyond this resistance by empathising with characters from different cultures and examining their own assumptions. Long's observation of a group of students reading and discussing multicultural texts with their teachers (2012) concludes that teachers play significant roles in encouraging their students to welcome multiple perspectives. When the students showed negative perspectives towards the characters, the teachers tried to provide additional perspectives from various sources. Rietschlin (2012) points out that teachers hold important roles in discussions with students as non-dominating facilitators. In her study with second-graders reading and exploring global children's literature, she observes that "it was through discussion in which the teacher/researcher stepped back that children revealed some of their cultural misunderstandings" (2012, p. 170). Stepping back was crucial to provide opportunities for

children to process and express their thoughts. Rietschlin (2012) learned from her sessions that the interventions of teachers can hinder this process.

However, despite these urgent calls for teachers to apply multicultural practices to address an increasingly diverse world, Aragona-Young and Sawyer (2018) point out that research has suggested that both novice and experienced teachers may not have sufficient understandings of multicultural issues. Cai (2008) argues that in incorporating multicultural children's literature in their classrooms, teachers might be tempted to "teach" by telling them what to do instead of guiding them to develop critical perspectives. They might prefer the "transmission model" to the "transaction model" and simply tell students what is wrong with the text rather than letting students have meaningful discussions. They might also feel disappointed when the classroom seems to be unsuccessful in challenging stereotypes (Cai, 2008).

In her study, Desai (1997) collaborated with a teacher to develop units incorporating multicultural picturebooks in a fourth-grade classroom. The books were read aloud and discussed in the class over the year. Desai points out the need for challenging talks on race that she calls "moral imperative" and how teachers themselves struggle to negotiate these issues, particularly regarding "what the students were ready to deal with and what they were able to understand" (p. 174). In the end, decisions made by teachers regarding conversations about ethical issues surrounding multicultural literature would be framed by teachers' beliefs and the social, cultural, and political context of the classroom.

According to Banks (1998), it all starts with the teachers' own perspective and stance regarding diversity and multiculturalism. He posits that "teachers should start with the process of self-transformation, a process of reading, a process of engaging with the other, a process of understanding that the other is us, and we are the other" (p. 11). Scholars have laid out the preparatory steps that teachers need to take in order to execute the responsibility of teaching with multicultural texts. As Cai (2008) explains:

The particular social-cultural position that the teacher takes exerts great influence on the students. A teacher who takes a conformist or assimilationist position may enforce interpretation based on the values of the dominant culture. But if the teacher adopts a more open or truly multiculturalist position, the result may be acceptance of various interpretations based on different systems of cultural values. (p. 170)

It is important that teachers educate themselves about culture and diversity. According to Banks (2014), before embarking on teaching, teachers need to be able to learn the strategies that “help students to understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups in order to prevent students from developing new stereotypes when ethnic groups are studied in school” (p. 80).

2. 6. 2 Teachers and Multicultural Children’s Literature

Publications on teachers and multicultural children’s literature take many directions. Much has been written by teachers themselves, sharing their experiences of using multicultural texts in their classrooms (some of these studies have been mentioned in the previous section on empirical research with children). Some articles recommend lists of multicultural texts for a variety of student demographics and learning goals. What follows is a summary of research with or by teachers and multicultural children’s literature that has explored teachers’ resistance to the inclusion of multicultural literature in their curricula.

Scholars have argued that exploring teachers’ perspectives on multicultural texts is critical (Colabucci, 2004; Colby & Lyon, 2004; Isler & Dedeoglu, 2019). One reason for this is that teachers could be unaware of the potential of multicultural children’s literature for their students’ perceptions of diversity. Research by Mongillo and Holland (2017) shows that teachers could have a limited understanding of multiculturalism. The findings of their study, which involved 26 elementary school teachers, indicates that teachers’ limited understandings could impact their selection of multicultural texts to certain groups or topics. Through discussions with a group of teachers from prekindergarten to fifth-grade level in the United States, Mathis (2001) concludes that teachers need “to be familiar with literature that can further cultural insights in the classroom” as well as “to present texts in meaningful, insightful ways” (p. 158).

Teaching multicultural literature is perceived as different from teaching other types of texts, and this has yielded multiple challenges (Cai, 2002; Fang et al., 2003). When Kuo and Alsup (2010) interviewed secondary school teachers in the United States, staff listed a number of key challenges related to incorporating multicultural literature into their classrooms. These include having too little time and knowledge about different cultures, as well as limited support from parents; constraints imposed by the curricula and standards set by the states; the

challenge of supporting students' relations with texts featuring diverse characters and cultures very different from students' backgrounds.

Much like the resistance shown by the students when encountering cultures different from theirs in texts, resistance to multicultural texts was shown by teachers due to unfamiliarity with the texts. Consequently, when they first encountered different cultures in the texts, they tended to approach it from their own perspectives. This was demonstrated by the teachers in Dong's study (2005). When a group of secondary English teachers from pre-dominantly White European backgrounds were reading and discussing eight multicultural novels, Dong saw that the teachers' responses "were confined to an ethnocentric way of reading the text, ignoring the cultural context and refusing to use a perspective other than their own" (2005, p. 372). Mongillo and Holland's (2017) findings' echo Dong's, in that the teachers felt "uneasy using books on diverse subjects that they were unfamiliar with or unknown to them" (p. 23). In Dong's study, the teachers' perspectives changed as the group of teachers became more familiar with multicultural texts through regularly meeting to read and discuss them: "They moved from avoiding a discussion on cultural differences to openly accepting their own ignorance and recognizing a need to learn more about other cultures" (2005, p. 373).

The second type of resistance to using multicultural literature can be caused by a reluctance about discussing what teachers consider "sensitive subjects", such as racism and discrimination. The teachers in Ketter and Lewis's study (2001) did not want to cause controversy by bringing these topics up; they took a neutral position and focused on commonalities across different groups to avoid possible tensions. Nieto and Bode (2018) suggest such an approach could be because teachers themselves lack knowledge and experience with diversity, making them feel uncomfortable talking about these issues with their students. Scholars have used their papers to encourage teachers not to shy away from critical multicultural issues, as it will only teach students that these are uncomfortable matters to talk about (Mongillo & Holland, 2017; Nieto & Bode, 2018). As Lehman et al. (2010) put it: "denying the complexities of our world and more sensitive issues, like war, does not help students develop global perspective. The key is to thoughtfully present books developmentally suitable for your students and discuss them with respect" (p. 125).

In Dong's study (2005), one teacher was initially reported to be reluctant to use multicultural texts because the issues they raised were considered "heavy" for students who were already strained by schoolwork and exams. However, she found that she changed her mind and

recognised that her secondary level students responded positively to lessons involving multicultural literature. Dong (2005) affirms that the approach helped to transform teachers' stances towards multicultural literature and teaching with the texts. She advocates that teachers should develop sensitivity, educate themselves about multicultural literature, and develop teaching skills so they can fulfil their critical role in multicultural education. She further argues that the use of multicultural literature in the classroom requires teachers to transform their perceptions and teaching methods regarding discussions of culture and diversity.

According to Colby and Lyon (2004), teachers need to gain awareness that multicultural literature can be used as a tool for "creating classrooms where all students are valued" and that classroom can be a place where "children can celebrate their own cultures and explore the uniqueness of others" (p. 28). Souto-Manning (2009) evokes Freire's stance that "[i]t is the role of the teacher to facilitate the dialogue and to pay special attention to the critical turns, supporting them, so as to promote and enable problem solving and action among young children (Freire, 1990)" (p. 65). These arguments about teachers increase my awareness that their perspectives regarding multicultural children's literature need to be explored.

Having discussed the literature regarding the texts, the readers, and the facilitators, I will bring the project into Indonesian context in the next section before summarising my points.

2. 7 Indonesian Context

Research on this topic has recently been conducted in Indonesia, particularly with high school and university students, to explore their notions on religious diversity, multiculturalism, tolerance, and religious education in Indonesia (Firdaus, 2018; Laksana & Wood, 2018; Parker, 2014; Parker, et al., 2014; Sterkens & Yusuf, 2015). These studies indicate that education for tolerance and multicultural values in Indonesia still needs work. For one thing, the teaching of Pancasila as the country's conception of tolerance is found to be problematic as educators prefer students to memorise the five principles early in primary school rather than discussing them, exemplifying what Cai (2008) refers to as the transmission model instead of the transaction approach. As a result, the understanding and implementation of the noble values of Pancasila become controvertible.

Scholars argue that the Indonesian education system holds the potential for tolerance and multicultural values, as can be observed from the curriculum and textbooks (Hoon, 2013; Parker, 2018; Raihani, 2018). In an ethnographic study in six Indonesian schools, Raihani (2017) conducted focus group discussions and interviews with 80 teachers to explore their perspectives on the teaching of cultural diversity. The researcher found that the teachers “did not use education that promotes tolerance and diversity as part of their subject curriculum; nor did they believe that multicultural education is one of their educational responsibilities”. (Raihani, 2017, p. 14). There were very few exceptional cases where teachers supported their students in their meaning-making processes to learn about the national ideology of Pancasila, multicultural society, and tolerance. Raihani (2017) concludes that there seems to be a discrepancy between Pancasila’s ideal values and the interpretation in the pedagogical context. This suggests that the principles of multicultural education are not yet understood and implemented in Indonesian education.

At the time of this research, there has only been one study conducted in Indonesia that employed multicultural stories with children: Brown et al. (2018). The researchers emphasise that there has been very little research on ethnic prejudice outside of Western contexts, which led them to bring their study to Indonesia. The study applied a quantitative method using an intervention programme with multicultural storybooks written and illustrated by professionals together with the research team. The storybooks were aimed at reducing the ethnic prejudices of Javanese/Sundanese children towards the ethnic out-groups of Chinese Indonesians and Papuans. The research assistant read the stories to children aged four to seven and asked them questions designed “to elicit positive evaluations of the out-group children” (Brown et al., 2018, p. 73). Before and after the reading sessions, the children’s racial attitudes were assessed with a racial attitude measure. The researchers concluded that the intervention programme was ineffective in reducing prejudice, as the children in the study did not show a reduction in their racial bias towards the out-group.

It was inconclusive why the intervention was unsuccessful, but there seems to be no attention given to the children’s responses other than their performance in the racial attitude test, most likely due to the quantitative approach of the research. There are also very limited references to the multicultural stories, particularly considering how multicultural children’s literature is tied up with complex issues, as discussed in the previous section. In addition, the research team lacked any Indonesian researchers who could bring valuable contextual knowledge, except for the assistant whose task was to carry out the reading sessions in the fieldwork.

Nevertheless, Brown et al.'s (2018) study does highlight an important gap in research that my project seeks to fill: there is still very little known about how children read and respond to multicultural literature in Indonesia.

2. 8 Chapter Summary

I have reviewed a substantial body of work that has informed my research and shaped my theoretical assumption that multicultural children's literature offers the potential for learning about diversity through culturally authentic stories. The origin of the genre itself as part of a multicultural education reveals its didactic purpose of instilling multicultural values in its readers, and this becomes part of the reason multicultural books, in all their variety of labels and sub-genres, have gained much attention from scholars and educators. However, empirical studies suggest that while there is some pedagogical potential to multicultural children's literature, the nature of the texts and their readers complicate the responses that might take place. Each reading of multicultural texts seems to be highly contextualised and dependent on various social and cultural factors.

This literature review has been valuable for highlighting the important role of discussions in bringing multicultural texts to primary school students, bearing in mind that the sessions needed to be a safe space that acknowledged multiple perspectives as informed by the prior research reviewed here. Additionally, the examination of the role of teachers in multicultural education has informed my understanding of the critical nature of exploring teachers' perspectives concerning multicultural children's literature. This objective arises from the realization that teachers play an indispensable role in multicultural education; however, they frequently lack the necessary preparation for effectively utilizing children's texts as potential instruments for promoting diversity education.

Having provided an overview of the theories and empirical studies that have shaped my research project, I will now proceed to introduce the selected multicultural children's texts in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three:

Multicultural Text Set

In Chapter Two, I identified several key issues in examining multicultural children's literature, namely cultural authenticity, stereotypes, ideology, and didacticism. I carried these criteria in mind as I embarked on the text selection phase for my fieldwork, which I will elaborate in depth in the subsequent chapter on Methodology. In this chapter, I discuss the selection process and introduce the multicultural children's books employed in the study. I begin with elaborating the dual primary stages that characterized the selection process: The first stage revolves around literary merits and the second stage encompasses practical considerations. Thereafter, I review the five chosen books that comprise my primary text set.

3. 1 Text Selection

The text selection for this study involved two main aspects. First, I carefully selected texts based on their narrative and illustrative qualities. Additionally, informed by my literature review, I examined factors such as cultural authenticity, the presence of positive or negative stereotypes, the promotion cultural diversity versus assimilationist ideology, and the overall didactic tone of the texts. As the fieldwork commenced, pragmatic aspects like accessibility and suitability for shared reading and responding activities were taken into account to ensure that the chosen texts would facilitate inquiry and productive discussions.

3. 1. 1 Literary Considerations

With the increasing number of publications of children's books centred around diversity (as previously discussed in my research context in Chapter One), I found myself with a plethora of options for my fieldwork.

I started by gathering children's books with diverse cultural groups visible on the cover or in the title, and many were explicitly labelled "books for promoting tolerance" or *keberagaman* (diversity). In addition, I looked at books that did not seem to be obviously multicultural, at least from the cover or the synopsis. From here, I created a long list of multicultural children's books that had potential for my fieldwork. The majority of them were published as parts of series, such as the *Pelangi Anak Nusantara* series by Litara, *Seri Misteri Kiddo* by Bhuana Ilmu Populer, *Lintas Anak Nusantara* series by Bhuana Ilmu Populer, *Seri Ragam Budaya Nusantara* by Tiga Ananda, and *Seri Kisah Kuliner Nusantara* by Tiga Ananda. The frequently occurring word *nusantara* is Sanskrit for "archipelago" and it has been used to refer to the vast region of the 17,000 islands of Indonesia. The inclusion of the word in the series titles indicates the local cultures of Indonesian archipelago, which shows that the series deal with plural cultures or diversity.

I read the texts in the long list thoroughly while employing Cai's (2002) and Yokota's (1993) shared criteria for evaluating multicultural children's texts: literary quality. The two scholars argue that literary merit is as crucial as representation of ideology in multicultural children's texts. Cai (2002) warns that "mediocre literature" cannot provide "an engaging aesthetic experience" that will "move [children's] hearts or enlighten their heads" and thereby achieve the text's goals around culture and inclusivity (p. 91). How does one examine the literary merits of multicultural children's literature? Gopalakrishnan (2011) suggests looking at three aspects: language, illustrations, and content. She asserts that both language and illustrations should evoke depth of meaning and be culturally authentic, and the content should be well-researched, offers a new perspective, and provides "openings for questions, queries, wonderings, and 'what ifs'" (p. 51). Bishop's metaphor of "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" (1990) that I discussed in Chapter Two was also a pivotal guidance in selecting the texts. These principles used to evaluate multicultural children's literature – as put forth by Bishop (1990), Cai (2002), Gopalakrishnan (2011), and Yokota (1993) – have all informed my reading and subsequent selection. As a result, I reduced the long list into a shorter list consisting of twelve chosen titles.

3. 1. 2 Practical Considerations

In addition to the literary examination applied to my text selection, the reality during my fieldwork necessitated the implementation of pragmatic considerations. After successfully enlisting participants for my study, I revisited my short list of potential texts. This time, I re-evaluated the books by taking into account two practical factors: the accessibility of the texts and their suitability for inviting responses during the reading sessions.

With the funding from the Indonesian government, I wanted to give each student participant a copy of the texts, but children's books have a notoriously short shelf life in Indonesia. There were not enough copies of many of the titles, and soon accessibility became the overriding factor in finalising the short list. For instance, I had wanted to be able to use *Seri Misteri Kiddo*, a series of chapter books in which children solve mysteries in various islands and are immersed in the local cultures. I considered the books to be well written, engaging, and less didactic than some in promoting multicultural values, as they focused more on demonstrating the diverse ways of living through storytelling. Moreover, the chapter book format suited the reading level of the participants. Unfortunately, it was difficult to obtain enough copies for my participants. I did manage to get six different titles from the series for one school, but not enough for another one, so I ended up handing the books to the students without any chance to talk about them. Another title nearly did not make the list for the same reason. Although it had been published only one year before the fieldwork, I could not find it in bookshops nor online stories. It was only after I contacted the publisher and the author that I got the help I needed to find enough copies for the participants in both schools. These challenges indicated a future challenge for teachers interested in using multicultural texts and highlighted the importance of working with publishers.

An additional important factor that impacted my text selection process throughout the fieldwork was the readjustments I made in response to the discernible outcomes of the reading sessions, both in terms of achievements and setbacks. Notably, a substantial alteration to my initially ambitious text set was the deliberate reduction in the number of titles, a modification aimed at facilitating increased instances of communal reading engagement among the students. As a result, my final primary text set encompassed five titles. In the following, I present an overview of these multicultural children's texts.

3. 2 Selected Multicultural Children's Books

3. 2. 1 *Berani Menjadi Joki*

Widiyarti, A., and Studio, N. (2019). *Berani Menjadi Joki*. Tiga Serangkai.

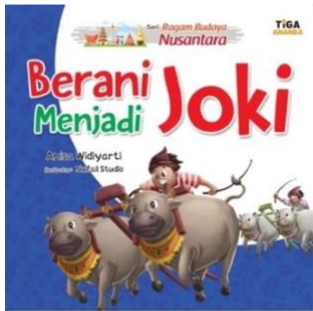


Figure 3. 1 Front cover of *Berani Menjadi Joki*

This picturebook is part of a series called *Seri Ragam Budaya Nusantara*, in which each book focuses on a cultural tradition from a particular ethnic group in Indonesia. In *Berani Menjadi Joki* (Courage to be a Jockey), the culture represented is from Madura, an island to the east of Java and home to the Madurese ethnic group. It depicts the bull race festival, a centuries-old tradition in which young boys ride wooden skids yoked to a pair of bulls and race for 100 meters. The boys start their training as young as ten years old, and they are known as *joki*.

Using a third-person point of view, the narrator begins by introducing the story's main characters as the illustration shows three boys walking home from school in their national uniforms for primary education. The boys talk about their excitement for the upcoming bull race practice while one of them, Amar, stays silent as he is still traumatised by a past accident. His friends encourage him to get back in the race, but Amar is reluctant. After seeking advice from his father, who tells him about the religious origin of the bull race tradition in their island, Amar gathers his courage. He joins his friends in practising and wins third place in the race. The story ends with a description of Amar's joy for conquering his fear and states that "most importantly, he can carry on preserving his tradition" (Widiyarti, 2019).

Regarding its literary quality, this book is perhaps not the best by the global standards of picturebooks, but it is representative of Indonesian children's literature: a small-sized book

with a simple story that comes as part of a series. The illustrations mirror the textual narrative, and the colour palette seems outdated, reminiscent of authoritarian era children's books.

I consider the story authentic in portraying the Madurese bull race from a young boy's perspective as he struggles to fulfil society's expectation to participate in his cultural tradition. Although it attempts to sympathise with the boy, the way the story depicts the boy successfully facing his fear and riding the bull suggests that the text prioritises the preservation of cultural tradition over personal challenges. This might be understandable as the goal of the text is to encourage the young generation to safeguard traditions. This might raise some discussion about what some will consider dangerous practises both for the bulls and the children in the name of cultural preservation. There is not much about other aspects of Madurese culture presented, perhaps due to the limited scope of the text. However, the illustration of the boy who wins the race wearing a striped red-and-white top with a black jacket is recognisable from the media as a stereotype of the Madurese, who are often caricatured in such clothing. The ideology of multiculturalism that seems to be promoted in the text is the importance of knowing one of the cultural traditions that make up the archipelago, which if read together with the other four books in the series will show a glimpse of Indonesia's diversity.

There is heavy focus on education as the text also contains learning pages. The end of the book features a colouring page (a picture of Amar riding two bulls), followed by a fact page of the type commonly found in Indonesian children's books. This is the explicitly pedagogical part of the book in which the moral lesson or knowledge is explicitly conveyed. The fact page applies expository writing that explains the tradition of bull racing in Madura, how it is done, and how it originated. The last page following this is a glossary, in which some words that have been printed in bold in the story are defined in a dictionary style. The inclusion of the fact page and glossary demonstrates the didactic role of children's texts and suggests the emphasis on learning.

With *Berani Menjadi Joki*, I sought to find out children's responses regarding stories with child characters actively involved in preserving cultural traditions. The book represents the type of children's books available and accessible books on Indonesian culture, which means

that the likelihood of such books being read in Indonesian classrooms is greater, and thus it is important to know how children make meaning of it.

3. 2. 2 *Kisah dari Banggai*

Kurniawati, D. D., Sakilah, L., Sitio, H. B., Annisa, D., Syafri, L. P., Pamungkas, Y. P., and Marti, S. K. (2017). *Kisah dari Banggai*. Bhuana Ilmu Populer.



Figure 3. 2 *Front cover of Kisah dari Banggai*

This is part of the series *Lintas Anak Nusantara*, with four books so far highlighting different parts of Eastern Indonesia. Released by a major publisher, the format is a collection of illustrated stories inspired and written by young teachers who served in the regions. I used two books from the series in my fieldwork. The first one is *Kisah dari Banggai* (Stories from Banggai) and the second is *Kisah dari Sumba* (Stories from Sumba), which I will discuss in the next subsection.

Kisah dari Banggai comprises ten stories about children who live in Banggai, a region in Sulawesi where violent conflicts between Christians and Muslims took place after the regime change in 1998. Two main themes from the stories are environment and religious diversity. Seven stories talk about nature and endemic animals in Banggai and how children can play their roles in looking after and preserving their environment, including the critically endangered Maleo bird. Three stories raise the issue of religious diversity in the region. Each of the stories has a different style as they were written by different authors. The illustration is colourful and done in anime style, which helps break down the density of the story.

I consider the text authentic in capturing childhood in remote islands, with unreliable electricity yet living closely with nature. Readers learn that children in Banggai have to walk far to reach their schools and catch some fish from the sea for pocket money. The stories that

centre on religions depict the encounter of religious diversity by children. The type of religious education in Indonesia in which every school must provide religious teachers that correspond to the students' confessed religion has caused segregation in learning about religions. This is depicted in two challenges presented in the stories. First is the challenge faced by schools, particularly in remote places in Indonesia, to provide religious teachers for minority religions. As a result, one Christian student in the school does not have a teacher for the religious lesson like his Muslim friends. The second challenge is the limited knowledge about other religions among the students due to the segregation of religious classes, which triggers suspicion and tension.

The book is explicit in conveying its message about respecting religious differences and preserving nature through the voices of the teachers. It was one of the first children's texts after the regime change to openly address issues of religious diversity, with children having dialogues with their teachers about having a Christian teacher for the first time and being curious about other religions. The teachers, either Muslim or Christian, approach the matter with emphasis on respecting diversity because "we are all one nation" (Kurniawati et al., 2017, p. 90). The approach of teaching diversity is confined within the post-authoritarian policy of acknowledging six religions, and therefore these are the only six religions named. The students learn about the holidays and places of worship of the six religions, and although their leaning goes no further than that, they are told to respect others and "love one another".

Although there is no acknowledgement about the context of religious tensions in Banggai, I felt the book had potential for discussions with children because it presents issues of religious diversity faced by children themselves.

3. 2. 3 *Kisah dari Sumba*

Wihardja, M. M., Rakhmavika, K., and Haikal, W. (2018). *Kisah dari Sumba*. Bhuana Ilmu Populer.

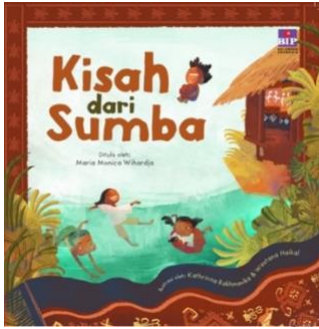


Figure 3. 3 Front cover of *Kisah dari Sumba*

Kisah dari Sumba (Stories from Sumba) is the next book in the *Lintas Anak Nusantara* series. This time the focus is on a remote island in Eastern Indonesia: Sumba. Like *Kisah dari Banggai*, the stories centre around children and attempts to capture their daily lives on the island of Sumba. However, unlike its predecessor in the series, there is more focus on culture in the five stories. The child characters actively participate in their culture as they learn to weave Sumbanese *ikat* from a very young age, and they investigate the origin of Sumbanese people when they see very little is written about the history of Sumba.

The illustrations are more authentic in depicting the distinctive culture, including details of the traditional village and vivid *ikat* patterns. The characters, both children and adults, are pictured with dark skin, which is something recent in Indonesian children's books despite the majority of the people having dark skin.

I consider the text to be a critical breakthrough in terms of representation, as it is arguably the first children's book in Indonesia to feature a story about an indigenous religion and position it as equals to the more established religions. In the first story of the book, titled *Marapu dan Kampung Tarung* (Marapu and the Tarung Village), readers learn about Marapu, one of the hundreds of indigenous religions observed in Indonesia that have been marginalised and discriminated against. It was not long ago – in 2017 to be exact – that indigenous religions were legally recognised by the Constitutional Court. Even still, this recognition is not without challenges, as the Indonesian Ulema Council maintains that indigenous religions are not equal to the six officially acknowledged religions in Indonesia (Marshall, 2018).

In the story, a boy who follows Marapu faces bullying from his classmates, most of whom observe the more mainstream religions of Catholicism, Christianity, and Islam. "Of course,

Meha is proud of his religion. However, he is sometimes embarrassed because his friends often equate Marapu with dark magic” (Wihardja et al., 2018, p. 9). Meha’s father tells him about the reality of their native faith: “The religion of Marapu has been practised by our ancestors in Sumba since before Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Christianity came to the archipelago. Today, Marapu and its followers are becoming more forgotten and marginalised” (Wihardja et al., 2018, p. 10). Meha decides to invite his classmates to his village, Kampung Tarung, to show them the way they live and worship.

In presenting Marapu as equal to other religions, *Kisah dari Sumba* goes beyond other children’s books in Indonesia that emphasise tolerance between the six state-acknowledged religions. That said, the message of tolerance is still conveyed didactically through Apu Humba, Meha’s grandmother and the spiritual elder of Marapu: “Every religion has its own belief and ways of praying. More importantly, whatever religion you believe in, you must own a kind, humble heart and always love each other. We must not underestimate or mock other religions and other people” (Wihardja et al., 2018, p. 20).

3. 2. 4 *Cap Go Meh*

Dewayani, S., and Gina. (2014). *Cap Go Meh*. Yayasan Litara.

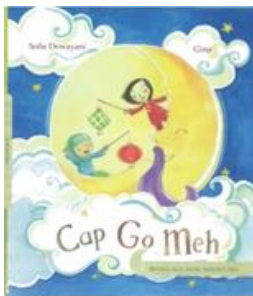


Figure 3. 4 Front cover of *Cap Go Meh*

Cap Go Meh is a picturebook depicting two girls who come from different cultural groups: one is a Muslim and the other a Confucianist. The plot is simple and focuses on similarities amid differences. Nisa, the Muslim girl, shares knowledge about Eid al-Adha and her love of the Eid *ketupat* (a rice cake cooked in woven coconut leaves). Lily, the Chinese Indonesian, follows Nisa’s enthusiasm by talking about Chinese New Year and her love of the *Cap Go Meh ketupat*. The two versions of *ketupat* are similar as a result of acculturation between the

Javanese and the Chinese who came to Java centuries ago. The book has an explicit agenda of promoting intercultural friendship between the majority and minority groups.

Within the Indonesian context, this picturebook is significant as one of the first children's books published after the authoritarian regime to explicitly portray Chinese Indonesians and their culture. For more than three decades under the regime, Chinese Indonesians were forbidden from observing Confucianism and expressing their culture in public in order to "totally assimilate" to Indonesian culture (Tong, 2010). The oppressive policy resulted in shame and reluctance among Chinese Indonesians to openly show their identity, even after the authoritarian regime collapsed and the law that forbade public expression of Chinese culture and faith was repealed (Arifin et al., 2017). Yet, in *Cap Go Meh*, Chinese Indonesians confidently embrace their distinctive culture and celebrate Confucianism, with vivid illustrations and explanations about the meanings behind the cultural symbols.

I considered the picturebook to have potential for fostering discussion with children as it has good literary quality and depicts cultural authenticity of the two cultural groups.

3. 2. 5 *Joko dan Jenar Jalan-Jalan*

Sastradipura, A., and Yulianti, H. (2018). *Joko dan Jenar Jalan-Jalan*. Saga Press.



Figure 3. 5 *Front cover of Joko dan Jenar Jalan-Jalan*

The picturebook is published by an independent publisher and, unlike the previous books discussed in this section, does not mention subtitles or jargon about diversity on the cover. However, readers might predict based on the cover illustration, which shows a boy pushing a girl in a wheelchair, that the book is about disability. The story opens with a third-person narrator introducing the two main characters, Joko and Jenar, a pair of cousins who like to hang out together in the mall. One day, Jenar injures herself falling from the stairs and has to

use a wheelchair. Joko has to adjust himself as he takes Jenar out after she comes home from the hospital, as the mall they so love is not accommodating for wheelchair users. Joko's parents then suggest that they go to a park that is "wheelchair-user friendly". The two families go together and Jenar can again hang out with her cousin again and do fun things. The end of the book features a fact page much like *Berani Menjadi Joki*. It talks about the challenges faced by people in wheelchairs and the hope that there will be more public facilities that accommodate the needs of wheelchair users.

The story promotes diversity, not only through what is told in the text as Jenar has to use a wheelchair (dis/ability) but also as told in the illustrations, as Jenar is pictured as a little girl wearing a hijab, but when Joko is praying for his cousin's recovery the illustration shows him praying in a Christian manner, and with a cross on his bedroom wall. This is significant as Indonesian children's books tend to be explicit with their content, and I consider this picturebook to have the potential to ignite discussions on religious differences within a family.

3. 3 Chapter Summary

The selected multicultural children's stories consisted of five texts that centred around the experiences of minority cultures and intergroup friendships. Although the majority of these texts continued to adopt a didactic tone in conveying messages of tolerance and respect, this aligned with the broader landscape of children's literature in Indonesia, which often emphasized explicit moral lessons. Most importantly, the underlying ideology promoted across all texts was their promotion of cultural diversity, achieved through positive portrayals of minority cultures and religions in Indonesia. In this sense, the selected texts were anticipated to function not only as "windows" into diverse groups but also as "doors" that provided opportunities for inquiry and conversations about diversity.

This selection aligned with my research objectives. My first research objective was to explore the ways in which children engaged with and responded to multicultural children's literature. These texts were intended to fulfil this objective by exposing children to high-quality multicultural literature that offered opportunities for meaningful interactions and responses. In relation to my second research objective, the selection aimed to showcase the pedagogical potential offered by readily available and accessible multicultural children's literature in Indonesia. These texts had a specific aim of cultivating positive viewpoints that highlighted

how multicultural texts could be valuable tools in teachers' instructional practices, particularly concerning education for diversity.

In the next chapter, I will lay out the research design and the methodology of the empirical study.

Chapter Four:

Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter, I explain the methodology applied in my research project. The chapter opens with the summary of my conceptual framework and the elaboration of the research design adopted for my fieldwork. The next section presents a description of the schools that served as my fieldwork locations and the research participants. Following this, I will describe the data collection stage and the specific methods used for the students and teachers, followed by some reflections on the issues I encountered during my fieldwork. The final section describes how a global pandemic affected my research journey as I arrived at the data analysis stage, then ends with an overview of the analytical frameworks I decided to apply to work with my data.

4. 1 Conceptual Framework

Before I introduce my research design, I will briefly summarize the theoretical frameworks that inform my methodological choice.

My research is founded upon the fundamental principles of multiculturalism and multicultural education, as I have elaborated in Chapter Two. I align with Kymlicka's (2012) conceptualization of multiculturalism, which emphasizes the imperative of recognizing cultural diversity and striving for equality and inclusion among minority groups.

Additionally, I draw from Banks' (2014) argument advocating for multicultural education that aims to equip students with the critical knowledge that enables them to fully participate within their cultural groups and the wider society. Banks (2014) points out that knowledge, while crucial, must be paired with empathy in order to encourage students to take action. I consider this an argument for multicultural literature, as stories have the capacity to not only inform, but also to move hearts (Cai, 2002). The role of multicultural children's literature is therefore to empower children and young people to "function effectively in a pluralistic society and become advocates for social justice" (Bishop, 2012, p. 9).

However, an examination of the existing research reveals the nuanced complexity of multicultural texts and their occasional shortcomings in achieving their intended goals. This necessitates a comprehensive exploration of key issues inherent within the texts and their dynamic interactions with readers. This brings me to the next pivotal framework integral to my research: reader response theory. In this regard, I particularly draw upon scholars that focus on reader response to multicultural children's texts, such as Cai (2002), Cuperman (2013), Rogers and Soter (1997), and Short (2010). Central to their argument is the recognition of the potential held within multicultural texts, yet it concurrently acknowledges the intricate and multifaceted relationships between readers and texts, which can result in an array of outcomes ranging from resistance to transformative shifts in perspective.

4. 2 Research Design

Building upon the perspectives established by these key scholars, this empirical research is designed within the assumption that readers have complex relationships with texts and that children actively construct meanings as readers. Thus, this study seeks to explore children's responses and teachers' perspectives concerning multicultural literature. To fulfil this objective, a qualitative approach is essential. This approach provides the researcher with the flexibility to explore children's opinions, facilitating adaptability and modification during the data collection process. This adaptability is particularly beneficial when examining issues of multiculturalism, whose dynamic quality has been described as "plural and fluid" and "constantly changing" (Race, 2011, p. 5). In terms of research with children, the qualitative methodology's inherent capacity to "appreciate diversity and uniqueness" (O'Reilly et al., 2013, p. 166) proves invaluable. This capacity enables the researcher to effectively examine the complex accounts of children's experiences.

To try to understand how children interpret the world (and the texts) within an Indonesian context, my research adopts an interpretivist paradigm that views meaning as multi-layered and dependent on different individuals' interpretation of reality. From a qualitative perspective, meaning is socially constructed and there is no single truth because of individuals' different interpretative processes in seeing the world (O'Reilly et al., 2013). Under this paradigm, multiple realities are recognised and there is a focus on understanding participants' perspectives (Cohen et al., 2018). Therefore, this research does not seek to generalise the participants' perspectives regarding their responses to multicultural stories;

instead, it aims to understand how their experiences and backgrounds may shape the way they make meanings from such texts.

Informed by the goal of multicultural literature to empower readers (Cai, 2002), the research was designed to encourage children's active participation. This is particularly critical in societies where children's voices are rarely heard in research (Christensen & James, 2008), as I contend is the case in Indonesia. I argue this based on my own experience growing up and being involved in the fields of education in Indonesia, and also based on the evident scarcity of social and educational research involving children's perspectives. This has motivated my interest in inviting children's voices into this research.

My choice of methodologies was motivated by two contexts in Indonesia. First is the wide assumption that texts are a source of knowledge that work one way, transferring their content into the readers' mind. Second, the teacher-centred method remains dominant in Indonesian classrooms and limits children's participation in their own learning. As my own thinking is grounded in the transactional perspective of texts and readers' relationships, I chose to adopt the principles of a participatory approach to some extent as a way to welcome readers' voices when looking at multicultural texts. In adopting the perspective that children are "co-creators of knowledge" (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2018, p. 17), the participatory approaches involve "research with, rather than, on children" with the focus on positioning children "as social actors who are subjects, rather than objects of enquiry" (Christensen & James, 2008, p. 1). While this research was only participatory to a certain extent, reading the literature on the participatory approach helped me to be aware of the importance of valuing children's voices and the strategies that can invite these voices.

In children's literature research, participatory research is critical because "[t]he adult-dominated nature of our field limits children's voices to reader-response research" (Chawar et al., 2018, p. 111). Chawar et al. (2018) posit that children's literature research must break from traditional adult domination and promote "intergenerational dialogue" where children's voices are valued. Their study evaluates how ten students (aged 11-13) work together with three adults as co-researchers in a reader-response study, with the goal of reviewing a reading list of the Polish war canon. It is not without challenges, particularly considering policy and ethical considerations in different cultural contexts that might impede maximum children's participation. The key, suggest Chawar et al., is to "keep inevitable power inequalities to a minimum by stressing child-adult interdependencies, adopting lesser adult roles and building

in the young researchers' capacity and a sense of responsibility for their own life-worlds" (2018, pp. 119-120).

The data produced from the participatory approach, argue Coyne and Carter (2018), is not necessarily superior to data gathered from other approaches, but it will be different because "children's voices are differently and unequally heard" (p. 8). The participatory approach challenges the assumption of a singular children's voice that represents children and young people's experiences, and this perception helped me realised that children were not a homogenous group and that their responses to texts would not be straightforward. This contrasts with the nature of multicultural texts in Indonesia, which tend to be didactic and all-knowingly assume that the texts will educate any and all children about tolerance.

Children's participation in research can take different forms (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2014). In his assessment of the "Students as Researchers" project in a British secondary school, Fielding (2001) proposes a four-fold framework that distinguishes the extent of student involvement in their learning. These four levels are, from lowest to highest: Students as data source, students as active respondents, students as co-researchers, and students as researchers. Eckhoff (2018) adopted Fielding's framework to observe the role of children and young people in research (see **Figure 4. 1**).

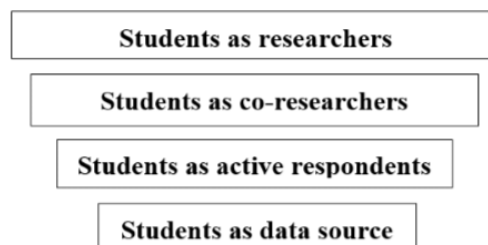


Figure 4. 1 *Levels of students' participation in research*

Note. Reprinted from *Participatory Research with Young Children* (p. 5), by A. Eckhoff, 2019. Copyright 2019 by A. Eckhoff.

In the first level, students as data source, students act as recipients of adults' actions and data is determined by adults. Students inform understandings but they do not have active roles in it. The next level, students as active respondents, positions students as subjects with valuable information. They can actively share their opinions and ideas, but these remain confined within the research parameters set by adults. When students become co-researchers in the

third level, there is deeper collaboration between students and adults, with students viewed as partners. Meaning is created through dialogues led by adults. It is at the fourth and final level, students as researchers, where students lead the dialogues and act as initiators. At this level, adults undergo paradigm shifts and arrive at an understanding that they can “work with” children. Both Fielding (2001) and Eckhoff (2019) maintain that in practice, there might be movements between these levels of students’ involvement.

This model offered a valuable entry point for my research as I attempted to invite students to be collaborators of meanings to an extent. Coyne and Carter (2018) posit that participatory methods consist of a various range of strategies that aim to not only accommodate but also maximise the different ways children communicate. Keeping this in mind, I decided to implement literature circles with the students as a data collection method that invites and values children’s thinking. This decision was informed by Thein et al. (2011), who show that with regard to multicultural texts, literature circles provide an effective space for responses and engagement, as well as informing and empowering students as readers. For the teachers, I opted for focus group discussions as a tool to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding the teaching of multicultural content.

4. 3 Participants

The two main groups of subjects in my research are the children as the target readers of multicultural books, and the teachers, particularly language teachers, as the significant gatekeepers regarding the use of these books in schools. In what follows, I talk about approaching the schools before moving on to the recruitment of students and teachers.

I started approaching the schools several months prior to the expected fieldwork period. My intention was to conduct the research in two schools, not for comparison, but for a complementarity that would enhance the data, particularly given the wide variety of educational institutions in Indonesia.

The first school was a private school in Jakarta that I had previously visited with a friend from the *Satgas Gerakan Literasi Sekolah* (Task Force for the School Literacy Movement), a division of the Ministry of Education. That visit had been an invitation for the school to take

part in the School Literacy Festival held by the Ministry in 2018. During the visit, I was impressed by the school's library and literacy programmes, as visible from the students' responses to the books displayed in the library. The school applies the national curriculum with a heavy focus on literature, implemented in the use of books as springboards for lessons. When I contacted the education director, I received a positive response and she agreed to welcome my research in the school at the end of 2019 (September to December). This school will be referred to as Sekolah Kerinci.

For the second school, I planned to target a more homogenous student population. Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population, and Islamic schools constitute a large part of the education system. I approached several Islamic schools via emails to no avail before finding one private school in Bogor, a city in West Java, a one-hour drive from Jakarta. The school promotes itself as an international Islamic school that endorses pluralistic values. After contacting the school by email, a representative from the school's research and quality department wrote back, expressing interest in welcoming my research. This school will be referred to as Sekolah Merapi.

The two schools' different characteristics enriched my research experience. Sekolah Kerinci is a national school with a diverse student demography. The students do not wear uniforms nor have conventional classroom seating, distinguishing it from traditional education in Indonesia. Located in a converted house, Sekolah Kerinci is also smaller and more informal, with around 20 students in each grade. It has one library for both its kindergarten and primary students, and this became the main site for the literature circles. Meanwhile, Sekolah Merapi is an Islamic school with an international curriculum. Although it accepts students from non-Muslim families, most of its students are Muslims. It is a part of a larger educational establishment spanning kindergarten to high school, with around 60 students in each grade. The students wear uniforms, although there are days when they wear casual clothes. The school also has stricter bureaucracy than Sekolah Kerinci for visiting researchers, including a short interview and signing forms that states he or she will comply with the school's regulations.

After securing approval to conduct research from the head teachers in Sekolah Kerinci and Sekolah Merapi, I completed my application for ethical approval from the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee for research involving human participants. Following the guidance from the Ethics Committee on working with children, I had to provide a clearance from Disclosure Scotland, the organisation that manages the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG). Since I first came to Scotland in 2015 to do my MEd in Children's Literature and Literacies, I had already obtained PVG clearance to volunteer in the Church of Scotland as a Sunday School teacher, and I was able to use my existing PVG form in my application. After obtaining the ethical clearance from the University of Glasgow (see Appendix 1), I made my travel arrangements. In the following section, I describe the participant recruitment, which was the first step I took after arriving in Indonesia and visiting the schools to meet the head teachers.

4. 3. 1 The Students

The selection of middle graders as the participants was based on both theoretical and practical assumptions. When conducting research with children in the social sciences, it is important to take children's cognitive development into account when deciding on the participants' ages. I wanted an age group with cognitive development that allows for independent thinking and reasoning as we would be discussing abstract issues of multiculturalism and diversity. As discussed in Chapter Two, scholars from developmental psychology suggest that children at primary education level are at the most suitable period for critical learning about differences beyond literal perspectives (Ramsey et al., 2003; Quintana, 2008). A more practical reason for choosing students middle childhood was because the available multicultural texts in Indonesia mostly suit readers from this age group.

The student participants were recruited in collaboration with the head teachers. First, I visited the classroom selected by the head teacher, with the class teacher present. I introduced myself and read aloud from two books in each school, then I distributed the participant information forms and consent forms. I went through the forms together with the students, checking if they had any questions. The teachers reminded the students after one week to return their forms. After the forms came back to the teachers, I returned to the school to go through the

forms together with the teachers, asking their guidance for choosing diverse representations of gender, ethnicity, and religion.

There were different consequences to this method of participant recruitment. Regarding efficiency, this method made it easier and faster for me, as an outsider to the schools, to get a group of participants selected in a relatively short time. Rather than having to gather the students' profiles beforehand and study them thoroughly, I could rely on the teachers' knowledge of their students. Nevertheless, this recruitment method meant that the selection accorded with the teachers' preferences. Although they were informed about what I was looking for (a group of diverse students who enjoyed reading), they might have had their own criteria. An example of this took place in Sekolah Kerinci. When I was given the list of potential participants the head teacher had selected for my study, I asked her why a particular student did not make the selection. I remembered him because he had shown enthusiasm for books when I had come to the fourth-grade classroom for my introduction the previous week. The head teacher said she had only chosen students who would be able to contribute to the discussions, implying that the said student perhaps did not fit her criteria for an "ideal" participant. This suggested that the participants selected for me were the ones not only meeting my requirements, but also the head teachers', and they were most likely the ones who were considered "smart" or did well in class.

Following the selection of participants from the fourth-grade classrooms in Sekolah Kerinci and Sekolah Merapi, the head teachers informed the selected students and distributed copies of the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendices 2 and 3 for Participation Information Sheet and Consent Form for students, and Appendices 4 and 5 for Participation Information Sheet and Consent Form for parents). In Sekolah Kerinci, the participants comprised four boys and two girls who came from diverse ethnic and religious groups. In Sekolah Merapi, the participants consisted of three boys and three girls who were all Muslims and came from a mixed group of ethnicities. Their ages ranged from nine to ten years old by the time of data collection. **Table 4. 1** below details the list of the students, and I assigned names of Indonesian flowers, trees, and birds as their pseudonyms.

Table 4. 1 *List of student participants*

Students (pseudonym)	Age	Identified religion/ethnicity	School
Jalak	9	Hindu/Bali	Kerinci
Elang	9	Islam	Kerinci
Murai	9	Catholic/Chinese Indonesian	Kerinci
Maleo	9	Catholic	Kerinci
Camara	9	Christian	Kerinci
Gelatik	9	Islam	Kerinci
Dahlia	9	Islam/Javanese, Gorontalo, Minangkabau, Batak	Merapi
Akasia	9	Islam/Jakarta, Australia	Merapi
Melati	9	Islam/Javanese	Merapi
Damar	10	Islam/Pekanbaru, Surabaya	Merapi
Pinus	10	Islam/Samarinda, Surabaya	Merapi
Cemara	9	Islam/Sunda, Chinese	Merapi

4. 3. 2 The Teachers

As I have discussed in my review of the roles of teachers in multicultural education in Chapter Two, I consider teachers to be critical gatekeepers of multicultural texts. Colby and Lyon argue that teachers bear the roles of “assisting children as they develop into productive citizens in a pluralistic society” (2004, p. 24), and this is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where the teaching style in classrooms remains heavily teacher-led. One of the possible reasons for this is Indonesian culture’s emphasis on respect to older people and paternalism (Maulana et al., 2011).

Following the argument that employing multicultural literature is different from using other types of literature, I was aware that the teachers might have felt challenged and reluctant to integrate it into their lessons for various reasons (Dong, 2005). Since I aimed to disseminate this study among Indonesian teachers and work further with them to find the best ways to include multicultural texts in the classrooms, I needed to explore my teacher participants’ perceptions of the texts. What did they know about multicultural literature? How did they use children’s texts in their lessons? What did they see as the potential benefits and challenges of employing multicultural literature in Indonesian classrooms? I also sought to explore how the teachers’ backgrounds (their identities and experiences with diversity) might influence their thinking and teaching.

Much like the selection of student participants, recruitment of the teachers was conducted with the help of the head teachers in both schools. After explaining the goals of my research to them, I asked them to help select the teachers who would have the opportunity of using multicultural texts in their lessons. This criterion manifested in a slightly different way in the two schools. As Sekolah Kerinci applied literature-based lessons, their teachers were familiar with using children's texts, with one teacher for each grade covering all subjects. Since all of them were considered to benefit from the focus group discussions about multicultural texts, including the head teacher herself, who taught the fourth-grade class, they were all invited to participate. The challenge was to find the times when all the teachers would be available. In the agreed schedule, the second-grade teacher could not make it, so I ended up with five teachers in my participant group. Meanwhile, in Sekolah Merapi, there were different teachers for different subjects in each grade, and the head teacher decided that the Indonesian Language teachers were the ones who would most likely use multicultural texts in their lessons. This meant there would potentially be six teachers for my study, but availability became an issue as well as it was difficult to find times when all the teachers would be able to attend the discussion. After some rescheduling, three teachers and the librarian were able to take part. **Table 4. 2** shows the list of the teacher participants from the two schools, with names of traditional Indonesian dances as their pseudonyms.

Table 4. 2 *List of teacher participants*

Teachers (pseudonym)	Teaching level	School
Jaipong	1 st grade	Kerinci
Janger	3 rd grade	Kerinci
Andun	4 th grade	Kerinci
Tifa	5 th grade	Kerinci
Pilin	6 th grade	Kerinci
Merak	Librarian	Merapi
Saman	3 rd grade	Merapi
Rampai	5 th grade	Merapi
Kecak	6 th grade	Merapi

4. 4 Data Collection

4. 4. 1 Literature Circles

One of my major research questions relates to how children read and respond to multicultural texts. To answer this, I chose to conduct literature circles with the selected multicultural children's books.

Following the definition proposed by Daniels (2002), literature circles are “small, peer-led discussion groups” whose members read the same texts (p. 2). In the early scholarship of this method, Eeds and Wells (1989) critiqued the “old” model of literature discussion in American classrooms for not fostering critical thinking, arguing that the way books were discussed in the classrooms sounded more like “gentle inquisitions” than “grand conversations” (p. 4). In the critiqued model, students were asked to read excerpts of the classics, then formed groups with their classmates in order to answer a list of questions prepared by teachers. This way, students' understandings of the texts were measured by “how closely their answers match those in the textbook” (p. 4). Eeds and Wells tested a different model of book discussions with a small number of children from fifth to sixth graders who met twice a week, with each session lasting about 30 minutes. Their findings revealed that “children as young as ten participated in rich discussions of works of literature” (p. 27) and that “talk helps to confirm, extend, or modify individual interpretations and creates a better understanding of the text” (p. 27). Eeds and Wells's proposed model of literature discussion then became the prototype of the literature circles that are now commonly applied (Thein et al., 2011).

Various applications of literature circles have offered much potential for students, from the possibility of introducing different perspectives regarding social issues to raising multicultural awareness (Daniels, 2002). In relation to multicultural texts, literature circles seem to suit the nature of multicultural content that tends to be political and multi-layered. Through reading and responding together, students not only make meaning together and scaffold one another, but also exercise their critical thinking as they encounter multiple perspectives from their peers and are challenged to question their own views. In one early study on using literature circles for reading and discussing multicultural literature, Hansen-

Krening and Mizokawa (1997) argue that literature circles serve as an effective tool for responding to multicultural literature because they generate context for dialogues and offer the space for “expanding cultural and ethnic perspectives” (p. 188). In her study with first graders reading and responding to multicultural literature over the course of eight weeks, Souto-Manning (2009) asserts that literature circles allow students to exercise their critical thinking. She posits that literature circles enabled the first graders to talk about the social issues they encountered in the texts and engage in dialogues that were crucial to further the conversation.

Literature circles, according to DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006), provide the potential for “critical encounters” that allow for “pivotal moments that have transformative possibilities for student discussion and learning” (p. 157). When they observed a fourth-grade classroom reading and talked about multicultural literature over the course of six months, they found that literature circles can address the challenge of a diverse classroom as the method allows for “a purposeful meaning-making activity for developing multiple (Daniels, 1994) rather than single interpretations” (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006, p. 162). One student in their study reported that the circle helped her understand her peers’ multiple perspectives as they discussed solutions for the story character who encountered racism. The method also proved valuable to address the challenges faced by teachers with diverse classrooms, as demonstrated by Walker (2018) when she visited a classroom where the students who came from different ethnic groups (Latin Americans and Middle Easterners) did not mix. With the teacher, Walker devised reading sessions employing literature circles with a set of multicultural texts. Throughout the period of six weeks, the students learned to engage in conversations with their classmates and showed empathy towards each other's experiences.

Nevertheless, like any other methods, literature circles have their complex aspects. In their study with 90 tenth grade students in the US, Thein et al. (2011) found that literature circles were effective in generating discussions about a multicultural text that they described as “dialogic, interpretive, and engaged” (p. 21). However, they noticed that the students interpreted the multicultural text “in ways that reinforced their status quo stances towards social class” (p. 21). This suggests that although literature circles might be effective as an educational instruction and a method of research inquiry, the implementation of literature circles for reading and responding to multicultural literature presents more complex challenges. Thein et al. (2011) argue that the model of literature circles proposed by Daniels

(2002), in which the discussion is entirely student-led, is not adequate in challenging students' initial perspectives. They posit that teachers hold important roles in guiding students to push their responses to go "beyond the personal and toward the critical" (p. 23).

In Indonesia, literature circles are not yet a common practice in the classrooms, but there have been a handful of studies that employed literature circles with students. This indicates that the approach is not unfamiliar among language scholars and educational experts in Indonesia. While research with literature circles outside Indonesia generally applies qualitative methods, the studies in Indonesia are dominantly quantitative as they focus on conducting experiments to assess the efficacy of language circles for language achievement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Irawati (2016) investigates the impact of literature circles on the reading comprehension of university students as they read expository texts. Her study reveals that literature circles could help students achieve higher reading comprehension scores. Similarly, Lubis's studies (2018, 2020) employ literature circles with university students to assess how the method could foster composition process and critical thinking through discussions of textbooks.

Among studies like these, one stands out for its choice of texts and unique research design. Although their study was conducted within an EFL context, Moecharam and Sari (2014) employed literature circles to expose their students to multicultural content, including the LGBTQ themes that are still considered taboo and controversial in Indonesia. Seventy university students in the study were invited to read selected short stories, discuss them in literature circles, and create written responses after every session. Through a set of questionnaires completed after the sessions, the researchers found that literature circles with multicultural texts could promote "a positive discussion environment" (p. 124) and improve the students' cultural awareness, particularly in relation to the sensitive issues of LGBTQ in Indonesian context. I consider this study quite distinguished because it does not focus on reading comprehension nor moral themes, which remain the objectives of many studies on the teaching of literature in Indonesia. Moecharam and Sari (2014) also offer a space for students' voices that I do not find in studies involving texts for young people in Indonesia. The lack of studies like this and the alarmingly more dominant quantitative approach suggest that the potential of literature circles remains much under the radar within Indonesian classrooms.

After reflecting and learning from the above review, this is how I decided to implement the research methodology in my fieldwork:

1. Reading multicultural texts individually or in groups.
2. Conducting discussions and activities to encourage effective interpretations and meaning making.
3. Inviting creative responses beyond the oral discussions.

Before I began the literature circles, I was given a chance by the head teachers to introduce myself to the students who would be my participants. This was when I could get to know them and tell them about my research. In this introduction session (as well as on the Participant Information Sheet), I used the term “book club” to refer to the literature circles. I explained to the students that we were going to hang out after school once a week to read books together, talk about them and do some fun activities. The students were enthusiastic and they attended all the sessions, with only one student in Sekolah Kerinci having to be absent for our last session due to a conflicting schedule with an extracurricular activity. I had five sessions in each school, each lasting around one hour. In Sekolah Kerinci, the session was held every Friday after school in the library. In Sekolah Merapi, we met during the students’ library time, so it took place at a different hour and day every week.

In addition to oral responses during the literature circles, I employed a set of activities to encourage creative responses, upon which I will elaborate in the next section.

4. 4. 2 Creative Responses

In comparing the frameworks of research with children and adults, Punch (2002) points out that the main challenge of research with children is to “understand the world from a child's point of view” (p. 325). According to Arizpe and Styles (2003), children might face challenges in expressing their responses if limited to oral and written materials. Keeping these considerations in mind, I found it important to ensure that I provided opportunities for children to freely express themselves. I strived to use approaches that would foster a relaxed and fun atmosphere, particularly considering that the theme of multicultural issues is considered sensitive in Indonesia. Coyne and Carter (2018) argue that researchers have to be “intuitive, reflective and flexible” and recognise that “[n]ot every technique is appropriate for every child or young person in every situation” (p. 7). Drawing on Coyne and Carter’s (2018)

suggestion to incorporate arts-based techniques in order to “enable dialogue with children and young people about complex and abstract issues” (p. 6), I decided to employ the following creative responses: annotations, drawing, writing, and artifacts. I will introduce each in the following subsections.

4. 4. 2. 1 Annotations

Annotation is an activity in which I provided students with copies of selected pages or illustrations from the texts we read and invited them to write and draw on the copies. I was inspired by Farrell et al. (2010) and Arizpe et al. (2014), who have employed annotation to encourage students’ responses to wordless picturebooks. In their research with immigrant children in the UK, Farrell et al. (2010) propose that annotation serves as an effective methodological tool for collecting data as it enables children to bring “their personal experiences to their meaning-making and how sharing their thoughts created understandings at a deeper level” (p. 206). Arizpe et al. (2014) argue that annotation acts as a “palimpsest” (p. 80) that reveals how children make connections to meanings they construct from the texts.

During the literature circles, I employed annotations as we had read texts on religious diversity. I made copies from selected pages, distributed them to the students, and invited them to write or draw on the copies. At first, the students did not know what to do or understand what an annotation was, as this is not a common practice in Indonesian classrooms. I explained that annotating meant giving commentaries in either writing or drawing, and I demonstrated my own annotation by drawing speech bubbles and emojis and writing some words. I emphasised that the task was an invitation for them to respond to the particular section of the texts. After a while, the students in both schools managed to scribe on their copies, and at the end of the sessions, the papers were full of their drawings and words. The activity seemed to help them process what we had just read, and I could see some of the students’ personalities reflected in their annotations. For example, the students who liked to ask questions during our reading sessions wrote questions on their copies, demonstrating their inquisitiveness. Some students circled or put question marks next to words that befuddled them, and some others added speech balloons to the illustrations and contributed their own dialogues to the texts. The annotations offer valuable insights into what the students were thinking regarding the multicultural texts and our discussions, and become a meaningful part of my data.

4. 4. 2. 2 Drawing

Drawing as a method of data collection seems to be common in research with children, as the activity is fun and “can encourage children to be more actively involved in the research” (Punch, 2002). Drawing is useful for researchers too as children's drawings can offer windows to their thinking (Noble, 2016). This method has been applied in various studies that have explored children's responses to multicultural texts (Kim et al., 2016; Macphee, 1997; Nguyen, 2021). Arizpe et al. (2011) argue that visual responses have been proven to be an effective method for research on inclusion. In Kim et al.'s study (2016), children's initial perception of skin colour was revealed through their drawings of babies, which showed preference for lighter skin tones. The researchers observed an improvement in the children's attitudes towards racial diversity after being read multicultural picturebooks highlighting the lives of African children.

Nevertheless, Punch (2002) warns that drawing is not as simple as it sounds, as it depends on children's perceptions of their ability. There are children who might not see drawing as a fun activity, while some might feel self-conscious about their competence. This seemed to take place when I attempted to apply drawing as a responding activity in Sekolah Merapi. When I asked the students if they would like to draw responses to the picturebook we had just read aloud in turns, only one welcomed the activity and immediately picked up his pencil. The others were self-conscious about their drawing skills and although I told them they did not have to do it, they ended up producing some drawings that copied the pictures from the book. When I asked them why they chose to draw the images, they said they picked the ones that seemed the easiest! I was reminded of my experience as a storyteller. When I have invited children to do some drawings after the storytelling, there has been much fuss about creating perfect drawings. This might be due to the context of Indonesian classrooms, which emphasise good grades and instil a fear of doing badly. In different research contexts, what might be considered a fun activity for children might not necessarily be so.

4. 4. 2. 3 Writing

Writing has been applied as a form of reader response in various research with multicultural texts, from writing response journals (Blake, 1998), reflections on cultural identities

(Webster, 2001), “alternative texts” (So, 2016), and blogging (Braden, 2019), to stories (Wang, 2020). Written responses can become a means of affording students different ways to externalise their thoughts, in addition to oral responses. Blake (1998) argues that written response is a way to support students to create their own texts, which in turn can encourage students to “connect their lives to other texts in the social world” (p. 239). In her study, Dressel (2005) worked with a secondary school teacher on a multicultural unit in which the students were asked to read multicultural novels and respond in a “Dialogue Journal” with partners. The objective of the journal was to encourage the students to “take on the point of view of one of the characters in the novel” and to “see the world from a different cultural perspective” (p. 755). One of the findings from the study was that the Dialogue Journal allowed students to increase their enjoyment in reading and become personally engaged in the stories.

Inspired by Dressel (2005), I adopted writing as a response activity to encourage the students to try taking on different perspectives. In Sekolah Kerinci, I asked the students to write letters to the characters from *Kisah dari Sumba*. In Sekolah Merapi, I asked the students to retell the story of *Marapu dan Kampung Tarung* from a different point of view. I also offered additional spaces for written responses throughout our sessions by providing them with notebooks, stationary, and Post-its. I encouraged them to use their notebooks to jot down any thoughts or questions at any points in our sessions, while the Post-its were available if they wanted to mark particular pages from the texts and comment on them. A few of the students in Sekolah Kerinci used the notebooks to write down their musings from our discussions, while one student from Sekolah Merapi used her notebook as a reading diary. The entries were short, but they showed me that she loved the books she had received and read them outside our sessions.

4. 4. 2. 4 Artefacts

Artefacts, defined as everyday objects that create “a space for storytelling” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011, p. 130), have the potential to connect students’ lives outside and inside the classrooms. I was interested in applying this method in the hope that the objects the students brought would offer opportunities to tell their stories and contribute to the meaning-making of the multicultural texts. This approach was inspired by Pahl and Rowsell (2011) and McAdam (2019), who both invited their participants to show artefacts from their lives. In their study,

Pahl and Rowsell (2011) asked students from Pakistani families that have lived in the UK for several generations to bring objects from home that they considered important. Similarly, McAdam (2019) asked teachers in Glasgow to bring “artefacts of value” (p. 297) from their lives. In both studies, the objects brought by participants demonstrated cultural practices and became springboards for intercultural dialogues. Pahl and Rowsell (2011) argue that cultural artefacts could highlight “less visible stories” and “inform our understanding of texts as realized in the classroom” (p. 134). For researchers, cultural artefacts become valuable empirical materials as they offer rich data for understanding the social and cultural lives of their participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

I invited the students in Sekolah Kerinci and Sekolah Merapi to bring what I called “multicultural artefacts” to our last sessions. I told them that multicultural artefacts were personal belongings that they considered representative of their cultural or religious lives. In Sekolah Kerinci, I had some time with the students to discuss what objects these might be, and they suggested bringing items related to their religious practices. Three out of six students showed up with artefacts in our last sessions, and one quickly wrote down a prayer on a piece of paper and gave it to me as his artefact. All the artefacts brought by the Kerinci students represented different religions, and as I was arranging the artefacts on a table to take a photo, I could hear the students being curious about their friends’ objects. This demonstrates the potential of these artefacts to allow the students tell their stories and learn about their friends’ cultures.

Meanwhile, the method was not so successful in Sekolah Merapi as the time constraint did not allow me an opportunity to discuss with the students what multicultural artefacts were. I could only ask them to bring objects that showed their identities, and two of them came to the last session with their childhood photos. One was the student’s birthday photo with her family, and the other was a kindergarten graduation photo with the student wearing a small gown resembling a college graduate. We also did not have enough time in that last session to talk about the objects, so I only took photos of them and thanked the students who had brought them in. From this experience, I acknowledge that it is important to be able to talk about the objectives of the activity with the students and allow sufficient time to discuss what they might bring.

All the students' creative responses throughout the literature circles – annotations, drawings, writings, and artefacts – were photographed and saved as image files, and our oral discussions in the circles were recorded and saved as audio files.

4. 4. 3 Focus Group Discussions

The method I selected to gather the teachers' perceptions of multicultural literature was focus group discussions. Focus groups are not only deemed highly suitable in educational research (Gibbs, 2012), but are also effective in sowing collective views and putting the participants' perceptions first rather than the researcher's agenda (Cohen et al., 2018). With focus group discussions, multiple perspectives can be explored and negotiated, and meanings can be contested and co-constructed within dynamic interactions, potentially re-shaping perspectives on diversity and multicultural literature (Mathis, 2001; Harlin et al., 2009; McVee, 2014).

Most studies involving teachers regarding multicultural literature employ surveys (questionnaires), book clubs for certain periods, or reading journals. Ideally, I used the same method as the students: that is literature circles for several sessions. However, it is also worth noting that most studies I found on teachers and multicultural literature focused only on teachers, meaning the researchers can apply more complex methods and longer durations. In my study, a focus group was chosen because this method fitted the limited time frame I had with teachers and was ideal for one meeting exploring their perspectives and experiences.

The focus group discussions were held once in each school for one hour. In Sekolah Kerinci, the focus group lasted one and a half hours and took place after their weekly teachers' meeting, in the fourth-grade classroom. In both schools, I started with a short presentation of the material I had prepared to share with the teachers (see **Appendix 9**). In this presentation, I talked briefly about multicultural children's literature and multicultural education and how they underpinned the study I had conducted with the students. I then invited the teachers to look at the multicultural children's books I had brought and told them that these were the texts I had been reading and discussing with their students. I proceeded with the questions I had prepared for our discussions and the conversation grew from there.

The discussion in this literature-based school was rich because the teachers could give information on using books in class and their students' responses. These language teachers were also very knowledgeable about books, both adults' and children's, Indonesian and international. However, it is interesting to note that even these experienced teachers (including the librarian, whom I got the chance to chat with now and then in the library before or after my book club) were not familiar with the multicultural children's books I had brought and used with their students. It is important to note that the school prides itself on being "literature-based", so these teachers perhaps felt confident with using books in the classrooms. When they saw my display, which mostly comprised books about Eastern Indonesia, they suggested some titles they had used in class that talked about the cultures from the Western part of Indonesia. I considered this a valuable input as it demonstrated the teachers' good knowledge of multicultural children's books.

In Sekolah Merapi, the focus group session lasted one hour. There was some restraint and wariness at the beginning as perhaps the teachers were still wondering about who I was and what was going to happen to them. After some time, the "ice" broke, although the liberty of discussing more sensitive topics was not the same as in the focus group session with the teachers in Sekolah Kerinci. The teachers in Sekolah Merapi seemed more reluctant to talk about multiculturalism, except for one teacher who preferred to focus on teaching the knowledge of diversity of cultures, which is less controversial than issues of religion. One issue that also came up in the discussion was how their students responded to literature during the lessons that they taught, and how the responses were similar or different from the responses I had observed in my literature circles. I noticed that I was more self-conscious as well with them, because the women all wore long hijabs. Of course, this should not have been an obstacle because some of my closest friends wear hijabs and as a minority, I am used to be the "different" one in my society. However, since we had just met, there was a gap between us when it came to talking about this sensitive issue. I found myself (especially when listening to the audio recording) holding back and not brave enough in asking questions.

4. 4. 4 Fieldwork Reflection

Following Punch's (2002) line of reasoning that "reflexivity should be a central part of the research process with children" (p. 321), I kept a fieldwork diary to record my observations

and thoughts. This allows me to now reflect on my methods and review what worked and what could have been conducted differently.

As the literature circles started, several challenges arose. The first was in accessing the books, particularly because I wanted the six student participants in each school to have the books so they could take them home and do individual readings. Although the books had mostly been published since 2015, shelf life in Indonesia is short and many books fall out of print. I had to order them online or contact the publishers or the authors directly. Some of the books were in the warehouse outside Jakarta and there were long delays in delivery. This was also because my book choice kept changing based on what I experienced in the field with the children, and also because even during the fieldwork, I came across new titles that were different from the books I had in my collection and would have loved to use.

Apparently, this concern was shared by the librarians, who sometimes chatted with me after the sessions. Many of the books that I brought for the sessions were not recognised by the librarians, even though half were from big publishers. The librarians also talked about the difficulty of finding good books in Indonesia, so they often resorted to translations or English books. In Sekolah Kerinci, authors like Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton were mentioned as favourites (including the Indonesian translations). In Sekolah Merapi, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* was an example of a popular book mentioned by a teacher.

The second challenge concerned the use of the books in the sessions. At first, I lined up the books in neat themes that I wanted them to explore in each session. The first session would be about culture, the next would be about religion, the next on tolerance, etc. As is the case with research with children, the students' responses would continually inform my approach for the next session. There was also the challenge of the students' hectic schedules, which made finishing certain books difficult, particularly the middle-grade novels.

Another major challenge I experienced had to do with my positionality in the literature circles. Keeping in mind the importance of children's active participation as I set out in the research design, I wanted to intervene as little as possible to allow the children to lead the discussions. However, in practice this proved to be no easy task as I often found myself in push-and-pull situations of following their lead and being "the adult in the room" who took control of the sessions and guided the students in the discussions. There were constant

challenges between conducting “pure” data collection on children’s responses to multicultural literature and employing intervention in using the texts with children as I was navigating my role as a researcher (which sometimes felt blurred with being a teacher).

It was a trial-and-error experience; I learned and changed strategies as I wondered how I could improve in the next session. For example, the first session left me feel overwhelmed, thinking it had not gone the way I had expected and thus that I would not gather any meaningful data. In Sekolah Kerinci, I attempted to allow free choices when the students picked their forms of responses. I introduced the options and showed them the materials provided (such as annotations) but they made the decisions on the activities they preferred. In the discussions, I urged them to express themselves as much as they wanted. Sometimes this resulted in “chaos” where students talked over each other and drove the talks towards issues unrelated to multicultural issues. I decided to try a somewhat different approach for Sekolah Merapi, offering more control and guidance, and this impacted my interaction with the students. To sum up, participatory approach is not as straightforward as it seems, and more studies need to be done in trying out the methods to offer guidelines to future researchers. In Indonesia, this new approach needs to be tested in educational settings to see how it is positioned within a paternalistic culture.

A qualitative approach entails flexibility, but this means the data collection can seem to lead to “messiness” rather than “order”. During the literature circles, I had to modify my methods accordingly as my reflections on one session informed the next. That said, positives came from the “messiness” of the sessions. I found that discussions grew organically (and unexpectedly) as I attempted to follow the students' lead, which sometimes revealed what they had in their minds as they came across multicultural texts. The question sets I had prepared sometimes worked as effective prompts for discussions, and although not all the creative activities took off, some of them served as windows on the children’s thoughts.

One potential advantage that I observed from the fieldwork was the literature circles provided space for children to explore books in fun, informal, and creative ways. In the literature circles, the creative responses – from drawing, book annotations, writing – seemed to be effective in eliciting the participants’ responses. They helped provoke further dialogues beyond the books as the students had more time to process what they had read. I also noted

how the sessions had become opportunities for children to exercise their opinions as they made meanings and interacted with the stories. One participant in Sekolah Kerinci gave me a farewell letter in our last session stating that she really enjoyed the book clubs and being able to talk about books. This, along with generally positive feedbacks from the participants at the end of the book clubs, inspired me to promote the activity in the future as potential extracurricular in schools.

4. 5 Data Analysis

After my fieldwork, I came back to Glasgow on 1 February 2020. One month later, the UK imposed the first lockdown in efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19. The university had to abruptly close, including its PhD offices and library. This sudden and stressful change impacted doctoral students in many countries (Sideropoulos et al., 2022; Soria et al., 2021; Paucsik, 2022). While I considered myself fortunate for having finished my fieldwork before restrictions were imposed, the pandemic had a profound impact on my mental and intellectual well-being. As I became obsessed with the news from both the UK and Indonesia to get updates on the constantly changing situations and regulations, my anxiety, which had been dormant for quite some time, flared up and paralysed my ability to think. As schools had to close and children were asked to study from home, I also wondered what this meant for the future of shared readings of multicultural texts. My data was there, transcribed and translated, ready for analysis, yet it felt so insignificant now with many deaths caused by the global pandemic.

At some point, several weeks into the first UK lockdown, people's adaptation to life in a pandemic took place, as best as we all could. I stayed in touch with my family in Jakarta by communicating almost every day with them, took long walks in the parks, joined the long queues to enter the supermarkets for grocery shopping, and set up a space in my tiny flat to serve as a home office. For the next several months, as the UK went through several lockdowns and some of the worst parts of the pandemic, I also went through several setbacks in analysing my data. The largest challenge I faced was finding a framework to structure and make meaning of the findings.

First, I made my way through the transcripts. I started with the responses from the fourth graders in Sekolah Kerinci, then moved on to Sekolah Merapi. As I was reading through the

transcripts, I highlighted and made notes on certain sections that seem important. At this stage, the themes that emerged were moments of confusion and learning, as well as frequent references to religions. I then attempted to highlight students' responses that were specific to attitudes to multicultural literature, and this proved quite challenging as many of the responses seem to reveal that the children in this study did not necessarily associate multicultural literature with issues of cultures or diversity. Moreover, the responses seemed to be unrelated to each other and so unstructured that it was challenging for me to make sense of them.

The first framework I applied in data analysis was Lawrence Sipe's (2008) five categories of children's responses. The students' responses seemed mostly to fall into three categories: personal, analytical, and intertextual. On the personal level, the students made frequent links between the texts and their identity and experiences. The analytical category consisted of responses relating to comments regarding story and illustration qualities, while the intertextual level was revealed through students' mentions of not only other books but also textbooks, songs, and movies. However, Sipe's framework could not answer my research question regarding the multicultural texts.

I went back to prior studies on reader response to multicultural texts and paid more detailed attention to their data analysis. The analysis methods in these studies were vastly diverse, depending on the research objectives, participant background, type of texts, and the nature of the response activities. There seemed to be no "general rule" in terms of understanding children's responses to multicultural texts and each study had applied its own method.

Mingshui Cai's (2002) work came to mind at this time. I first came across Cai's monograph when I initially became interested in multicultural children's literature for my presentation at the 2015 IBBY Regional Congress. In his doctoral research, Cai assesses how the three dimensions of cognitive, affective, and social play roles in the ways American and Chinese university students respond to various cultural texts. He proposed a multi-dimensional model for reader response to multicultural literature, arguing that:

the comprehensive study of reader response to multicultural literature should include the same aspects studied in research on response to literature in general, such as cognitive, developmental, affective, and social factors, but, within each aspect, the

focus should be on those factors that are particularly relevant to multicultural literature. (Cai, 2002, p. 58)

I decided to try employing Cai's multi-dimensional model with my data. I returned to my transcripts afresh and went through them with three codes from Cai's work:

- Cognitive (comprehension, interpretation, and background knowledge)
- Affective (preference, resistance, involvement, and identification)
- Social (intertextuality, negotiation of meaning, and influence of social context)

After coding the data, I gathered the responses that reflected these dimensions under their respective categories and analysed them accordingly. In the process, I found that in some cases, responses were difficult to categorise as cognitive or affective, or both, and several responses seemed to overlap. There was also a significant number of responses that did not fit any of the three dimensions, which I ended up categorising in a separate group labelled "Identity". After some time applying Cai's multi-dimensional model, I had to conclude that it did not help me to explain my data.

I went back to the students' responses one more time and focused on responses that particularly demonstrated the various ways in which they engaged with the multicultural texts. I found two major categories emerging from the data. The first is Navigating Difference, which contains a variety of responses that occurred as students encountered the diversity of cultures in the texts. Navigating Difference comprises three kinds of responses: the students' interest in food, disorientation at different cultural traditions and objects, and curiosity and potential for learning. The second category is Multi-layered Identity, which includes responses that demonstrate the students' interest in religion, awareness of multiculturalism, and displays of pride by students with Chinese heritage. Given the complex nature of human interaction, there are overlaps between these categories of responses, as one type of response might also reflect another.

To approach these two themes, I decided to employ two analytical frameworks. For Navigating Difference, I appropriated Banks's (2016b) approaches to multicultural content integration to assess different forms of reader responses. I found that the students' responses under Navigating Difference correlated with three out of four levels of Banks's typology, namely the Contributions Approach, the Additive Approach, and the Transformation Approach. Here, Banks's multicultural education as theoretical lens acted as my analytical

framework, as often takes place in qualitative research in which theoretical lenses influence analytical strategies (Mertens, 2015). For Multi-layered Identity, I used Brooks and Browne's (2012) culturally situated reader response to understand the various cultural positions students were taking as they interacted with multicultural texts and how these positions influenced their meaning making process.

Analysing the teachers' transcript was more straightforward. As I went through the transcript, I perceived two major categories from the emerging themes. The first category includes what I determined to be perspectives on diversity. This comprises excerpts on how personal experience with diversity have shaped the participants' teaching principles, the teachers' own understandings of tolerance, and the importance of being supported by the schools. The second category is the teachers' perspectives on multicultural texts, and this consists of excerpts on awareness of the texts, the pedagogical potentials, and the challenges perceived by the teachers in bringing multicultural literature into their classrooms. To understand the teachers' perspectives, I applied Banks's dimensions of multicultural education (2016b).

The whole data analysis process, both for data gathered from the students' responses and the teachers' perspectives, is illustrated in **Figure 4. 2**.

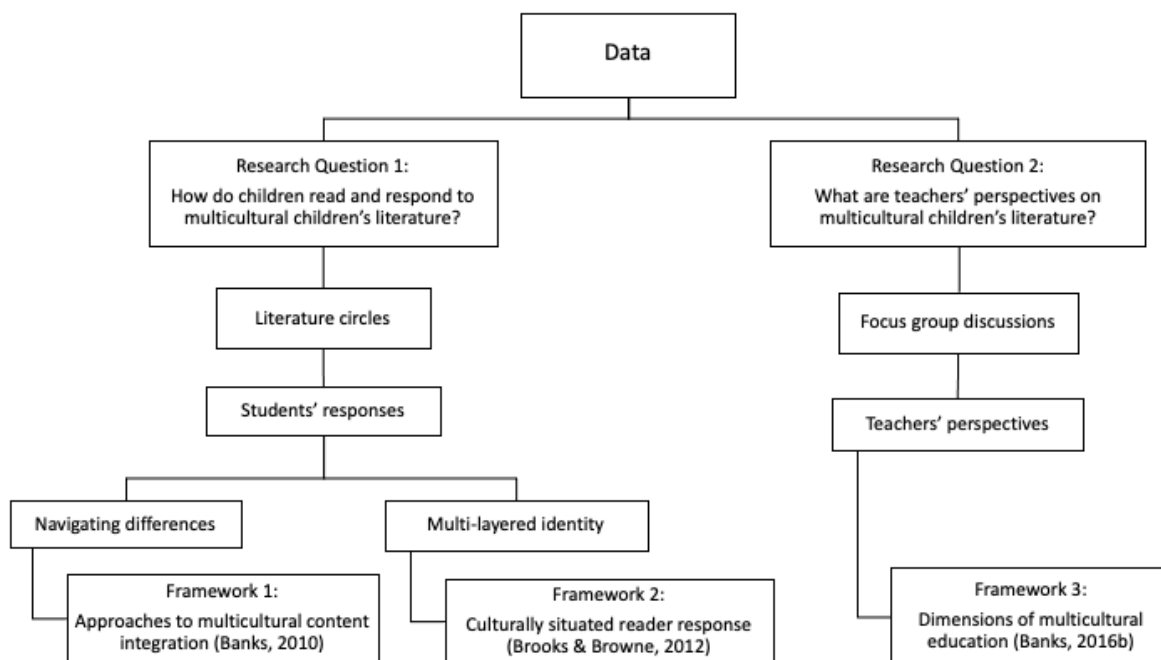


Figure 4. 2 *Diagram of data analysis process*

In the next section, I will elaborate on the three frameworks and explain how they were useful for my analysis.

4. 5. 1 Analytical Framework 1: Levels of Multicultural Content Integration

Banks (2010) conceptualised a framework for educators to assess the extent to which they incorporate multicultural content in their classrooms. The framework contains four levels, with level one considered the most superficial and level four reflecting the highest level of students' engagement.

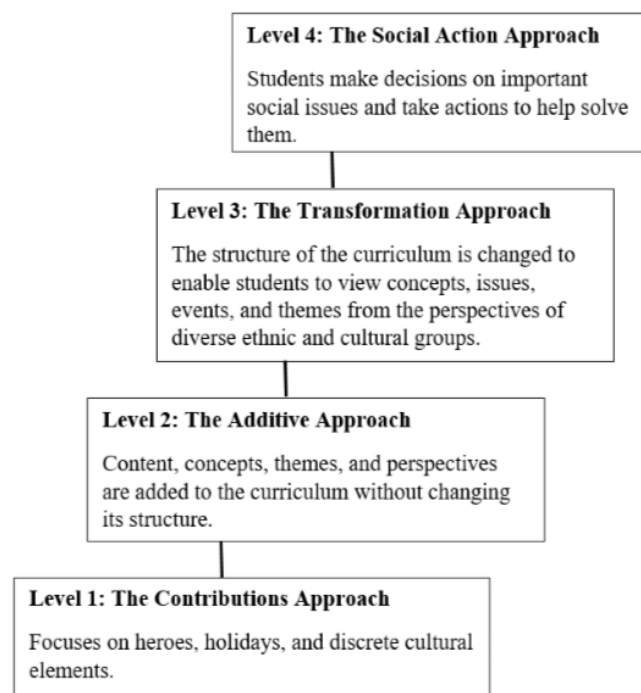


Figure 4. 3 *Approaches to multicultural content integration*

Note. Reprinted from *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (9th ed., p. 156), by J. A. Banks, 2016, John Wiley & Sons. Copyright 2016 by J. A. Banks.

The Contributions Approach, as the first level, is the quickest way to add multicultural content to classrooms, often by introducing discrete cultural elements like dances, food, or festivals. While this approach is popular for teachers as it does not require large efforts but can quickly bring visibility of different cultures to students, Banks criticises it when applied

on its own as it risks engendering “superficial understanding of ethnic cultures” (2016b: p. 164). This is because there is little attention given to cultural groups beyond their artifacts, with no attention paid to learning about their lived experiences and struggles, which can provide a more nuanced understanding of multicultural society.

The next level, the Additive Approach, is when teachers attempt to do more in multicultural content integration than just introducing cultural elements. There is a space for learning about different concepts and perspectives through the addition of books or lesson units on other cultures. However, the presentation of different cultures remains framed within the perspectives of the mainstream or dominant culture, and if there is no space for questioning and discussing the content, Banks warns that confusion might occur, and it does not impact significantly on students’ understanding of multicultural life.

The Transformative Approach takes multicultural content integration to the next level, as now there is an attempt to modify the curriculum to allow students to understand diverse cultural perspectives more comprehensively and learn that knowledge is a “social construction” (Banks, 2014, p. 55). In this approach, students are provided space to challenge their views and discuss concepts and issues from more than one perspective. Banks (2016b) argues that discrete cultural elements can be studied within the Transformative Approach if the purpose is to demonstrate the contributions of diverse cultural groups to the multicultural society.

The highest level of integrating multicultural content into classrooms is the Social Action Approach, which expands the Transformative Approach to empower students to take meaningful action. This approach encourages students to “pursue projects and activities that allow them to make decisions and to take personal, social, and civic actions related to the concepts, problems, and issues they have studied” (Banks, 2014, p. 55). In this approach, both teachers and students have the potential to become agents of social change (Banks, 2016b).

Although some approaches are more favourable to achieving the goals of multicultural education, in practice and with the different dynamics of classrooms, these four approaches might not be rigidly separate. Banks encourages teachers to mix them according to the contexts of their classrooms: “It is unrealistic to expect a teacher to move directly from a highly mainstream-centric curriculum to one that focuses on decision-making and social

action” (2016b, p. 163). He suggests that the lower levels of approaches be applied as stepping stones to progress to the “more intellectually challenging” ones.

Banks’s approaches to multicultural content integration have been implemented as methodology in various research, mostly to analyse teachers’ multicultural practices. Vecellio (2012) applied Banks’s multicultural content integration model to examine the extent to which LGBT content is integrated in primary and secondary curriculum. Brown and Livstrom (2020) found Banks’s approach was useful as an evaluating tool to assess secondary science teachers’ curricula after they took a four-week culturally responsive science teaching module.

Other studies have adapted Banks’s model (Gopalakrishnan, 2011; Freire & Valdez, 2021). In their research of bilingual teachers' multicultural beliefs and practices in an urban elementary school, Freire and Valdez (2021) found that the teachers’ lessons did not fit Banks’s typology in a linear method. Instead, the teachers moved between levels throughout their lessons or modified or blended the approaches. To accommodate the complexity of teaching practice, Freire and Valdez (2021) proposed a reframing of Banks’s typology by adding two more levels. Meanwhile, Gopalakrishnan (2011) adapted Banks’s model to assess the levels of multiculturalism in children’s literature and its use in multicultural education (**Figure 4. 4**).

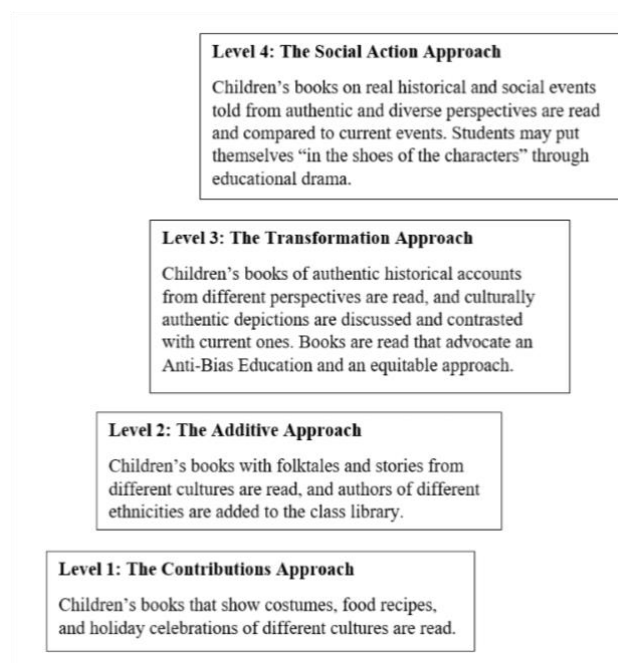


Figure 4. 4 *Levels of multiculturalism and multicultural children’s literature*

Note. Reprinted from *Multicultural Children’s Literature: A Critical Issues Approach* (p. 30), by A. Gopalakrishnan, 2011, Sage Publications. Copyright 2011 by A. Gopalakrishnan.

In Gopalakrishnan's adaptation, the Contributions Approach in multicultural children's literature manifests in cultural stories that are introduced to children briefly as part of special culture days. This is also termed the Touristic Approach as it focuses on food and festivals without going beyond the cultural artifacts and introducing more knowledge about the cultural groups' lives.

The Additive Approach takes place when teachers provide stories from different cultures but nothing more, essentializing the country/culture. It involves reading folk tales from different cultures, but with no interaction, discussion or critical engagement with texts. The potential of multicultural children's literature is demonstrated in the Transformation Approach, which represents literature that goes "against the grain" and offers multiple perspectives. There is more criticality as texts are juxtaposed with one another, authenticity is discussed, and there are discussions about multicultural issues, such as refugees and racism, building awareness and consciousness. This can be expanded to the Social Action Approach, which entails reading authentic stories, connecting them to present issues, and taking action.

As I went back over the students' responses, both Banks's approaches and Gopalakrishnan's adaptation became helpful in making sense of the first strand of key responses, in which the student participants reacted to the multiculturalism presented in the texts. Although they were created for educators, Banks's approaches to multicultural content integration were relevant to the children's responses in my study because they enabled me to map and interpret the extent of the students' attitudes towards the diversity they encountered in the texts. My review of empirical studies using Banks's approaches did not find its use for reader responses to multicultural texts, so I decided to appropriate the approaches to accommodate reader responses.

Table 4. 3 below shows my adaption of Banks's typology to accommodate the variety of reader responses as the students encountered differences in multicultural texts:

Table 4. 3 *Reader responses to multicultural children's books*

Level 4 The Social Action	Responses that demonstrate readers' empowerment from reading and discussing multicultural texts and inspiring them to act.
Level 3 The Transformation	Responses that show readers' awareness of multicultural issues, with discussions of multiple perspectives taking place.

Level 2 The Additive	Responses that occur as readers encounter diversity in multicultural texts.
Level 1 The Contributions	Responses that acknowledge discrete cultural elements in multicultural texts, such as food, fashion, and festivals.

4. 5. 2 Analytical Framework 2: Culturally Situated Reader Response

The second strand of themes from my data was a set of responses that demonstrate the participants' diverse cultural contexts, and these are not accommodated in Banks's approaches. Considering this limitation, I was looking for another framework and came across Brooks and Browne's culturally situated reader response (2012). In their study with a group of primary students reading the historical fiction novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, Brooks and Browne identified various cultural positions in the students' responses. They proposed a theory of reader response that "prioritizes culture" in the reading process: a theory in which both the readers' cultural backgrounds and the cultural aspects embedded in texts are in "transaction" in meaning-making.

In Brooks and Browne's model of culturally situated reader response, there are four cultural positions potentially assumed by readers as they come to texts: Ethnic Group, Community, Family, and Peers. Collectively, these four positions form the "Homeplace", which is inspired by bell hooks's conceptualisation of home, in which readers' multi-layered cultural aspects are represented. These cultural positions are not mutually exclusive: "Rather, the positions are fluid, interactive and relied upon to make sense of unique situations embedded in the texts" (Brooks & Browne, 2012, p. 79). **Table 4. 4** presents my summary of the cultural positions.

Table 4. 4 *Four cultural positions in culturally situated reader response.*

Ethnic Group	The position taken by readers when they identify with the cultural group presented in the texts. Readers tend to demonstrate this position in their responses to the social issues in the texts that they feel familiar with (the issues that are also faced by their cultural group).
Community	The position taken by readers that demonstrate various communities they are part with (e.g., schools, mosques or churches, malls, etc.). Readers use their communities and their experiences in them to relate to the text and make meaning.

Family	The position taken by readers as part of family units and “the familial aspects of their culture” (Brooks & Browne, 2012: p. 81) Responses that demonstrate the significant roles of family and family values, as they affect readers’ perspectives as they make meaning of texts.
Peers	The position taken by readers as part of their peer group, with shared values, interests, and experiences. Readers make connections between texts and their own relationships with friends and the cultural references for their peer group.

Brooks and Browne’s culturally situated reader response (2012) is useful for the second strand of my data in two ways. First, it validates the culturally rich responses to be accounted for as significant in readers’ meaning making process. Second, the cultural positions allow me to identify the multi-layered identities that the student participants brought to the reading sessions.

4. 5. 3 Analytical Framework 3: Dimensions of Multicultural Education

For the teachers’ discussions, I employed James Banks’s dimensions of multicultural education (1998/2016b). This is a different framework from the previous one I discussed above. While the previous one (Banks, 2010) focuses on levels of integrating multicultural content, the dimensions are conceptualised to broaden the definition and scope of multicultural education. Banks (2016b) proposes that multicultural education could take place in five different aspects, which are interrelated and overlapping in practice (see **Figure 4. 5**). The purpose of the dimensions is to support teachers from a wide range of disciplines to incorporate multicultural education in their teaching.

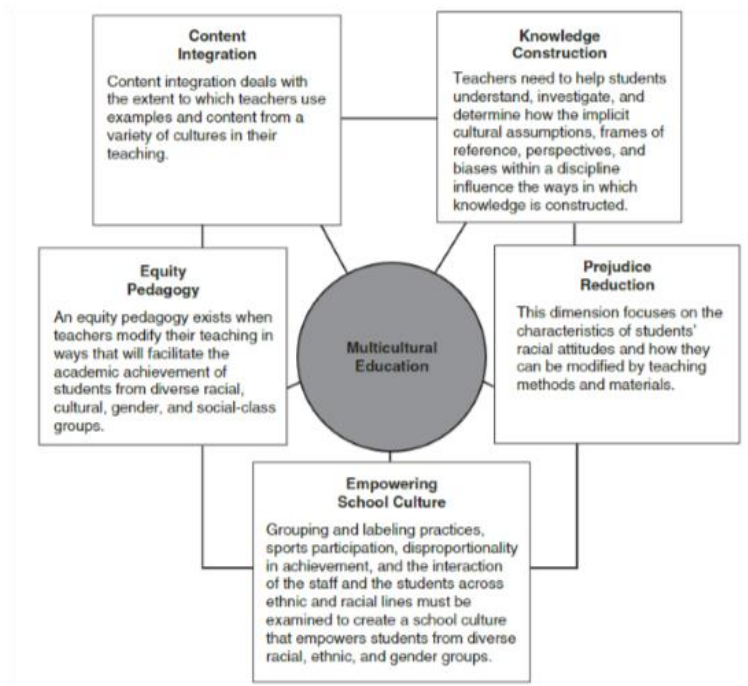


Figure 4.5 Dimensions of multicultural education

Note. Reprinted from *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (9th ed., p. 18), by J. A. Banks, 2016, John Wiley & Sons. Copyright 2016 by J. A. Banks.

The first dimension is Content Integration, which relates to the inclusion of multicultural content into the lessons through the introduction of not only discrete cultural elements, but also cultural perspectives, historical facts, and key concepts. All subjects should recognise the opportunities to integrate multicultural content, although some might be more obvious; for example, social studies compared to maths. Banks (2016b) maintains that “[t]he infusion of ethnic and cultural content into the subject area should be logical, not contrived” (p. 16).

The second dimension is Knowledge Construction, which is concerned with the ways teachers can help students understand knowledge in context and be aware that implicit cultural assumptions and biases can influence the process of knowledge construction. To do this, teachers can invite students to think critically about representations of marginalised groups, examine concepts in textbooks, and reframe their perspectives.

The Prejudice Reduction dimension takes place when teachers apply strategies and materials that can develop positive attitudes towards different cultural groups. The next dimension, Equity Pedagogy, relates to the pedagogical means and strategies that facilitate students from

diverse backgrounds in order to ensure equal opportunities for all students, whether they are from majority or minority groups.

The fifth dimension of multicultural education is Empowering School Culture and Social Structure. This dimension argues that the school culture needs to support the goal of achieving equality for students with diverse backgrounds. The success of multicultural education does not rely only on teachers or staff, but on the whole structure of the school, from students to administrators to head teachers. All members of school have to participate in the transformation and share the same goal.

Various researchers have employed Banks's dimensions of multicultural education, from the kindergarten level to higher education (Cole & Zhou, 2014; Harjatanaya & Hoon, 2020; Todor, 2015; Merlin, 2017; Munalim, 2020). These studies demonstrate how the dimensions have been useful in assessing the implementation of multicultural education, from evaluating school curricula to exploring teachers' strategies. For my data gathered from the teachers, Banks's dimensions served as a useful framework to map out and understand the teachers' perspectives on multicultural children's literature and its potential for their classrooms.

4. 6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has laid out the research design and methodology underpinning the empirical study in this thesis. The methodology was designed with the aim of fostering multicultural education, whose objective is to instil in students the ability to view diversity as an opportunity for all individuals to develop knowledge and experience different cultures (Banks, 2014). Guided by both this objective and informed by prior research, particular methods were selected for the students. These methods included literature circles, which were intended to create a secure and open environment for discussions. Additionally, a range of response-inviting activities were incorporated, utilizing arts-based techniques such as annotations, drawing, writing, and multicultural artefacts. For the teachers, focus group discussions were used to accommodate a variety of perspectives and facilitate the negotiation of meanings. On reflection, these chosen methods served the research objectives by effectively gathering a rich data set.

In what follows, I elaborate the findings from my fieldwork. Since the findings from the teachers' perspectives provided context for how the students responded, I decided to present the findings from teachers' perspective *before* I dealt further with the findings from the students. Therefore, the next chapter (Chapter Five) will focus on the teachers followed by the chapter on the students (Chapter Six). The aim is to set the scene on the learning environment in which the students were based because the teachers' perspectives set the tone for what can be anticipated from the students' responses.

Chapter Five:

Findings and Discussions: Teachers' Perspectives

As noted in the conclusion of Chapter Four, the presentation of findings derived from my data will commence by delving into the teachers' viewpoints. In **Figure 5.1** below, a segment of the diagram that highlights the process of data analysis is presented, serving as a reminder of the specific analysis conducted on the teachers' perspectives.

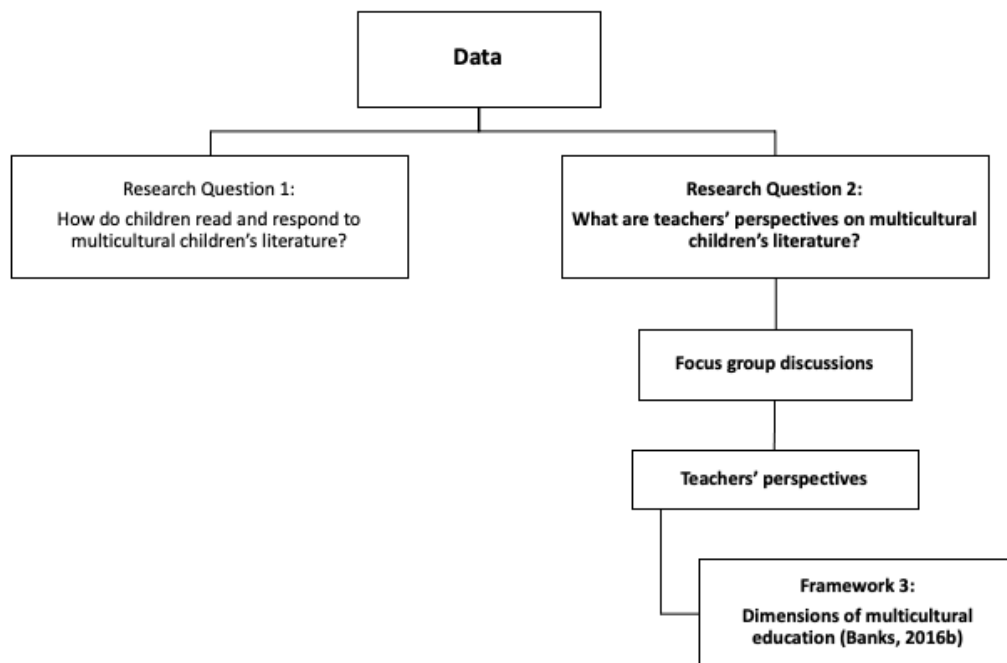


Figure 5. 1 Diagram of data analysis (teachers' perspectives)

The data collected from the focus group discussions with the teachers resulted in several key themes that I categorized into two groups (see **Table 5. 1**). The first group encompasses the teachers' viewpoints concerning diversity, from including their personal experiences living in a multicultural society, their individual interpretations of tolerance, and the significance they attributed on alignment with the school's diversity ideology. The second group encompasses the teachers' viewpoints pertaining to multicultural literature. Within this category, their awareness of the texts, recognition of the literature's pedagogical potential, and the perceived

challenges associated with integrating multicultural literary works into their classrooms were addressed.

Table 5. 1 *Key themes from teachers' discussions*

Perspectives on Diversity	Personal background
	Conceptualisation of tolerance
	School culture
Perspectives on Multicultural Literature	Awareness
	Pedagogical potential
	Challenges

In presenting the findings from teachers' perspectives, I begin by delving into discussion of these emerging themes and relevant excerpts from the teachers. Subsequently, I proceed to a more comprehensive exploration of these themes through the analytical framework chosen for this section, namely Banks's (2016b) dimensions of multicultural education.

5. 1 Perspectives on Diversity

5. 1. 1 Personal Background

The theme of personal background emerged during my session with the teachers in Sekolah Kerinci, prompted by the first question I asked them after my presentation: "How does your background affect your perspective in diversity education?" My question was inspired by Willis (2000), who asked her pre-service teachers at the beginning of her class on teaching multicultural literature to acknowledge and address their backgrounds. She argues that doing this is pivotal to "give voice to their identity as cultural beings in a multicultural society" (Willis, 2000, p. 269) and prepare the ground for the teaching of multicultural literature. By asking the same question at the start of my focus group, I hoped to explore how the teachers' own lived experiences with diversity might have shaped their teaching.

Miss Pilin, the sixth-grade teacher in Sekolah Kerinci, was the first one who answered. Identifying herself as a Sundanese Muslim, Pilin grew up in Sukabumi, West Java, where she was a part of the majority ethnic and religious group in Indonesia. She recalled learning about different cultures and religions not in schools, but from her neighbours who belonged to the minority groups of Chinese Indonesians and Catholics. She recounted how her Muslim friends mocked her for befriending these neighbours, but she carried on and learned about how her neighbours had different ways of worshipping God and celebrating holidays, and that became her first experience of diversity. When Miss Pilin went to college and was more widely exposed to diverse peers, she became “more open”: “It shaped me to see that everyone has their own perspectives”.

As a teacher, Miss Pilin conceptualised her teaching principle as “treating fellow human beings with empathy”. She felt that her experiences with her neighbours had primed her to become a part of Sekolah Kerinci, which she viewed as a place that “celebrates diversity”. It is important to note that this school follows the national curriculum, albeit with some modifications. One significant alteration is their approach to religious education, where religion is taught as knowledge and students are encouraged to explore religions other than their own. This contrasts with the more common confessional-based religious education in Indonesia, which focuses exclusively on the religion followed by each student, with the primary goal of fostering piety. The approach taken by Sekolah Kerinci in teaching religion as knowledge appeared to hold immense significance for Miss Pilin. It afforded her the opportunity to educate students about religions beyond Islam, such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Confucianism. In preparation for a lesson on Christianity, Miss Pilin, who wore a hijab, took a remarkable step: She picked up a Bible and read the beginning of the New Testament. This act served as a powerful symbol of the school’s commitment to fostering interfaith understanding and tolerance, as it allowed the teacher to bridge cultural and religious divides. Miss Pilin also demonstrated that teaching about different faiths can be a means of promoting diversity within the school’s curriculum.

Responding to Miss Pilin, Miss Tifa, the fifth-grade teacher, maintained that being exposed to various religions in her own family had also shaped her perspective on diversity. Identifying as a Muslim, Miss Tifa realised by observing her school friends that having family members who followed different faiths was not common. She remembered wondering why her friends did not seem as comfortable as her when meeting people who were not Muslims. She argued

that the religious conflicts that had been increasing recently in Indonesia were caused by “the intolerant majority” who could not imagine what it was like to live as part of a minority group in Indonesia.

Miss Pilin and Miss Tifa’s accounts of their backgrounds highlight the importance of teachers examining their own attitudes when it comes to diversity (Banks, 1993). Both teachers shared how their perspectives on diversity were shaped by the friends and family they grew up, and this realisation was valuable in understanding the teaching principles they held. According to Harjatanaya and Hoon (2020), “[d]etermining the teachers’ positionality in multiculturalism is crucial as such a position can influence their decisions and views when it comes to managing, teaching and fostering the value of diversity” (p. 23). Miss Pilin and Miss Tifa demonstrated their positionality as members of the majority ethnic and religious group who consider it essential to learn about the minority groups, and they model this attitude for their students. As Miss Tifa pointed out, her experience growing up with a mix of Muslims and non-Muslims in her family made her see that diversity is normal, and this understanding has shaped her principles in teaching.

I did not raise this question in the Muslim-majority Sekolah Merapi, and the themes of religious and cultural diversity did not naturally arise during the initial discussions. My status as a minority within this context gave me a unique experience, as I felt like I was entering the space of the majority. This shift in perspective was not always evident during my interactions with the students, which would be elaborated in the next chapter. However, the situation was slightly different during the focus group discussions with the teachers. I found myself slightly more nervous, primarily because of my visible differences. For instance, many of the female teachers at Sekolah Merapi wore long hijabs, a stark contrast to my casual attire. While it was clear from the school’s stated values and principles that they promoted tolerance, I hesitated to initiate conversations that might touch upon sensitive multicultural issues. My reluctance to broach these topics might have been influenced by my own personal experiences as an ethnic and religious minority, which made me acutely aware of the potential challenges and sensitivities involved in discussing such matters.

Upon reflection, it is evident that my positionality as a Christian researcher in a Muslim school had influenced the dynamics of the research process. This might have affected the extent to which the issue of multiculturalism was explored, and my hesitation to initiate such conversations appeared to highlight the potential challenges faced by a minority within a

multicultural context. Nevertheless, despite my slightly different approach in Sekolah Merapi, the teachers themselves eventually brought up the topic of diversity. They spoke about their practices of inclusivity within the school, which will be further elaborated in the following section.

5. 1. 2 Conceptualisation of Tolerance

A second theme to emerge from my session with the Kerinci teachers was the conceptualisation of tolerance. Like the first theme of personal background, this was spurred by my question (number three on the list of questions in the focus group material): “How do you define tolerance?”

Before giving their own definitions, three teachers responded to this question by talking about how tolerance is depicted in school textbooks:

Usually there is picture of a diverse group of people shaking each other's hands, and the word toleransi [tolerance] is mentioned. (Miss Andun)

I remember in the Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan [Citizenship Education] textbook, tolerance is depicted in an illustration of neighbours who hold hajatan [traditional wedding ceremonies] and saying we should not be angry for the noise. (Miss Tifa)

Yes! I remember clearly in my primary textbooks, there are word definitions but no examples. Toleransi is depicted in an illustration showing a Buddhist in his cloth, a Christian wearing a robe, a Muslim with a peci [a cap often worn by male Muslims in Southeast Asian countries] and a sarong... and that's it.” (Miss Pilin)

Miss Andun's statement on the depiction of tolerance in Indonesian textbooks prompted the other teachers to offer their observations as well. The concept of tolerance presented in Indonesian textbooks as remembered by the teachers in Sekolah Kerinci seems to be narrow and single-layered when in reality, tolerance is a complex and nuanced. Scholars have argued that tolerance is difficult to pin down. It has been called “elusive” (Heyd, 1996), “impossible” (Williams, 1996); “contested” (McKinnon & Castiglione, 2009), and “profoundly controversial” (Forst, 2013). Moreover, there seems to be a divergence between theories and practice: While the theoretical discussions stress on the urgency of tolerance, the practice is considered “complacent” (McKinnon & Castiglione, 2009).

In the context of Indonesia, tolerance is mostly associated with religious relations (Parker, 2018), which might explain the depictions in the textbooks that attempt to exemplify inter-religious harmony. The way the Kerinci teachers described the textbook presentation of tolerance seems to indicate dissatisfaction with the simplistic depiction, as can be seen in Pilin's expression "... *and that's it*".

Miss Tifa and Miss Pilin then offered their own understandings of tolerance:

As I reflect on the meaning of tolerance, [it means] I don't have to approve what someone does, but I will help him when he needs help. If he is comfortable with his way, I should show my respect by helping him. Even though I cannot make everybody comfortable, at least I have the initiative to make others feel so. (Miss Tifa)

I consider tolerance to be something related to kesetaraan [equality]. It is about how we respect everybody, fellow human beings. As for right or wrong, everyone has their own opinions. No need to force it. This does not mean if we have different opinions, we then give up. It is okay to disagree but still maintain good relations. (Miss Pilin)

Both teachers mentioned "respect" as an important aspect of tolerance and provided examples of how this could manifest in action: helping people whom we disapprove of (Miss Tifa) and maintaining good relations despite disagreement (Miss Pilin). This seems representative of the wider perception of tolerance in Indonesia, as argued by Raihani (2014), who identifies respect as an integral element that forms the basis of tolerance. Raihani also posits that in addition to respect, tolerance encompasses "accommodating differences" and "taking seriously the equality of human beings who have different religions and cultural practices" (2014, p. 543). These values can be identified in Miss Tifa and Miss Pilin's conceptualisations, which bring them closer to the concept of tolerance that "contributes to a more positive approach to multiculturalism" (Raihani, 2014, p. 543). Respect is also a key component in the conceptualization of tolerance as posited by Forst (2013). It is through respect that tolerance can transcend the mere act of "putting up with" people who are different. When tolerance incorporates what Forst terms "the respect conception" (p. 29), it implies that various groups will regard each other as autonomous and equal, with none asserting superiority over the other.

Miss Tifa's and Miss Pilin's statements also demonstrated a notable disparity between the nuanced conceptualisation of tolerance found in the definitions provided by the two Kerinci teachers and the narrower depiction presented in textbooks. This led Miss Pilin to assert:

“The government should broaden their models of *toleransi*”. Miss Pilin’s perspective here aligns with the argument made by McKinnon (2009), who contends that there continues to be a gap between theoretical understandings and practical applications of tolerance. Despite calls for a reinterpretation and a shift away from viewing tolerance merely as passive putting up with differences, such discussions have predominantly remained within academic and scholarly circles, with limited real-world impact. In practice, diverse perceptions of tolerance exist. These contrasting viewpoints seem to be rooted in different conceptions of tolerance and the justifications provided for it. made for it (Cohen, 2014; Forst, 2013; McKinnon, 2008). One action may be deemed tolerant by some but viewed as intolerant by others. For some, tolerance is perceived as a display of strength of character and respect, while others interpret it as a sign of weakness and ignorance. Despite its noble aspirations, tolerance may still fall short of the ideal. Nevertheless, as a longstanding concept, it continues to hold promise in achieving a fair society, including in Indonesia.

5. 1. 3 School Culture

When I joined this school, I felt comfortable. This is the right place to teach children.

(Miss Andun)

As the fourth-grade teacher and the primary head teacher, Miss Andun expressed the significance of being supported by the school. Her comment was made to highlight how her perception of diversity education is in line with the school’s ideology. Compared to the confessional approach common to the delivery of Religious Education in Indonesian schools (Nurwanto & Cusack, 2017), Sekolah Kerinci adopts a different model. The school teaches religion as a knowledge, introducing students to the world religions instead of a single religion practiced by the students. Miss Andun’s predecessor decided to leave the school as he disagreed with Kerinci’s model of religious education.

From what the teachers said in our discussion, Sekolah Kerinci seems to employ the “whole-school approach” (Raihani, 2011), in which the staff, the curriculum, the student activities and the school culture “all together contribute to the promotion and nurture of tolerance within the school community” (Raihani, 2011, p. 23). For their field trip, the school initiated *Wisata Rumah Ibadah* (House of Worship Tour), on which the students visited various places of worship in Jakarta and met with different religious communities. The students also

attended *Pekan Kebudayaan Nasional* (National Culture Fair), an exhibition held by the Ministry of Education and Cultures in 2019, where students got to learn and participate in various cultural traditions from across the archipelago.

The significance of a supportive school culture regarding issues of diversity could be identified in Sekolah Merapi as well. Although Sekolah Merapi is an Islamic school, one of its principles is inclusivity, which is defined on their website as an “open attitude and tolerance towards a range of faiths, beliefs and thoughts”, along with the statement that “pupils from all the faiths in Indonesia are treated in a fair and dignified manner” (Yayasan Pendidikan Madania Indonesia, 2019). Towards the end of my discussion in Sekolah Merapi, Miss Merak, the primary school librarian, offered her perspective regarding the role of the school within the wider context of multicultural issues:

We all know how today, conflicts are increasingly running amok in the country. I find it remarkable ... either the ethnic or religious conflicts. That's why I keep saying, how lucky that my children are studying in Madania. It is scary in my neighbourhood, Ms Herdiana ... there are children who are still receh (narrow thinking) and focus on people's religions. As for my children, religion is no longer an issue. In Madania, the learning aspects support such thinking. Alhamdulillah (thanks be to God), they have been equipped in the very pluralistic Madania, be it about religion or culture, so I as a parent do not have to work hard. Whatever Indonesia will be like in the future, Insha'allah (God willing), my children will serve as the peacemakers. (Miss Merak)

Miss Merak's statement validated a few issues that I had not been able to bring up in the discussion due to my reluctance as a minority group member. First, her statement offers valuable insights into the pressing issues affecting Indonesia, particularly in the context of cultural and religious conflicts. Her acknowledgement of the increasing conflicts within the country underscores the gravity of the situation how these have affected children. The use of the term “scary” to describe the situation in her neighbourhood, where children have become fixated on religious differences, serves as a representation of the pervasive tensions. This aligns with reports from various organisations, such as Convey Indonesia (2018) and PPIM UIN Jakarta (2018), which have documented rising intolerance among young people towards individuals from different religious backgrounds.

Miss Merak's statement also goes beyond highlighting the challenges and points to a crucial aspect: the pivotal role of schools in shaping the attitudes of future generations, or, to borrow her word, future "peacemakers". She considered Sekolah Merapi as a place where students, including her own children who went to the school, could acquire the important skills necessary for coexisting in a multicultural society. The school, in her view, played a vital role in equipping students with the tools needed to navigate the complexities of a diverse society. This points out the significance of schools as not only academic institutions but also as agents of social change.

5. 2 Perspectives on Multicultural Literature

5. 2. 1 Awareness

The second category of themes emerging from the teachers' discussions was their perspectives on multicultural literature. This took place as I invited the teachers to look at the children's books I had brought to the sessions. As I and the teachers formed circles – on the floor in Sekolah Kerinci or at a round desk in Sekolah Merapi – it was easier for us to reach the books, flip through them, and exchange titles. After allowing some time for them to look at the books, I began asking them what they thought of the texts.

The teachers in Sekolah Kerinci immediately showed that they were quite knowledgeable about multicultural texts. The school prides itself on having a "literature-based" programme, which means many of the lessons in the primary classes incorporate literary texts, both Indonesian and English. This is evident in the fact that the Sekolah Kerinci teachers were familiar with some of the multicultural books I brought and had even used them in their classrooms. Jaipong, the first-grade teacher, recognised the Mandala picturebook as she had been using the picturebooks by Litara that highlight Indonesian cultures. The upper primary levels had been reading middle-grade chapter books that I consider multicultural as well, such as *Mata* by Okky Madasari, which centres around a young girl's adventure in Indonesia's lesser-known places and histories, as well as *Na Willa* by Reda Gaudiamo, which talks about the author's childhood as a child of parents with different ethnicities and living in a multicultural neighbourhood in East Java in the 1960s.

As Colby and Lyon (2004) argue, teachers' awareness of multicultural literature is critical because "[w]hen teachers gain awareness that multicultural literature may be used as a stimulus for creating classrooms where all students are valued, then children can celebrate their own cultures and explore the uniqueness of others" (p. 28). This was demonstrated by the teachers in Sekolah Kerinci. It was encouraging to learn that the multicultural texts they had selected and used in their classrooms were more than books about festivals and fashion, but rather stories with nuanced and complex depiction of cultures and multicultural identities. The teachers were also keen to know about the titles they had not seen before, such as those that I had brought to our discussion. It is important to remember that Sekolah Kerinci was exceptional in their heavy use of literature, which has not been the norm for the majority of schools in Indonesia.

What took place in Sekolah Merapi might be more representative of Indonesian schools. The school had a well-stocked library with Indonesian and English books and employed the 15-minute free reading time advised by the Ministry of Education, but the significance of multicultural stories did not seem to be a priority. Before I started my sessions with their students, the head teacher asked to see the books I was going to use first, saying that "diversity is already covered in our lessons". When I showed her the books, she had not seen any of them before, but after flipping through the pages, she gave me the green light to proceed with my sessions with the children.

When I showed the books to the teachers as we were about to start our discussion, Miss Merak the librarian looked a little surprised. She commented: "The variety is quite large ... not only multicultural". Her comment implied that Miss Merak might have a narrower notion of what constitutes multicultural literature. Indeed, Banks indicates several times in his various works (1993, 1998, 2014) that educators tend to have narrow conception of the term 'multicultural', limiting it to tangible forms of culture. In fact, the term 'multicultural' encompasses many variables of identities and their intersections, from gender, race, religion, and social class to exceptionality (Banks, 2016).

When I asked the teachers and the librarian if multicultural books such as the ones I brought for our discussion had been used before in their classrooms, Mr. Saman (the third-grade teacher) and Miss Merak (the librarian) ensured me that these books were not strangers in the classroom or the library. The books in the library, Miss Merak believed, "touched on the issue". However, from their comments about my multicultural text set, I gathered that they

were not familiar with the texts. The books they were using with their class were not particularly multicultural, given that the use of English fiction had the aim of improving the students' English. Miss Merak liked to read aloud during library hour, and she would read from folktales (she mentioned Timun Mas, one famous folktale) for the younger students and KKPK (*Kecil-kecil Punya Karya* or Little Creators' Works), the popular book series written by children, for the older ones. While folktales hold immense value as vital components in cultural heritage, they might not neatly fit into the concept of multicultural literature, which places a strong emphasis on representing marginalized groups and addressing contemporary societal issues (Cai, 2002). Conversely, books like the Little Creators' Works, intriguing in their own right as they are authored by children and carry the potential to provide unique insights into children's perspectives, need further research to examine whether they capture diverse cultural backgrounds. It is also worth noting here that these books tend to focus more on universal experiences, such as school life, friendship, and relationships with parents and siblings. Nevertheless, the fact that the teachers at Sekolah Merapi have already started to incorporate children's literature to some extent into their lesson was a promising sign. At the end of our discussion, the Merapi teachers commented that they wanted to see more of the multicultural books I brought to our session and wished more titles would be published. Their interest in the multicultural text set and how they could be used with the students suggest a potential avenue for multicultural stories to find a place within classrooms.

5. 2. 2 Pedagogical Potential

Prompted by my question, the teachers in both schools talked about what they considered to be the potential of multicultural texts in the classrooms. In Sekolah Kerinci, the teachers reported having had already exploited some of this potential as they had incorporated the books in their classrooms, resulting in what Miss Janger, the third-grade teacher, called "lively discussions". For more obvious reasons, the multicultural texts the Kerinci teachers used in class had been a great resource for learning about cultures. However, since discussions were a normal part of their lessons, the books had served as springboards to talk about wider issues. When Miss Tifa assigned her class to read *Negeri 5 Menara*, a novel about a young man who goes to an Islamic boarding school, she noted that her students did not only learn about the cultures of Minangkabau, where the protagonist is from, but also made comparisons and connections with their own school. Miss Jaipong also shared her

experience using one of the Litara picturebooks, *Pewarna Langit*, with her first graders. This book narrates the story of how traditional kites from West Sumatra are crafted, from the perspective of a child who has recently moved to the region. Miss Jaipong creatively employed this book in her teaching, capitalizing on its multifaceted potential. Firstly, she utilized the story to instil empathy in her students by encouraging them to relate to the character's experience as a newcomer in the neighbourhood. Next, she introduced the cultural significance of traditional kites from West Sumatra, broadening her students' horizons. Finally, Miss Jaipong harnessed the book's content to impart the science behind kite flying, thus providing a well-rounded educational experience for her first-grade class.

The teachers at Sekolah Merapi had limited prior experience with using multicultural texts; however, they recognized significant pedagogical potential of such materials, as discussed in the previous section. Furthermore, they shared their perspectives on how the integration of multicultural materials could benefit their classrooms. Mr. Saman, for instance, mentioned that he had previously utilized videos and photography books to teach his students about the variety of Indonesian cultures. He noted that he was able to use it to teach about not only language, but also about character education and religion. Miss Kecak, who taught sixth grade, highlighted the positive impact of even a simple activity, such as reading a story excerpt on a worksheet about various modes of transportation in Indonesia. She observed that this had broadened her students' perceptions, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. These perspectives further underscore the teachers' recognition of the immense potential of multicultural materials in the classroom. Mr. Saman and Miss Kecak, for example, viewed these resources as not only enriching language and cultural understanding but also as tools for promoting character education. This suggests that the teachers at Sekolah Merapi perceived the incorporation of multicultural texts as a contribution to a more inclusive educational experience for students.

After I gave them some time to look through the multicultural texts, the Sekolah Merapi teachers and the librarian seemed more interested. Mr. Saman pointed out that the books were promising for teaching because they could be linked to various subjects: language, citizenship, and religion. Similarly, Miss Rampai, offered her thoughts on the benefits of the texts for her students:

This book [referring to Joko dan Jenar Jalan-Jalan]. For the lower classes they are easy, and the language is easy to digest. The back part is very good; there's

additional information about people in wheelchairs and their difficulties regarding public facilities so that children can get the illustrations and there is empathy. It makes me think, where else we can find places that are accessible for wheelchair users? (Miss Rampai)

Miss Rampai's comment suggests the importance of didactic values in children's books as her focus turned to the "information page" rather than the story. She did not comment on the page that had interested the students during the literature circles: the page with the illustration of Joko praying as a Christian for his Muslim cousin, Jenar.

Cap Go Meh, the brightly coloured picturebook about the intercultural relationship between a Javanese Muslim and a Chinese Indonesian, attracted the attention of Miss Kecak and Miss Merak, who assessed the text's potential for teaching about multicultural issues:

These books are really good. This one [referring to Cap Go Meh] is about diversity of religions, and it shows how to practice tolerance ... and the illustrations are very attractive. (Miss Kecak)

For the students, in order to apprehend multiculturalism to the heart and also apply it ... then they have to be supported by these books. Insha'allah [God willing]. (Miss Merak)

Both teachers recognized the potential of a multicultural text like *Cap Go Meh* in serving as a valuable resource for addressing multicultural issues in the classroom. Miss Kecak's enthusiasm for the picturebook was evident through her positive assessment of its content and visually appealing illustrations. Furthermore, she emphasized the importance of the book in teaching tolerance to her students. Miss Merak echoed this sentiment. Her statement highlights the role of multicultural books as a form of "support" for students in learning about multicultural values and putting them into practice. These teachers' keen interest in *Cap Go Meh* emphasizes the importance of well-crafted multicultural texts in shaping the perspectives of their students and promoting education for diversity.

5. 2. 3 Challenges

Several challenges were raised by the teachers in both schools regarding the use of multicultural texts in the classroom. These challenges related to the texts themselves, the students, and the teachers.

The challenge regarding texts seemed to focus on accessibility. As previously noted, the teachers were mostly aware there were children's books in Indonesia that highlight issues of diversity and multiculturalism. Nevertheless, they saw them as, in Miss Rampai's words, "limited edition". Comments such as "there aren't many books like these in Indonesia" were repeatedly made in Sekolah Merapi. When Miss Kecak uttered these words, her colleagues agreed and added, "too few books like these" and "the authors are still scarce". In Kerinci, where the awareness was higher, the teachers also pointed out the need for quality multicultural texts. As Miss Andun, the fourth-grade teacher and head teacher, affirmed: "There should be more books like these".

As for the students, both the Kerinci and Merapi teachers mentioned limited vocabulary as the main challenge. Miss Tifa emphasised that she wished to have meaningful discussions about the texts, but the students' limited vocabulary made them frequently stop their reading in order to check the meanings of the words. "This disrupts their engagement with the story," she said. She further elaborated:

If my aim is only for them to finish reading, perhaps it could be done, but there wouldn't be any discussions. As a result, the skills that I want them to have and apply from the reading wouldn't be gained. Discussion is important, although it makes finishing the book take a long time. (Miss Tifa)

As this excerpt suggests, the teachers' ideal plan to discuss multicultural texts in the classroom might not be able to take place if the students do not manage to finish their reading. The problem of limited vocabulary was pointed out by the teachers in Sekolah Merapi as well. When the teachers were looking through the multicultural texts in our session, Miss Kecak pointed out the "difficult words" in a picturebook titled *Mandala*; these were the words which referred to the language of the cultural group. She suggested that the books should include glossaries for such words. "This one is good," she said as she was

looking at *Berani Menjadi Joki*. “There is a glossary of the difficult words at the back.” Mr. Saman concurred that regional language could become problematic in using multicultural texts as the teachers themselves might not be familiar with the language: “That’s my experience... when I don’t come from the region. ‘Pak’, what does this mean?’ ‘What region is it from?’ ‘Sulawesi’? ‘I don’t know!’”

These excerpts from the teachers in Sekolah Merapi highlight the challenges and concerns that educators often face when incorporating multicultural texts into their teaching practices. The teachers in my study have expressed unease regarding aspects such as unfamiliar local vernaculars and different cultures, and this seems to be in line with research on educators and multicultural texts. In Dong’s observations of English teachers (2005a; 2005b), the teachers grappled with the very issue of teaching literary works from unfamiliar cultures, echoing the sentiments of the teachers at Sekolah Merapi. Dong (2005a) notes that educators may fear their unfamiliarity with literature from other cultures might inadvertently reinforce stereotypes, a concern that aligns with Miss Pilin’s comment about anticipating children’s questions. Furthermore, educators may question their students’ readiness to engage with racial and cultural issues with maturity and respect, a concern mirrored in Dong’s assertion. These parallels underscore the significance of providing educators with the necessary preparation and support to effectively integrate multicultural texts into their teaching, enabling them to navigate these challenges and foster meaningful discussions in the classroom.

Another challenge I picked up on from the teachers’ comments was how educators can support their students to move beyond Othering when encountering different cultures. When Mr. Saman used the learning resource set of photography books and documentaries on various cultural groups in Indonesia, he mentioned that his students were “a little surprised”. As the resources show remote parts of Indonesia, the students made comments like, “There are parts of Indonesia that are still like this?” and “Those poor children, they don’t have this and that”. Mr. Saman did not say if or how he responded to the comments, and he shared them in our discussion without expressing what he thought about them, or whether he saw them as an issue or not.

Studies in the field have consistently argued that it is crucial to support young people in moving beyond Othering and encourage them to adopt a critical stance when encountering diverse cultures in literature (Center, 2005; Short & Thomas, 2011). However, this presents a challenge for teachers, as Dong (2005a) argues:

The inclusion of multicultural literature in the English classroom is more than just an expansion of the reading list. It involves teachers transforming their attitudes and orientations, as well as their methods of exploring the issues of culture, race, and diverse voices in multicultural literature, and moving these issues and voices to the center of discussions and reflections. (p. 368)

Dong's statement asserts that integrating multicultural literature into the English classroom necessitates a profound transformation in teachers' attitudes, orientations, and pedagogical approaches. It involves shifting the focus from simply expanding the reading list to fundamentally reorienting teaching methods to explore issues of culture, race, and diverse voices in multicultural literature. The challenges identified through discussions with the teachers at Sekolah Merapi highlight the sentiments put forth by Dong and underscore the interconnectedness of texts, teachers, and students in the successful exploration of multicultural literature. The teachers' comments illuminate the real-world complexities of teaching multicultural texts, particularly in overcoming the tendency for Othering. As educators grapple with these challenges, it becomes evident that their role extends beyond merely presenting the texts. In essence, the teachers' efforts are integral to guiding students towards a more empathetic understanding of diverse cultures.

5. 3 Teachers' Perspectives & Analytical Framework 3

As mentioned in Chapter Four, I employed Banks's dimensions of multicultural education (2016b) to make meaning of the teachers' discussions. As a brief reminder, Banks (2014) proposes five dimensions to demonstrate that "multicultural education is complex and multidimensional" (p. 35). These dimensions reflect various conceptualisations and strategies in the implementation of multicultural education. They are content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. From my discussions with the teachers in Sekolah Kerinci and Sekolah Merapi, I identified four out of the five dimensions. **Table 5. 2** below shows my mapping of the teachers' perspectives through Banks's dimensions of multicultural education.

Table 5. 2 Teachers' perspectives through Banks's multicultural dimensions

Teachers' Perspectives	Dimensions of Multicultural Education (Banks, 2016b)
Awareness, pedagogical potential, challenges	Content Integration
Pedagogical potential	Prejudice Reduction
Conceptualisation of tolerance	Equity Pedagogy
School culture	Empowering School Structure

The first facet of multicultural education demonstrated from the teachers' discussion was **content integration**, which was apparent when we talked about the potential of multicultural literature. The teachers in both schools seem to concur that multicultural literature could be beneficial for learning about cultural diversity. Miss Merak perceived the multicultural books as "supports" for teaching multicultural values, while Miss Kecak considered the texts' potential for widening students' horizons. The teachers in both schools also thought that the multicultural books we looked at during the discussions could be used in different subjects, which reflects what Banks (2014) argues in reference to the content integration dimension, which is that it should not be limited to particular subjects. In Banks's example, even a mathematics teacher should be able to apply content integration with multicultural content to illustrate the contribution of a variety of cultures into knowledge.

The discussion about the potential of multicultural literature also reflects the second dimension of multicultural education: **prejudice reduction**. This is when multicultural education is applied to "help students to develop more positive racial and ethnic attitudes" (Banks, 2014, p. 39). In the context of Indonesia, developing positive attitudes to the "diversity of religions" (as Miss Kecak said when she was talking about the potential of *Cap Go Meh*) is especially important (Hoon, 2017). The majority of the teachers considered that the major promise offered by the texts was, in Miss Kecak's words, to encourage students "to practice tolerance".

The third dimension, **equity pedagogy**, could be identified in the Kerinci teachers' conceptualisation of tolerance. Miss Pilin mentioned that she considered tolerance to be closely linked to equality in the treatment human beings, regardless of their backgrounds. Banks (2016a) posits that "[a]n equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching

in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, gender, and social-class groups” (p. 17). Multicultural education can take place when teachers believe that students from diverse backgrounds deserve fair and equal opportunities in education. However, the fact that only one teacher mentioned this issue suggests that this dimension might not be prominent in the Indonesian context.

The fourth dimension reflected in the teachers’ discussion is **empowering school structure**. This dimension is mentioned by Banks (2014) as one important facet of multicultural education because it “involves conceptualizing the school as a unit of change” (p. 41). Principles of multicultural education should not be realised and implemented by teachers only, but instead they should be supported by the whole school. One of the key themes that emerged from the teachers’ discussions was school culture, in which teachers from both schools revealed the importance of having aligned multicultural values between the teachers and the schools. Miss Andun from Sekolah Kerinci and Miss Merak from Sekolah Merapi described being accommodated by the schools in teaching about cultural diversity, and this is critical considering the lack of guidance and policy from the government regarding multicultural education in Indonesia (Raihani, 2011; Harjatanaya & Hoon, 2020).

Among the five dimensions of multicultural education, **knowledge construction** seems to be the dimension less discernible in the teachers’ discussions. This dimension involves educators applying teaching strategies that help students recognize that knowledge “is influenced by the racial, ethnic, gender, and social-class positions of individuals and groups” (Banks, 2014, p. 38). This dimension requires teachers to deconstruct the presentation of knowledge and reveal how power relations influence the formation of knowledge. During my interactions with the teachers in both Sekolah Kerinci and Sekolah Merapi, they did not explicitly indicate their proficiency in demonstrating this aspect of knowledge construction. While I was not present to witness their classroom instruction, my discussions with them centred on their descriptions of teaching approaches and perspectives. It is important to recognize that my interactions with the teachers provided valuable insights into their perspectives on multicultural education, shedding light on the areas where they may require additional support or training to fully embrace the dimensions of knowledge construction in their pedagogical practices.

5. 4 Chapter Summary

The discussions with the teachers yielded valuable insights to address my second research question: *What are teachers' perspectives regarding the pedagogical potential of multicultural children's literature?*

Based on the viewpoints expressed by the selected teachers in my study, it was evident that they held positive attitudes towards multicultural texts. This positivity was exemplified by their demonstrated awareness, curiosity, and their perceived practices and challenges when it came to integrating these texts into their teaching. In broader context, the findings from this study highlight the teachers' pivotal role in multicultural education. Their experiences regarding diversity, understanding of tolerance, and recognition of the significance of institutional support collectively emphasized their capacity to serve the critical roles in fostering a more inclusive learning environment.

The implementation of James Banks's dimensions of multicultural dimensions has provided valuable insights into how selected teachers in my study perceive and put into practice the principles of multicultural education. Banks (2016a) emphasizes the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of multicultural education, asserting that its impact on schools can only be truly transformative when widely and accurately grasped. The teachers in this study offer hope in this regard as they reveal the identification of multiple dimensions of multicultural education. While the dimensions of content integration and prejudice reduction emerge as particularly prominent in these discussions, it is noteworthy that the broader aspects of equity pedagogy and fostering an empowering school culture also find expression.

Overall, the teachers' perspectives discussed in this chapter indicate their preparedness to incorporate multicultural texts into their teaching practices, and that opportunities exist within the classroom environment to facilitate this integration. In the forthcoming chapter, I explore the findings derived from the students' responses to multicultural texts.

Chapter Six:

Findings & Discussions: Students' Responses

After examining the teachers' perspectives, this chapter will present the findings from the students' responses. **Figure 6. 1** below shows the data analysis process regarding the specific part of the data on students' responses, which employ two analytical frameworks.

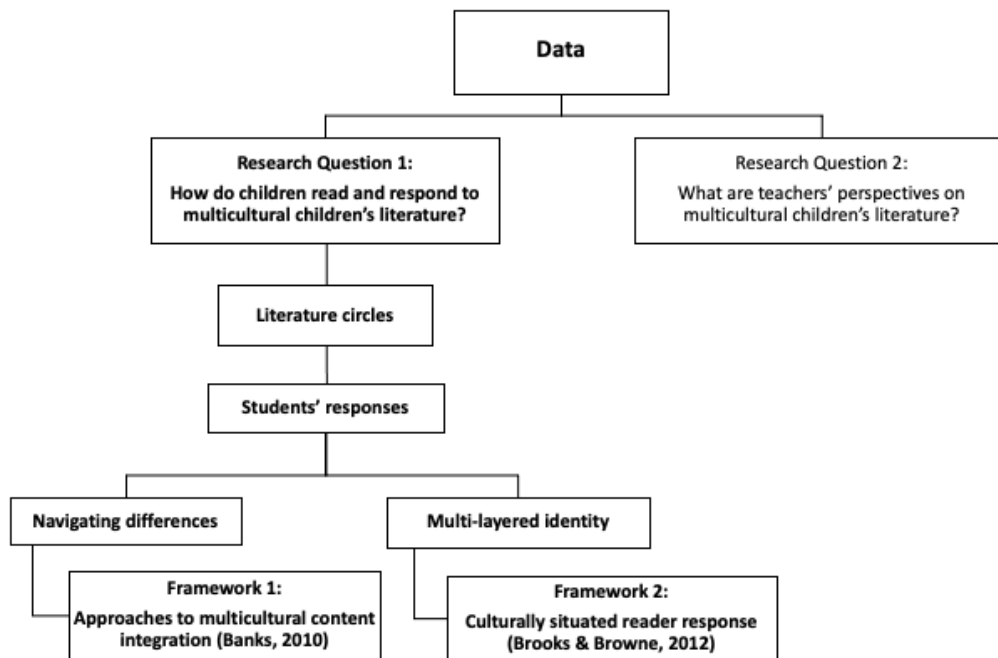


Figure 6. 1 Diagram of data analysis (students' responses)

As illustrated in the figure above, students' responses were categorised into two themes and analysed using two distinct frameworks. **Table 6. 1** below presents the detailed structure of the themes identified from the students' responses.

Table 6. 1 Key themes from students' responses

Navigating Difference	Food as an Important Interest
	Disorientation
	Curiosity & Learning
Multi-layered Identity	Importance of Religion
	Awareness of Multiculturalism
	Pride of Chinese Indonesians

The first theme, titled Navigating Differences, encompasses responses that reflect the various ways in which students engaged with the diverse cultures portrayed in the texts. Within Navigating Differences, I identified three subthemes: Food as an Important Interest, Disorientation, and Curiosity and Learning. The second theme, titled Multi-layered Identity, comprises responses in which students brought their complex and nuanced identities into their interactions with multicultural texts. This theme is further divided into three subthemes: Importance of Religion, Awareness of Multiculturalism, and Pride of Chinese Indonesians.

In the following, I provide a detailed discussion of the students' responses based on these two themes.

6. 1 Navigating Difference

Throughout the literature circles in both schools, the multicultural texts drew the students' attention to different cultures and invited them to react in various ways. In what follows I will go through the three prominent types of responses to encountering differences through texts.

6. 1. 1 Food as an Important Interest

The students demonstrated such strong reactions when there was food mentioned and illustrated in the stories that it became evident to me this was a key topic for the children. The mention of food, either during a read-aloud by me or during students' own readings, triggered comments such as "Ooo, yummy!" or "This is making me hungry!" from the students. Whether food was the main theme of the story or a mere addition in the illustration, it

immediately drew the children's attention and stimulated conversation or even informed their decisions when choosing a text to read. In the second literature circle in Sekolah Kerinci, after reading aloud the first story in *Kisah dari Sumba* and discussing it, I asked the students to choose any of the four stories in the book to read on their own. As they flicked through the pages of the book to pick their story, some stopped on a page showing illustrations of Sumbanese food:

Jalak: I want this one because there's food.

Murai: Me too! I picked it first!

While Murai subsequently changed to another story because she did not want to read the same thing as Jalak, Jalak went through with his choice and read the story with the food illustration.

In Sekolah Merapi, some the students placed their Post-its pages that featured food, such as spreads containing food. My instruction with the Post-its was for them to mark the pages they liked the most, so this seems to indicate that food was one of the primary attractions of the story.

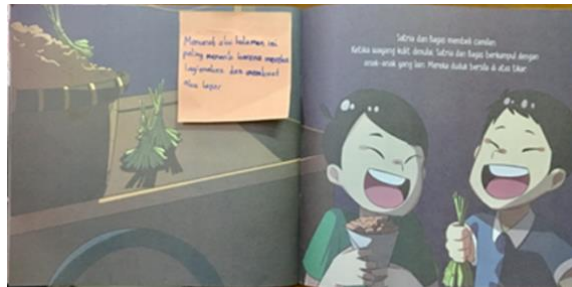


Figure 6. 2 Dahlia's Post-it in *Pertunjukan Wayang Kulit*

As can be seen in **Figure 6. 2**, Dahlia wrote, "In my opinion this page is the most interesting because they are eating and it makes me hungry". In addition to these individual responses regarding food, there was also interaction that took place when the text was particularly focused on the role of food in culture.

In Sekolah Merapi, we read *Cap Go Meh*, a picturebook about food as part of the Chinese Indonesian culture, in which food took centre stage. As we turned to the page adorned with Chinese New Year cuisine, it elicited strong responses from the students.

Dahlia: Oh, I know, I know this cake! What's its name?

Melati: Kue bulan! (Moon cake)

Pinus: No, no! But something like that...

Cemara: Kue keranjang! (Glutinous rice cake)

Pinus: Yes, kue keranjang! I was given this once!

The other page depicted *lontong* Cap Go Meh, the food shared by two ethnic and religious groups, Chinese Indonesians and Javanese Muslims, and this also triggered readers to write how they loved the illustration picturing Nisa's father serving the food for Nisa and Lili. In addition, Damar stuck another post-it on a different page and went beyond the primal reaction of seeing food (**Figure 6. 3**): knowledge of other culture. He wrote, "This page lets me know the food of Imlek (Chinese New Year)".



Figure 6. 3 Damar's Post-it in *Cap Go Meh*

The Merapi students' reactions towards the Chinese New Year food also reflected a welcoming attitude to the previously silenced cultural group. As mentioned in my research context in Chapter One, Chinese Indonesians endured more than three decades of prohibition to publicly observe their culture under the authoritarian regime (1966-1998) and have been perceived as the "Others" in Indonesia (Heryanto, 1998).

6. 1. 2 Disorientation

The next type of responses that regularly emerged throughout the literature circles were expressions of shock or fear, which occurred particularly when the cultural groups depicted in the texts were unfamiliar to the students. During my read-aloud of *Berani Menjadi Joki*, in which a young boy takes part in a bull race as part of the tradition on the island of Madura,

the students in both Sekolah Kerinci and Sekolah Rinjani would interrupt me with their reactions.

In Sekolah Kerinci, the students displayed strong reactions regarding the use of animals for the festival, either the adult bull for the race or the young calf for practice. When she saw the illustration depicting bulls racing, Camar commented, “*It’s sad! The bulls. Look!*” Most of them also reacted as they learned that Maduranese children train for bull races with the calves: “*Ooooh, please don’t! Not the calf!*” The calves are illustrated with large drops of sweat on their faces and cringing expressions conveying hard physical exertion. The other children made similar comments throughout the reading, and this empathy for the calves and bulls became an important factor in their assessment of the text. After the reading, I asked for their overall opinion of *Berani Menjadi Joki*. The students in Sekolah Kerinci said they liked it but gave the book a relatively low rating because they “*feel sorry for the calves*”.

In Sekolah Merapi, it was finding out the rider’s age that shocked the students. I was reading this part of the text that mentioned – “*In Pamekasan, Madura, teenage children participate in buffalo racing*” – when Dahlia interrupted:

Dahlia: There is also a joki, eh, bull rider, who is old, isn’t there?

Herdiana: There is, but they start training from a very young age. Around Pinus’s or Cemara’s age.

Dahlia: But Pinus is only 10 years old!

As shown in that excerpt, the idea that children take part in the cultural tradition of bull racing seemed to perplex Dahlia, causing her to interject to ask if “old people” also rode the bulls in Madura. When I mentioned that boys at her age participated in early training, Dahlia protested with “But... only”, which suggested the idea of young children practicing the tradition was hard to come to grips with. If previously the other children had demonstrated shocked reactions to the use of bulls, Dahlia’s comments suggested disbelief at the involvement of children in the tradition. Murai in Sekolah Kerinci expressed a similar reaction to the text: “*What if there’s a kid who’s really brave and then he wants to try it?*” It can be inferred here that Murai felt worried that the story might encourage young readers to copy the action of the protagonist and possibly endanger themselves.

Moments of disorientation also took place as students expressed how the traditions and cultural artefacts depicted in the texts were “scary”. When asked to give their overall opinions about *Berani Menjadi Joki*, Maleo commented:

I think this book is too scary and perhaps little children won't be able to understand. From 1 to 10, I give it an 8, because the book is good but it's sad, and there's also one flaw: it's scary, and perhaps kids will not enjoy it. (Maleo)

In his comment, Maleo took the role of an assessor who considered the book unsuitable for children because it was, as he mentioned twice, “scary”. He did not specify which aspects of the book were scary and wouldn't be enjoyed by children. However, Maleo gave the book a good grade “because the book is good”, which suggests he enjoyed the story.

When I told the students in Sekolah Kerinci that *Berani Menjadi Joki* was part of a series of picturebooks that highlight various cultural traditions, the mention of the traditions prompted reactions:

Herdiana: The other books in the series talk about ondel-ondel, wayang kulit, reog...

Camar: Why is everything scaring me?

Elang: Reog must be possessed by the devil first.

Herdiana: Is that so?

Elang: So the person can be mad. [Doing a mad dance.]

Camar: Everything is scaring me!

Camar was one of the expressive students in my fieldwork, and she demonstrated being scared at the mention of the cultural artefacts used in the traditions. Whether she was indeed scared or just being funny, Camar's reaction indicates she was aware of what these objects looked like. *Ondel-ondel* is a pair of giant puppets from the ethnic group of Betawi, *wayang kulit* is a shadow puppet from Central Java, and *reog* is a lion-headed figure with an elaborate peacock feather from East Java.

The students in Sekolah Merapi showed similar reactions. After a read-aloud of *Berani Menjadi Joki*, I handed out the other books in the series and invited them to read individually, with each student having a different title. After a while, I asked them to share with the group what they had read. Melati had read the book about *ondel-ondel*:

Herdiana: Have you ever seen an ondel-ondel?

Melati: Yep.

Dahlia: In the streets!

Herdiana: When you see one, what's in your mind?

Melati: Um, a bit scary.

Herdiana: Ondel-ondel used to be called barongan.

Cemara: Barongan? This is also barongan [pointing to his book about reog].

Melati: The face is scary!

Herdiana: Because it is meant to...?

Melati: [Reading from the book] To drive out the spirits.

Cemara: This is also barongan.

Herdiana: Indeed. In Imlek, there's also barongsai... we have many barong.

Dahlia: And also scary!

As the excerpt shows, Melati and Dahlia demonstrated scared reactions like Camar in Sekolah Kerinci when we talked about certain cultural objects in Indonesian traditions. When Melati specified that the scary part of *ondel-ondel* was the face, I tried to guide her back to the book, which explains the reason behind the scary face. At the same time, Cemara interrupted by making connections to the object in the book he was reading. I mentioned that the barongan character (a lion-like creature) is shared by several ethnic groups in Indonesia when Dahlia, who had been observing our talk, interjected by commenting that the *other* barongan was also scary. Nevertheless, the students were okay when I carried on and talked about other things, which suggests they might just have needed to be given the chance to express their visceral reactions to what they considered different.

The students' responses described here suggest a similarity to the resistance demonstrated by children and young people as they read multicultural literature, as discussed in Chapter Two. These shocked and scared responses are sometimes called the "flinch" reactions (Center, 2005) or "disorientation" (Dressel, 2005). These responses could be identified in empirical studies with students who perceive what they see in multicultural texts as different and "entirely foreign" (Page, 2002; Dunbar, 2013). Dressel (2005) argues that when students try to make meaning from a text about a culture different from their own, they read it from their own perspectives and apply what they know from their own cultures. Beach (1995) calls these readers' positions the "cultural model" and asserts that readers might experience

“tension between their own cultural models and the portrayal of cultures in literature that differ from their own culture” (p. 88). This can be seen in Murai’s reaction, described above. In Murai’s cultural model, which is different to the Madurese culture represented in *Berani Menjadi Joki*, little children do not train to be jockeys by riding calves, which might explain her surprise.

Enciso (1997) explains:

As children read about racial, ethnic, and class differences in literature, they encounter metaphors of and meanings about difference; these new metaphors and meanings must be negotiated by children as they struggle to understand how they will see themselves, their peers, and their teacher in light of the literature's new possibilities. (p. 13)

According to this argument, readers’ disorientation from encountering differences in multicultural texts do not indicate that readers will reject the texts entirely. Instead, they could be a potential step towards an understanding of the texts. Sipe and McGuire (2006) emphasise that resistance is not a barrier, but a form of engagement to texts:

Resistance suggests that students are coming to see themselves in positions of confidence and expertise with respect to texts and able to draw on their own experiences and knowledge for interpretation and critique. (p. 10)

Center (2005) notes that “[r]eaders of multiethnic literature need help to acknowledge and get comfortable with that feeling of being ‘momentarily disoriented by this encounter with the Other’ (Palumbo-Liu 12)” (p. 225). I would like to put emphasis on the word “momentarily”, which suggests that disorientation can be followed by understanding, depending on how educators or gatekeepers assist children in their reading. Bradford (2017) explains that “[w]hen mainstream readers approach minority texts they are normally required to do more work in order to understand them, since they are situated outside the systems of belief that inform such texts” (p. 25). I concur with these arguments and consider the students’ disorientation to be a good foundation for learning about different cultures.

6. 1. 3 Curiosity and Learning

Encountering unfamiliar cultures in the texts did not only provoke disorientation, but also curiosity. This was expressed through various types of questions during or after our readings.

While we were either in the middle of reading or post-reading activities, the students in Sekolah Kerinci and Sekolah Merapi would repeatedly ask either me or their peers about cultures different from theirs. This could range from simple questions like the correct spelling of the religion's name to deeper inquiries about the religion's practice. They were naturally curious and treated the new culture as new knowledge, which I consider an encouraging seed of respect that could potentially foster an appreciation for diversity.

As my six participants in Sekolah Kerinci followed different religions (Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, and Hinduism) and came from diverse cultural groups (Aceh, Balinese, Javanese, and Chinese Indonesians), they liked to ask their friends about the teachings or the greetings. The fact that they liked to do this was another encouraging sign. This was particularly apparent when I asked them to annotate an illustrated page from *Marapu dan Kampung Tarung* after we had finished reading the story. Jalak's annotation (**Figure 6. 4**) is representative of the group's approach towards the task: to identify each religious leader with either the religion's name, symbol, or greeting. Curious about Confucianism, Jalak, a Balinese Hindu, asked Murai, a Chinese Indonesian and a Catholic who had been proudly announcing that her family still observes Chinese traditions.

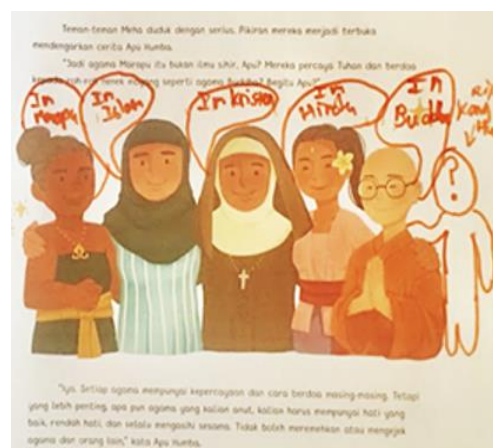


Figure 6. 4 Jalak's annotation of a page from *Kisah dari Sumba*

Although he admitted he “knew nothing about Confucianism”, Jalak was aware that the religion was added in the early 2000s as the latest of the six state-acknowledged religions in Indonesia. He noticed that there seemed to be no representation of Confucianism in the illustration, and so he drew an additional figure with a question mark on its face and wrote RIP *Konghucu* (RIP Confucianism). When I asked him why he drew that, he said, “The fact is they exist in Indonesia”. Even though he might not have realised it, Jalak’s statement validated the existence of not only the most newly accepted but also a fairly controversial religion in Indonesia’s history. In turn, Murai admitted she did not know (and would like to know) the Balinese Hindu greeting and asked Jalak, who provided her with the answer: *Om Swastiastu*.

Other students’ annotations revealed that they were curious about Marapu after we had read about it in the story. Gelatik, the quietest one in the literature circle in Sekolah Kerinci, expressed his thoughts through his annotation (see **Figure 6.5**), and it is encouraging to see that he seemed to have had a positive experience with the story and our discussion. I was particularly intrigued with one comment he wrote, so I asked him about it.

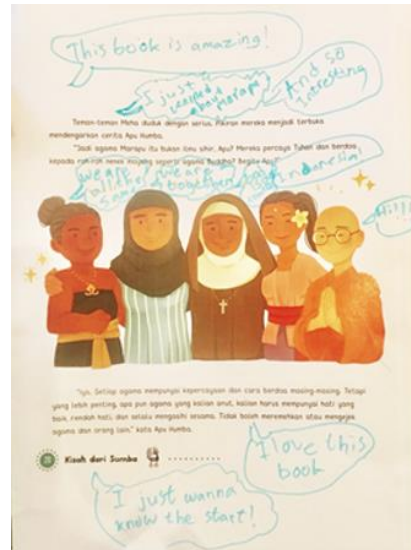


Figure 6.5 Gelatik’s annotation of a page from *Kisah dari Sumba*

Herdiana: Gelatik, what do you mean by “I just wanna know the start”?

Gelatik: Oh, it’s like, you know... the religion.

Herdiana: Marapu? You want to know more?

Gelatik: Yes!

Gelatik's answer reveals that he was still pondering this new religion that he had just encountered in the book. Although the story included the basic facts about Marapu – as told by Apu Humba, Meha's grandmother, who is also the elder in the tribe – Gelatik was curious about its origin. I consider this hopeful because Gelatik is an Acehnese, the only province in Indonesia which applies Shariah law. The fact that Gelatik's parents put him in Sekolah Kerinci, which is known as a progressive school that does not lean on a particular religion, could already be telling regarding his family's background. This is perhaps why Gelatik felt able to express his curiosity about other religions without fear of repercussion.

Indeed, as elaborated in my research context, in terms of multiculturalism in Indonesia, religion is regarded as being more important than ethnicity. This is reflected in my participants' responses, where readers' curiosity about religions different than their own figured more prominently than curiosity about other backgrounds. In Sekolah Merapi, where the participants were religiously homogenous, the children also displayed interest in a different religion. Dahlia's annotation in **Figure 6. 6** shows what she did not express during the literature circle.



Figure 6. 6 Dahlia's annotation of a page from *Kisah dari Banggai*

For our session on *Kisah dari Banggai*, Dahlia picked the same story as Cemara and thus annotated the same page. She circled the word *Konghucu* (Confucianism) and wrote: "What's their Bible, who's their God, want to KNOW!!" Her capitalisation of the word *TAHU* (KNOW) could not more clearly express her thirst to learn. I did not feel ready to provide the answer as I did not know much about Confucianism. I decided to do a little research about it

before I could address Dahlia's question. I picked the topic up during our next session, when I had also planned (unrelated to Dahlia's response) to read the picturebook *Cap Go Meh* (The Fifteenth Day). The students each got a copy of the book, and I read it aloud with them. The story is about intercultural friendship between Nisa, a Javanese Muslim, and Lili, a Chinese Indonesian who observes Confucianism. As we arrived at the part where Lili talks to Nisa about her tradition, I brought up Dahlia's annotation.

Herdiana: Now this is Konghucu (Confucianism), the one that Dahlia asked about in her annotation.

Dahlia: Yes! What is the Bible (of Confucianism)?

Herdiana: We shall find out in this book...

Dahlia: [Interjected] I know their holiday, but what is their Bible?

Herdiana: Okay, there are actually a lot of Bibles in Confucianism. There are fifteen. The followers call their god Tian, yet it's the same... Tuhan Yang Maha Esa (God the One and Only).

Damar: Oh, esa (one).

It turned out that it was Damar who was now pondering the religion. As I moved along with my reading and came to the part where the names of the gods in Confucianism are mentioned, Damar interjected.

Damar: How come there are gods when you said their god is one?

Herdiana: Yes, they have gods too...

Cemara: In our religion [Islam], the gods are not gods, but angels.

Herdiana: Um, do you know other religions that have gods?

Students: Buddhism... Hinduism...

Herdiana: Yes, Hinduism. Buddhism has Siddharta Gautama. So there are religions like that, aren't there?

Damar: Yeah.

With the various challenges and receptions children brought to their readings of multicultural stories, it was encouraging to learn that the stories *did* leave an impression, even despite the initial moments of confusion or resistance. Some of the responses of the fourth-graders in Sekolah Kerinci and Sekolah Merapi indicate that reading multicultural stories can be an engaging experience.

It seemed that it was curiosity as well that might have motivated Maleo to find out more about what we had read during the session. The week after our session on *Berani Menjadi Joki*, I started with a quick review of the book when suddenly Maleo made a comment about child *joki*.

Maleo: In Indonesia more than, about... 50,000 kids are joki.

Murai: What?!

Herdiana: Really? Where did you find out about it, Maleo?

Elang: GOO-GLE!

Maleo: Wikipedia! In my free time I always look at Wikipedia.

Elang: Wikipedia is a bit of a lie, you know...

Herdiana: I wonder if you did it because we read about joki last week?

Maleo: Yes!

As indicated in the excerpt above, Maleo had the initiative to learn more about what he had previously heard from the multicultural text by doing his own research about child jockeys in Indonesia. This suggests to me that the multicultural text he had read acted as a starting point that inspired him to explore further, without being instructed by others. This is a critical goal of using multicultural texts: to foster informed readers (Cai, 2002).

For nearly all the books we read throughout the sessions, Elang often wondered about the truthfulness of the stories, questioning the boundaries between fiction and reality.

Herdiana: Why do you want to know whether a story is real or not?

Elang: Curious.

Herdiana: Curious... if it's true?

Elang: Exciting!

Herdiana: If it's fictional?

Elang: No way. Like Harry Potter, I don't actually like it much, you know.

Murai: I like it!

Herdiana: You like stories that are real?

Elang: Uh-huh, real.

Murai: Real is not exciting!

Elang's responses suggests his interest in real-life stories. This seems to be what Sipe (2008) argues to be "relationships between fiction and reality", which became a subcategory in my analytical response. In his study with children, Sipe found that "children grappled with the

various ways in which the story (both the verbal and visual texts) related to what they understood as ‘real life’” (2008, p. 126). Elang’s interest in the reality of multicultural stories might be relevant to issues of accuracy and authenticity, which are considered significant in multicultural literature (Fox & Short, 2003), as discussed in the Literature Review in Chapter Two.

In Sekolah Kerinci, I started our first session by reading aloud a story from *Kisah dari Sumba* (Stories from Sumba) titled *Marapu dan Kampung Tarung* (‘Marapu’). Before reading, I asked the students if they knew about the island of Sumba and they all answered no and wanted to know where it was. I showed them the little map provided in the book and they were wondering how long it would take to get there by car. I then started reading aloud the story, which is about a boy named Meha who gets bullied by his classmates for following the indigenous beliefs of Marapu. The story has several local vernaculars which were unfamiliar to the fourth-graders, and the students sometimes interrupted my reading to ask me to repeat certain words, particularly the name of the indigenous belief, which they were hearing for the first time.

At one point in the story, Meha takes his classmates to his village so he can introduce them to his beliefs and culture. As they arrive in the Tarung Village, which still has traditional Sumbanese houses, Elang recognised the vernacular used for the term *house* in Sumbanese.

Elang: Oh! Uma! We’ve learned about this!

Herdiana: What is uma?

Elang: It’s a traditional house. [Pointing to the illustration in the book] I noticed the similarity. They are the same height.

His comment prompted the others to say that they too remembered the lesson on names of traditional houses in Indonesia, and I stopped the reading as they wanted to recall the other traditional houses and where each was from. If what they had learned was similar to my own lesson in primary school three decades ago, then they most likely had to memorise names of traditional clothes, dances, and houses from various cultural groups in Indonesia. Even though this is what scholars of multicultural education call the ‘surface’ level of cultural learning (Begler, 1998; Banks, 2015), it seems to have contributed to the students’ cultural schemata and aided them in engaging with a culturally unfamiliar text.

The same thing took place in Sekolah Merapi, where the fourth-graders also made references to their school lesson in responding to the multicultural texts. In my first session there, I brought five picturebooks from the *Ragam Budaya Nusantara* [Various Cultures of the Archipelago] series. Each book focused on one festival from various regions, and I asked the students to look at the covers to later on choose which one they wanted to read individually.

Dahlia: Fahombo! The one that jumps.

Herdiana: How do you know?

Dahlia: Well not from a lesson, but more like a worksheet in [the subject of] Bahasa Indonesia. And then there's a question of what the main idea is.

Herdiana: What do you remember about fahombo?

Dahlia: Jumping two meters, and the winner can get... what is it?

Damar: A cow?

Although Dahlia did not accurately remember the details of the tradition, she recognised the cultural name and mentioned that she had learned it from a worksheet, an additional material to textbooks used to assign tasks for schoolwork or homework. As she saw the name *fahombo*, she remembered it from a task that focused on the main ideas of text. It engaged her interest and made her choose the *fahombo* book to read (and she even asked for an extra copy to give to her friend outside our literature circle). This demonstrates how prior knowledge, in this case their school lessons, can play a critical role in bringing unfamiliar cultures closer to the readers.

In my second session with the students in Sekolah Merapi, I brought *Kisah dari Sumba* for each of them and told them that we were going to read the *Marapu* story. As they were eager to participate in the reading, we decided to take turns reading it aloud. The reading was interrupted when it came to the part where Meha's father explained the origins of Marapu to his son's classmates.

Herdiana: [reading from the book] "The religion of Marapu has been observed by the ancestors in Sumba since even before Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Christianity came to the archipelago."

Dahlia: It was said that the first one is Hinduism. The first Hindu Kingdom was... what was it?

Pinus: Sriwijaya.

Damar: Majapahit! Majapahit!

Pinus: Kutai!

Herdiana: Wasn't Kutai an Islamic kingdom?

Dahlia: No, the Islamic one was... Terante [supposed to be Ternate] and Tidore.

Pinus: Oh yeah, Kutai was Islam.

The excerpt shows that the students' prior knowledge was activated as they attempted to understand the story, particularly the talk of Indonesia's history as home to various religious kingdoms. Even though nobody mentioned where they had learned about this, it was most likely that they were all referring to a lesson on the past kingdoms in Indonesia, as this theme was covered in History for primary grade students. Their prior knowledge allowed them to explore the context of the story against Indonesia's history of diverse religions.

Herdiana: Does anyone know what menyirih is?

Murai: Eating sirih.

Camar: I don't even know what that is!

Murai: But, Mata! Just like Mata di Tanah Melus!

Much like reader responses to literature in general, readers of multicultural texts make use of shared readings and discussions to build on one another's meaning constructions (Short, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2009). In my fieldwork, the interaction took place not only among students, but also between students and myself as I posed prompt questions to invite discussions. When I was reading aloud the *Marapu dan Kampung Tarung* story in Sekolah Kerinci, I noticed a cultural expression that might be challenging for the fourth-graders. The word was *menyirih*, which means 'munching the *sirih* leaf', which is traditionally believed to be good for dental health. This old tradition is still observed by female elders in rural regions in Indonesia, but I assumed the students would be unfamiliar with it.

When I asked if any of them knew what *menyirih* meant, Elang and Camar answered, "No!" but Murai did because she had come across it in a novel they had previously read in class. "It's [*menyirih*] just like in *Mata di Tanah Melus!*" She proceeded to tell her peers the meaning of the word. Her intertextual knowledge became useful not only for her but also her friends as it aided their understanding of the text.

As an avid reader, Murai actively contributed to the dynamics of the literature circle in Sekolah Kerinci, as the following excerpt exemplifies. I was asking the students in Sekolah

Kerinci about the children's novels I had given them the week before, and Murai was the only one out of the six students who had finished reading hers.

Murai: So the book [Misteri Taman Berhantu] is about a child named Amel and she's an indigo, just like my little brother.

Herdiana: What's an indigo? The ability to see ghosts?

Murai: No. She can feel if someone is good or not. Just like my little brother!

Elang: Are you sure?

Murai: My little brother is an indigo!

Jalak: What's an indigo?

Murai: The specialist doctor says my little brother can tell if someone is good or bad.

Camar: Do you wish you had that power?

Murai: No!

Camar: Why?

Murai: It'd be scary.

We were discussing the meaning of indigo and when Murai offered an explanation which she argued was from her personal experience, her friends responded to her explanation and built on the meaning of the word. Elang challenged it (“*Are you sure?*”) while Camar threw out probing questions (“*Do you wish...?*” “*Why?*”), both as reactions and also to socially negotiate the meaning of the word. The dynamic of the students made them take off on their own, asking each other questions without prompts from me, and negotiating their understanding of language.

I consider the responses that indicate curiosity and positive learning experience from reading multicultural stories to be the most hopeful ones. Ramsey (2004) emphasises that “if we are open to learning, we can use each conversation to learn something new and push ourselves to critically examine our assumptions” (p. 26). Phillips (2016) defines “sociable curiosity” as “a strong desire to know or learn something about others in society” (p. 125). It can be expressed in two ways. The first is “empathetic curiosity”, which means “wondering and finding out about others”, and the second is “relational curiosity”, described as “being curious (about ideas, things, or others) with them” (p. 125). Phillips argues that both kinds of curiosity are important in “connecting individuals and communities” (2016, p. 125). Following Ramsey’s and Phillips’s arguments, the curiosity demonstrated by some of the

students in my study could play a crucial role in encouraging them to develop cultural understanding.

6. 2 Navigating Difference & Analytical Framework 1

In **Section 4. 5. 1** (Analytical Framework 1) of Chapter Four, I explained the framework I employed to analyse the first category of students' responses to multicultural texts, i.e., Banks's typology of multicultural content integration (2010). In my adaptation of Banks's typology, I identified four distinct responses aligned with various degrees of multicultural content integration, spanning from the first level of Contributions to the highest level of Social Action. The examination of students' responses within the Navigating Difference category reveals the manifestation of three out of the four levels of this typology, as outlined in **Table 6. 2**.

Table 6. 2 Navigating Difference Responses through Banks's Multicultural Content Integration

Navigating Difference	Content Integration (Banks 2010)
Food as an Important Interest	Contributions (Level 1)
Disorientation	Additive (Level 2)
Curiosity & Learning	Transformation (Level 3)

Reader responses that take place at the **Contributions** level of multicultural content integration manifest in acknowledgement of discrete cultural elements, such as the responses under the theme of **Food as Important Interest**. In Banks's typology, the Contributions approach is argued to be the easiest and quickest way to attempt to integrate multicultural content in the classroom. Banks criticises the approach as a "focus on the lifestyles of ethnic groups" (p. 157) that hinders students from constructing "a global view of the role of ethnic and cultural groups' in the society" (p. 155). Banks's argument is valid; nevertheless, it cannot be denied that based on some of my participants' responses that food (compared to other discrete cultural elements) seemed to hold a potential for engaging the students as they encountered cultures different from their own. In children's literature scholarship, food is deemed important (Keeling & Pollard, 2009) and serves a variety of roles. Nikolajeva (2000, p. 20) argues that food functions as a rite of passage in children's fiction, from a pathway to

the magical world to providing an important link to community (sense of belonging). With regards to multicultural texts, food becomes a signifier of one's cultural identity (Henderson, 2004).

A few scholars point to the value of this 'tokenistic' cultural element. Kusa et al. (2014) view the touristic approach to multicultural literature as providing potential for the "enlargement of the knowledge about the different countries and their cultures" (p. 307). It is mere knowledge – rather than empathy or experience gained from authentic stories – but it can be considered beneficial for multicultural learning. In his analysis of reports on school projects that centred on food, Richardson concludes that such projects managed to build relations between the multicultural schools and society. He calls for a rethinking of the critique towards food in multicultural education: "Notwithstanding progressive multiculturalists' important critique of a 'touristic' approach to difference, food-centred activities can be shown to foster community building in schools among teachers, school families and the surrounding neighborhood" (Richardson, 2011, p. 108). Ramsey (2009) points out that multicultural products that highlight discrete cultural aspects should not be dismissed as "[t]hey also can challenge children's assumptions that everyone lives the same way as they do" (p. 225). Discrete cultural features have the potential to heighten awareness as long as the teachers invite students to talk about them. More recently, research conducted by Dewilde et al. (2021) on young people's experience in attending a multicultural festival in Norway concluded that there was "value of seeing and understanding something new" as learners found out about unfamiliar cultures through their food, and it is a possible "first step toward learning about diversity" (Dewilde et al., 2021, p. 173).

The subsequent stage of reader response to multicultural content, as evidenced by the students in my study, can be identified as the **Additive** level. This level becomes apparent through the **Disorientation** responses exhibited when engaging with diverse content within multicultural texts. According to Banks's typology, the Additive level involves the inclusion of ethnic content, often leading to an approach that "view[s] ethnic content from the perspectives of *mainstream*" (Banks, 2016, p. 158, emphasis in original) and consequently triggers disorientation. He suggests that educators assist their students in gradually acquiring both the solid understanding of the text and the emotional maturity to engage with it.

Next, I consider the **Curiosity and Learning** responses to correspond to the **Transformation** level in Banks's typology. Banks (2014) points out that the Transformation

approach aims to encourage students “to think critically and to develop the skills to formulate, document, and justify their conclusions and generalizations” (p. 55). This is what was demonstrated by some of the students in my study through various moments of enquiries during the reading and discussing of multicultural literature: Maleo looked up information about child jockeys in Wikipedia, Elang questioned the authenticity of the stories, and some students wanted to know more about the religions they encountered in the texts (Dahlia and Damar about Confucianism and Gelatik about Marapu). As a step beyond acknowledging discrete cultural aspects and disorientation from viewing different cultures through the lens of one’s own, the Transformation level aims to “reduce racial and ethnic encapsulation” (Banks, 2016b, p. 164) – and, in the specific context of Indonesia, religious encapsulation – and achieve understanding about diverse cultures and multiple perspectives. This, I believe, is potentially indicated in some of the students’ responses, which show how they wanted to learn about various cultures presented in the texts.

The **Social Action** level, which is the fourth and highest level in Banks’s typology, might not be reflected in the participants’ responses due to a lack of opportunity during the literature circles. One possible reason for this is that the response-inviting activities had not been prepared to guide the students to this level. For instance, the students were not encouraged to contemplate the actions they could have taken to support the minority groups that they had learned about in the texts. However, drawing on Banks’s assertion that the Social Action approach bears resemblance to the Transformation approach in terms of fostering a sense of empowerment among students, I posit that there exists such potential among the students in this study. One illustrative example of this is evident when Maleo from Sekolah Kerinci was inspired to conduct his own research about child jockeys in Indonesia after engaging with the story about the tradition in Madura. Banks (2016b) contends that achieving the Social Action level demands more than just incorporating multicultural content into the classrooms. Instead, it necessitates comprehensive school support as reflected in the curriculum that enables students to “acquire political efficacy” and “become reflective social critics and skilled participants in social change” (p. 161).

In this section, I have discussed the first category of responses of Navigating Difference. Next, I will discuss the second category of responses from my findings: Multi-layered Identity.

6. 3 Multi-layered Identity

In addition to responses that demonstrate the various ways students navigate differences in multicultural texts, there are significant responses that show the important role of identities and social contexts in the meaning-making process. These are responses that reflect the students' multi-layered identities, from the prominence of religious identity to awareness of multiculturalism, to pride as young Chinese Indonesians.

6. 3. 1 Importance of Religion

The discussion of students' awareness of multiculturalism brings me to the other prominent theme in my data: the importance of religion as an aspect of identity. Some examples of references to religion have been discussed in the first category, Navigating Difference, where Dahlia showed strong interest in learning about a religion different from hers and the students from Sekolah Kerinci expressed their interest in learning about the indigenous beliefs of Marapu. The same level of interest did not seem to take place when we discussed other cultural aspects like ethnicity or race.

Immediately in our first session in Sekolah Merapi, the students were already curious about my religion. While the participants from Sekolah Kerinci had diverse beliefs, the students in Sekolah Merapi were all Muslims, as the school itself is an Islamic school. All the female teachers and staffs wore hijab, so my hijab-less head was notably distinct. In that first meeting, Damar asked me about my religion, but he was immediately scolded by Pinus, who shushed him before I could answer. I told them I was happy to let them know about my religion, which is Christianity. I asked if they had any Christians in the school, and they said no. Damar's open curiosity about my religion seemed to create tension with Pinus, who seemed to have perceived Damar's question as improper. There might be two reasons for this: that I was older and should not be asked so direct a question as it is not our culture to speak this way, or there was a perception that talking about religion, particularly with someone noticeably different from your faith, was sensitive. Here, the social nature of the literature circle affected students' responses, as there was a sense that responses dealing with these sorts of questions might be inappropriate.

Just as the students in Sekolah Kerinci were comfortable enough to talk about religious diversity without reticence because it was part of their lived experiences, the students in Sekolah Merapi, who were more consistently exposed to fellow Muslims, might have felt slightly more uncomfortable having conversations about religious issues. Their curiosity was there, but it needed encouragement and support from the teachers to confirm that it was acceptable. In terms of multicultural texts, there was potential for talking about issues deemed sensitive, and multicultural literature researchers advocate this discussion as necessary for attitude changes (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006; DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Hayik, 2011).

The following excerpt might illustrate this further. In our fifth session, I brought the picturebook *Joko dan Jenar Jalan-Jalan (Joko and Jenar Take a Walk)*, which explicitly talks about disability, but implicitly addresses diversity of religion in a family as the two main characters, Joko and Jenar, are cousins with different faiths. There is no mention of this in the text, but readers can infer it from the illustration that depicts Jenar with hijab and Joko with a cross on his bedroom wall. As we read the story in turns, we came to the page showing Joko praying in his bedroom. Dahlia was the first to notice and speak up: “Is this... a Christian or what?” She and her friends were now turning the pages to check the illustrations again.

Cemara: Doesn't Jenar wear hijab?

Melati & Dahlia: Yes!

Herdiana: They are cousins.

Cemara, Melati, & Dahlia: Oh, cousins...

Damar: So Joko is a... Christian.

Herdiana: Interesting, isn't it? So they are...

Damar: Oh! They have different religions!

I waited for a while in case they wanted to talk further about this aspect of the story, but they were eager to continue with the reading, so we carried on until we finished the story, and there were no more references to Joko and Jenar's different religions. After we finished the last page, they talked about the places they knew that were friendly for people in wheelchairs, and they talked about not knowing anyone who was like Jenar. I could see that Melati was still looking at the page that showed Joko praying in his bedroom, and I waited to see if she

or the others would like to come back to that. Since none of them said anything, I decided to ask:

Herdiana: How come a family like Joko and Jenar, who are cousins, has different religions?

Melati: Yes! How come?

Damar: Of course they can!

Melati: But they are from the same family!

Herdiana: Okay. Cemara, you once told us about your brother?

Cemara: Grandfather.

Herdiana: Oh, grandfather.

Cemara: My grandfather is from a, from a...

Damar: From a different country?

Cemara: From a different religion, and when he got married, he changed his religion.

Herdiana: Ah, that's it. Usually people change religions when they are married. Don't you have anyone in your family like that, Melati?

Melati: Nope.

Melati's immediate response to my question seemed to confirm my intuition that she would like to talk about what she had seen in the illustration regarding the protagonists' religions. It was a natural curiosity and one I would like to see addressed more in classrooms, so it was encouraging that Melati demonstrated her inquisitiveness. Two of her friends who had relatives with different religions provided her with the answer and confirmed that it was possible for an Indonesian family to have different religions. Both Damar and Cemara had mentioned in passing in our previous sessions that their grandfathers were from non-Muslim backgrounds, so for them it was not unheard of. However, they too, had similar reactions to their peers (as shown in the previous excerpt) when first encountering the characters' different religious practices in the picturebook. This indicates that it might have been the first time for them seeing a representation of a family with different religions in a children's book.

In addition to students' demonstrations of religious interests, the importance of religious identity was shown by students in Sekolah Kerinci based on the multicultural objects they brought in our final session. My instruction to them the week before was, "Please bring an object that shows your identity, either your ethnicity or religion". We then discussed the difference between ethnicity and religion and they suggested some ideas for the objects that they could bring. Even then, what they had in mind was already related to religious rather

than ethnic identity, as they suggested to each other bringing a rosary, a *sajadah* (a prayer mat for Muslims), or an *Iqro* (a textbook for learning Arabic). Camar asked if she could bring objects representing the three different religions in her family.

On the final day, only three out of six students brought their objects. Jalak realised he had forgotten to bring his and he wrote something on a piece of paper and handed it to me: it was a Hindu prayer. I displayed it side by side with the other objects: Elang's Children's Quran and Islamic Encyclopaedia, Murai's Catholic cross, and Camar's Christian Bible for children (**Figure 6. 7**).



Figure 6. 7 Multicultural artefacts brought by students in Sekolah Kerinci

They spoke briefly about the objects they had brought: Elang told us that he got the Quran from his aunt, Camar said that the Bible was read together with her class in her Sunday School, and Jalak informed us that the prayer he had scribbled was an expression of worship to the Balinese Hindus' god of knowledge. They demonstrated curiosity towards their friends' artefacts and asked each other if they were okay to touch, indicating respect for what they perceived as holy objects. Jalak was asked to recite the prayer twice by his friends. These talks about identity are critical in meaning constructions (Cai, 2002) as students bring their identities to the texts. Pahl and Roswell (2011) argue that artefacts can shed light on home practices through material objects and hearing students' experiences. The artefacts can tap into the students' "funds of knowledge", defined as "everyday stories, practices, and experiences that students bring to classrooms specifically those funds of knowledge that are linked to material culture, to artifacts" (p. 130). The concept of "funds of knowledge" itself was proposed by Moll et al. (1992), who define it as "historically accumulated and culturally

developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household and individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). It is an acknowledgement of the value of the students’ cultural backgrounds and how they contribute to learning experience. As we had seen various cultural practices in texts throughout the weekly sessions, my wish was to link what we had read with the students’ own cultural practices.

It is also worth discussing the fact that all the objects the students in Sekolah Merapi brought were related to their religious identities, affirming the discussions we had had that seemed to suggest religion was a critical part of society. Through their artefacts, the students could see that they were not only part of a particular religious group, but at the same time they were also members of a wider society that consists of different religious groups. In multicultural education itself, religion has been largely overlooked, with some scholars (Hoosain & Salili, 2006; Moore, 2009; Schweitzer, 2000) arguing for more attention and inclusion of religion in culturally responsive pedagogy (Aronson et al., 2016; Dallavis, 2011).

The students in both schools also made reference to their parents as they responded to the texts, with mention of religions too, as illustrated in this excerpt:

Elang: She’s a Catholic but also a Chinese descendant.

Murai: Back then, my A Ma [grandmother] was Buddhist.

Elang: And then, Sky is a Catholic.

Camar: I’m a Christian!

Elang: Oh yeah?

Murai: My mum is Catholic but then she converted to Christianity.

This conversation occurred after I had finished reading aloud the story *Marapu dan Kampung Tarung* from *Kisah dari Sumba*. There is an illustration of diverse religious leaders posing side by side, and this prompted Elang to respond by identifying the diverse religions of his classmates in the literature circle. As can be seen in the excerpt, his friends responded by mentioning their family members, indicating how religion played a significant role in the dynamics of religious diversity within the students’ families. The same illustration also spurred a discussion that reflects the students’ awareness of multiculturalism, which I will discuss next.

The prominence of religion also demonstrated the role of Community as a cultural position in the meaning-making process with multicultural texts. This is shown in the students' interest in the theme of religion and conversations about religious diversity, which reflect the importance of religion in the wider community of Indonesia.

6. 3. 2 Awareness of Multiculturalism

The students' responses seemed to demonstrate their understanding of their multicultural background and awareness of the tolerance ideology put forward by the current Indonesian government. Hoon (2017) asserts that “the discourse of multiculturalism emerged in Indonesia in the aftermath of Suharto’s resignation in 1998” (p. 477). Moreover, under the Education Law of 2003, “[m]ulticultural competencies are infused into the religion, citizenship education and social sciences.” (Raihani, 2017, p. 7), although the actual application and implementation depend upon each individual school’s policy. However, it might not be the term ‘multiculturalism’ that the students were familiar with, as it is not yet a popular term in Indonesia. Rather, it is terms such as *kebhinnekaan* (diversity) and *pluralisme* (pluralism) that pervade the media and school textbooks (Parker, 2017).

This is particularly evident in Sekolah Kerinci, whose students come from different religions. Our reading about the indigenous faith of Marapu prompted them to talk about their own lived realities as multicultural students who come from different religious backgrounds, and they displayed their familiarity with the current political agenda put forth by the government by role-playing the current president's multi-faith greetings.



Figure 6. 8 Elang’s annotation of a page from *Kisah dari Sumba*

While most of my participants from Sekolah Kerinci wrote down what they thought about the story in their annotations, Elang's annotation looked notably different (see **Figure 6. 8**). What he did was identify each religious leader by writing down the name of each religion above their heads (Marapu, Christian, Hindu Bali, Buddhist), with the exception of the Islamic figure, above whom he wrote the Islamic greeting of *Assalamualaikum*. It seemed like he was projecting himself onto the Islamic figure as that was Elang's religion and so he became one of the diverse religious people and acknowledging the others in a friendly way, including the practitioner of the new religion he had just heard about that day. On top of the paper, Elang wrote "Selalu Bersatu Bersama" ("*Always United and Together*") and at the bottom he wrote "Selalu Senyum" ("*Always Smiling*"). In doing so, his annotation looked more like a poster to promote the message of inter-religious harmony, through emphasis on both the diversity of the beliefs and the shared nationhood and unity in one country. His annotations became Elang's way of participating in promoting tolerance using literacy.

As the students were doing the annotations, they were asking each other about their religions' greetings. Elang asked Jalak about the Hindu greeting, and Jalak asked Murai about the greeting in Confucianism. The group's variety of religions did create a lively dynamic when the issue of religious diversity came up, as they liked to draw on one another to find out about religions different from their own. When I addressed their annotations in our next meeting, the students in Sekolah Kerinci wanted to emulate the president's multi-religion greetings. Elang asked me, "Please pretend to be Pak Jokowi," which is the nickname for the current Indonesian president, Mr Joko Widodo. I obeyed, and as I was starting my greetings, the students followed in unison, so I let them do the greetings instead.

Since taking office for his first term in 2014, Joko Widodo has explicitly emphasised that inter-religious harmony is his primary agenda. Part of his inclusive campaign is what is known as *salam lintas agama* (multi-faith greetings) in which he opens every speech by greeting the six official religions and not only the Muslims, as his six predecessors all had. Children, as members of society too, are implicated in this current familiar discourse in society, as it can be frequently seen in the media. The children admitted that they had become familiar with the greetings from hearing Jokowi's speeches, and Elang even noted that it was not only Jokowi who said the greetings but that "Pak Jokowi's subordinates do the same" as well.

The fact that the students in Sekolah Kerinci felt comfortable and safe enough to copy the interfaith greetings was encouraging as not all parts of Indonesian society tolerate Joko Widodo's greetings, particularly conservative groups. The East Java chapter of Majelis Ulama Indonesia, or the Indonesian Ulema Council, one of the country's top Islamic organisations, maintains that Joko Widodo's interfaith greeting is *haram* (forbidden by Islamic law). It is within this socio-political landscape that these children produced what Brooks and Browne (2012) argue to be a "culturally situated reader response model", where cultural and social contexts inform readers' meaning constructions of texts. The fourth-graders in Sekolah Kerinci seemed to take on the cultural positions situated within the political agenda of religious harmony forwarded by Joko Widodo's governance.

For the fourth-graders in both schools, our readings prompted them to engage in conversations about their identity. Religious identities seem to be more prominent than other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity or class, at least in our sessions.

In Sekolah Kerinci, my read-aloud of *Marapu dan Kampung Tarung* ended with the book's last sentence, which conveys the explicit message of the story: "Do not undervalue or mock other people's religions." Elang immediately responded, "That's just like us!" He then pointed to each of his friends in the literature circle and identified their religions: Jalak was a Hindu, Murai was a Catholic, Camar was a Christian, while Gelatik and Elang himself were Muslims. When I asked about Maleo, it was not Maleo who answered but his friends:

Elang: *That's just like us... Jalak is Hindu, Murai is Catholic, I'm a Muslim... Maleo is a Catholic if I'm not mistaken.*

Murai: *If not a Catholic, then a Christian.*

Jalak: *He's allowed to choose.*

Elang: *[to Maleo] Do you want to be Catholic or...?*

Herdiana: *Indeed, we are free to choose.*

Elang: *Yes, it's up to us.*

Herdiana: *Even within our family we can have different religions.*

Jalak: *Yes, that's right.*

It was possible that the students brought in their religious identities because it was prompted by the story, which emphasised respecting people from different religions. That was why Elang reacted with "That's just like us", as he saw himself and his friends who happened to

have various faiths reflected in the theme. Elang's responses in making connections between the texts and himself were the type of responses encouraged in multicultural education to foster a healthy sense of identity. As Ramsey (2009) points out, one of the goals of multicultural education is to support children "to develop positive and realistic identities that embody their race, culture, gender, and abilities, and their personal, family, and social histories" (p. 227).

For students in Sekolah Kerinci, religious diversity was not only a discourse they encountered in books, but a lived reality. What is worthy to note here is the students' attitudes towards the freedom to choose religions. When Jalak said that his friend "was allowed to choose" and Elang commented "it's up to us", there was an indication that they saw religion as being not merely what you are born into, but something you have the right to choose. This bears heavy significance in the context of Indonesia, where religious conversions are controversial, particularly when children are involved (Crouch, 2013). As Crouch noted from her interview with an *ulema* representative in Indonesia, a child is expected "to follow the religion of his/her parents and he/she cannot change religion without the permission of his/her parents" (p. 35). Teachers who are assumed to be "deceiving" children to change their religions risk a serious criminal offense.

Maleo himself spoke up when Jalak wondered about the difference between Catholicism and Christianity:

Jalak: Catholic and Christian are almost the same, right?

Elang: Yes.

Maleo: Different!

Jalak: But almost similar?

Maleo: There are some different rules. Christianity does not have the rosary, but Catholicism does.

While Jalak, a Hindu, and Elang, a Muslim, saw that Christianity and Catholicism are not dissimilar, Maleo corrected them. Drawing on the previous reference made by his friends that Maleo came from one Christian and one Catholic parent, it was possible that Maleo was equipped with sufficient knowledge about the two religions and their distinctions. It was the casual conversation these students could have about diverse religions that was encouraging. It might have been due to their school comprising students of various religions and ethnicities,

as Park (2011) asserts that “children in more diverse educational environments generally have more opportunities to experience difference and would be more likely to have been exposed to *talk about* those differences” (p. 397, emphasis in original).

6. 3. 3 Pride of Chinese Indonesians

Throughout our reading sessions, mentions of ethnicity were scarce, with religion being the dominant cultural theme, as described in this chapter. However, some references to ethnic identity that took place are worth discussing as they are linked to the existence (and problems) of Chinese Indonesians.

As we were annotating the illustration of the diverse religious leaders in *Marapu dan Kampung Tarung* in Sekolah Kerinci, some of the students in my literature circle asked their friends about particular religions’ symbols or greetings. Jalak wanted to know about Confucianism, or *Konghucu* in Indonesian, the latest religion to be officially acknowledged in Indonesia along with the annulment to the prohibition of Chinese religion and culture in the year 2000. At the mention of Confucianism, Camar and Murai spoke up:

Camar: I know Konghucu because I’m Chinese!

Murai: My mum and my grandma can speak Mandarin. I can write my name in Chinese.

Camar and Murai not only declared their Chinese lineage, but they also expressed some advantages of being Chinese descendants: Camar claimed that she knew Konghucu (Confucianism) because she was a Chinese descendant, while Murai asserted that being Chinese Indonesian meant she could speak not only Indonesian and English, but also Mandarin.

Elang from Sekolah Kerinci and Cemara from Sekolah Merapi identified as Chinese Indonesians as well. In the same discussion, Elang proclaimed that he too was a Chinese Indonesian who celebrated Imlek (the Chinese New Year).

Elang: I’m a Muslim but I’m still celebrating Imlek! Because my grandma is Chinese.

Meanwhile, in Sekolah Merapi, the reading of *Berani Menjadi Joki*, which describes a tradition in Madura, prompted a discussion about other cultural traditions the children knew.

They were trying to think of the traditions of their own cultural backgrounds, yet they ended up with religious holy days (Eid and Christmas) and Western traditions (Valentine's Day and Hallowe'en). I asked Cemara about the traditions he knew and celebrated, and his answer took some of his friends by surprise.

Cemara: Imlek, actually.

Herdiana: You're celebrating Imlek?

Cemara: Yes, my grandpa is from China.

Melati: Hah, you're... Chinese?

Pinus: You're Chinese?

Cemara: Yes!

Elang and Cemara demonstrated the multi-layered identity of the Muslim Chinese Indonesians. The ethnic group bears several stereotypes, including following a certain religion (Confucianism or Christianity) and having certain appearances, with Indonesians who did not fit these stereotypes not being seen as Chinese (Arifin et al., 2017). However, Elang and Cemara indicated that they were proud of having Chinese lineage.

6. 4 Multi-layered Identity & Analytical Framework 2

I analysed the students' responses that fall under the Multi-layered Identity category using the four positions outlined in the Culturally Situated Reader Response model theorised by Brooks and Browne (2012). This framework has been elaborated in **Section 4. 5. 2** (Analytical Framework 2) of Chapter Four. As shown in **Table 6. 3**, the responses within this category align with all four cultural positions in Brooks and Browne's model, with the Peers position underscoring all sub-theme of responses.

Table 6. 3 Multi-layered Identity through Brooks & Browne's Culturally Situated Response

Multi-layered Identity	Culturally Situated Reader Response (Brooks & Browne, 2012)	
Importance of Religion	Family and Community	Peers
Awareness of Multiculturalism	Community	
Pride of Chinese Indonesians	Ethnic Group	

The first cultural positions observed in the responses regarding the students' multi-layered identities is the **Family and Community** positions, which is particularly noticeable in the responses related to the **Importance of Religion**. The Family position becomes apparent through the various ways in which the students in my study expressed how their perceptions of the world seemed to stem from their family backgrounds. For example, Melati displayed confusion when thinking about the possibility of having mixed religions within a family and, with my prompt, Cemara confirmed this possibility as he came from a family with diverse religious backgrounds. The Community position also surfaces as the students demonstrated the significance of religion compared to other facets of identity, reflecting the broader Indonesian societal context, where religion holds paramount importance.

Likewise, the students' responses under the **Awareness of Multiculturalism** indicate the **Community** position, in which the discourse of multiculturalism is pervasive in the wider society of Indonesia. Like the responses that show the prominence of religion, the students' awareness of multiculturalism suggests their immersion in their community of "religious multiculturalism" (Hoon, 2017). Elang's view on religious freedom, however, seem to counter a perception that religious conversion is a crime, a perception that is gaining increasing support in Indonesia as a result of rising Islamic conservatism (Crouch, 2013; Raihani, 2017). The Community position that Elang seems to draw on in his response is fostered by Sekolah Kerinci, with its diverse students and pluralist ideology. As suggested by some empirical studies cited in the literature review, school plays a prominent role in shaping children and young people's perspectives of diversity (Ramsey et al., 2003; Aboud, 2009; Vuckovic, 2008; Burns et al., 2017; Hajisoteriou et al., 2017).

The students' responses under the **Pride of Chinese Indonesians** correspond to the **Ethnic Group** position in Brooks and Browne's (2012) culturally situated reader response. What some of the students said in reference to Chinese Indonesians is rooted in the history of the ethnic group and its position in Indonesian society. Decades of identity erasure have resulted in discrimination against the ethnic group (Heryanto, 1998) and negative stereotyping in popular media culture (Irena & Rusadi, 2019), even long after Suharto's regime had ended. According to Purdey (2003), "even in the supposedly 'freer' and more open nationalism of post-New Order Indonesia" (p. 427), which started in the year 2000 when Chinese Indonesians were legally allowed to publicly observe their cultures, many Chinese Indonesians are still grappling with their identity. When a teacher in a school in Jakarta asked her teenage students to identify their ethnic groups, very few said they were of Chinese

descent even though the teacher understood that 90% of her students were Chinese Indonesians. As Purdey (2003) attests, “ethnic Chinese, especially the young, suffered a loss of identity under a regime that imposed a nationalism excluding this group” (p. 427). Therefore, it is significant that the reading of the multicultural texts prompted a few students in Sekolah Kerinci and Merapi to declare their identities as Chinese descendants. This pride of being Chinese in young Indonesians is a recent development in a society that has only recently embraced the existence of the ethnic group previously seen as problematic.

Here, my identification of the theme has been significantly influenced by my own positionality. As I elaborated in Chapter One, one impact of my positionality within this research lies in my recognition of the crucial significance of embracing a sense of pride in having Chinese heritage. This recognition is rooted in the historical backdrop of decades characterized by political and cultural marginalisation during the New Order era. When I heard Camar, Murai, and Elang from Sekolah Kerinci and Cemara from Sekolah Merapi declared their Chinese heritage, I considered their affirmations as a profoundly significant theme. Given my own background as an individual with Chinese lineage, who spent my formative years and adolescence under a regime that suppressed Chinese cultures and religious practices, the newfound pride exhibited by young Chinese Indonesians assumed a paramount role. This aspect forms an integral component of the complex identity that evolves in response to the shifting social and political contexts in Indonesia.

In the various instances of Multi-layered Identity responses, the students also showcased the significance of the **Peers** position in their engagement with multicultural texts. The Peers position refers to the stance taken by students as part of a peer group sharing common interests and experiences. A notable illustration of this can be found in a response categorized under the Awareness of Multiculturalism theme, in which Elang drew connection between the text and his own friendships and exclaimed, “It’s just like us!” referring to himself and his friends in the literature circle. According to Brooks and Browne (2012), the Peers position allows students to consider diverse perspectives of their friends as they attempt to make meaning of what they read. This was consistently evident throughout the reading sessions as the structure of literature circles facilitated interaction and enabled students to take on their friends’ viewpoints to construct their interpretation. In the Pride of Chinese Indonesians, students’ reactions to their peers in the literature circle who openly expressed their Chinese

identity have prompted meaningful interactions that revealed the intricate layers of the students' identities.

The rich variety of cultural positions assumed by the students in this study demonstrated how culturally situated reader responses could unveil the complex identities that students brought to multicultural texts. The students in both schools adeptly showcased the Family, Community, Ethnic Group, and Peers positions, which played a pivotal role in making multicultural stories “resonate and become meaningful for them” (Brooks & Browne, 2012, p. 83). As posited by Brooks and Browne (2012), these diverse cultural stances do not exist in isolation; rather, they collectively “represent various multi-layered aspects of one's culture and the multitude of practices inherent within it” (pp. 79). In my study, multicultural literature appeared to serve as an invitation for students to bring their multi-layered identities into the literature circles and draw upon these identities while constructing meanings.

6. 5 Chapter Summary

The students' responses discussed in this chapter have provided comprehensive insights into my first research question: *How do children read and respond to multicultural children's literature?*

Drawing from the responses exhibited by students in both schools within my study, two ways of responses to multicultural texts might emerge. The first set of possible responses underscores that children encounter a need to navigate differences presented within multicultural texts. The second category of responses, observed as children interact with multicultural texts, underscores their imperative need to draw upon their multi-layered identities to derive significance from the complex multicultural issues present in the texts. In general, I believe that the responses of the students in my study indicate that children read and respond to multicultural texts through a range of positive interactions that are crucial for fostering a better understanding of different cultures. The students' responses demonstrated their willingness to actively engage with multicultural texts as part of their learning experience.

In the upcoming final chapter, I will bring together the findings from both the teachers' perspectives and students' responses.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusion

Indonesia is a culturally complex nation, and diversity has been managed with a variety of strategies throughout its history. The democratic regime (from the early 2000s up to the present) has made various efforts to welcome expressions of diversity but has had to deal with polarising tensions and religious and ethnic conflicts, along with the rise of Islamic conservatism. Within this context, some expectations seem to be placed upon multicultural children's literature for the young generation, as is evident from the growing publication of books about diversity and tolerance over the last decade. However, to the best of my knowledge, no research has been conducted that specifically examines how multicultural texts are read and interpreted by children in Indonesia. The present study was therefore conducted with the aim of starting to fill this research gap by exploring how a selected group of children aged nine to ten years old read and responded to texts about diversity, and the findings seem to concur with prior studies from outside Indonesia that have revealed the complexity of reader responses to multicultural literature.

In presenting the conclusion of the study, I will revisit my research questions and synthesize the key findings using Aboud's (2009) framework for modifying children's attitudes. While Aboud employs the term "modify" within the appropriate context of developmental psychology, I understand the word within the realm of social science, where the focus is more on exploration than modification. Indeed, this research has primarily been an exploration of children's perspectives regarding multicultural texts, with the implementation of Aboud's (2009) three key aspects: the message, the socializer, and the child. In my research, "the message" refers to the multicultural texts, "the socializer" refers to the teachers, and "the child" refers to the students. In the following, I will discuss the findings of my study in the sequence of these three elements before establishing connections between them. I will then proceed with my pedagogical reflection and recommendations.

7. 1 The Message

The publication of multicultural children's literature in Indonesia over the past decade has been driven by the hope that it can serve as remedy for the increasing fundamentalism and ethno-religious tensions. Nevertheless, a review of scholarly work reveals that the relationship between readers and texts can complicate these pedagogical roles, as the texts do not always fulfil their intended functions. Through the literature I examined, four key issues emerged that demand attention when evaluating multicultural texts: cultural authenticity, stereotypes, ideology promoted, and didacticism. I applied these four criteria during my text selection process while assessing various multicultural children's texts published in Indonesia. In addition to examining the texts for these key issues and their literary features, the practicality of obtaining the texts during fieldwork became a significant concern. This highlights the importance of considering accessibility as a challenge when using multicultural texts in Indonesian classrooms.

The final text set contained five books that served as “the message”, with multiculturalism as their primary theme. In terms of cultural authenticity, the selected texts not only depicted discrete cultural elements but also portrayed the distinctive experiences and challenges faced by various cultural groups and the dynamics of intercultural relations. The child characters in these texts are shown to actively participate in their cultural practices. Regarding stereotypes, although some stereotypical representations were identified in the illustrations – such as Lily in *Cap Go Meh* who is pictured in a red cheongsam, the texts generally presented positive character portrayals. The primary ideology promoted was multiculturalism, emphasizing the value of cultural diversity, marking a shift from the previous authoritarian era that heavily emphasised on assimilationism. However, didacticism remained a characteristic of the majority of children's texts in Indonesia, and this is reflected in the text set. The five multicultural texts in the study all conveyed explicit messages of tolerance, respect for different cultures, and the value of interfaith harmony at the end of the stories.

7. 2 The Socializer

One of the primary objectives of this research was to gather teachers' perspectives on multicultural children's literature and its pedagogical potential. Teachers play a pivotal role in multicultural education, particularly in mediating and facilitating important conversations

in classrooms regarding issues of diversity. The teachers in my study demonstrated the criteria that support multicultural education in Indonesia, as reflected in the multiple dimensions of multicultural education evident in their perspectives. Four out of the five dimensions proposed by Banks (2016b) were identified, indicating that these teachers not only embrace multiculturalism but also incorporate it in some ways into their practice.

The literature reviewed highlighted that teachers across the world have actively contributed to and influenced the landscape of multicultural education in classrooms, as is evident in publications written by teachers themselves, sharing their experiences using multicultural texts with students. My discussions with the group of teachers in this study suggested their readiness to implement multicultural education and utilize multicultural texts. While these teachers expressed interest and positive attitudes towards the texts, it is important to recognize that the complex nature of multiculturalism and reader responses to multicultural literature necessitate teachers having the knowledge of multicultural education and multicultural texts.

The key findings from teachers' perspectives reveal their personal experiences and viewpoints on diversity, aligning with existing literature that emphasizes the examination of teachers' stances on multicultural issues (Banks, 1998). As Cai (2008) posits, teachers have a significant impact on their students, and their perspectives, whether assimilationist or multicultural, manifest in their teaching practices. This study's findings demonstrate that these teachers have lived experiences of diversity and have developed their own conceptualisation of tolerance, which is also a critique towards ineffective governmental textbooks. In terms of teaching for diversity, institutional support from schools is crucial. When a school's ideology aligns with teachers' practices, it fosters a sense of accommodation and validation in teaching, especially in the absence of clear governmental guidance on the application of multicultural education in Indonesia (Raihani, 2011; Harjatanaya & Hoon, 2020).

As "the socializers" of multicultural texts, teachers' knowledge of multicultural literature is essential because it significantly influences their approach in fully utilizing these texts. The teachers in my study displayed some awareness, although not all the texts I presented in our discussions were known to them. They generally agreed on the potential of multicultural texts, yet they also acknowledged the challenges these texts posed. This aligns with what scholars have affirmed (Mongillo & Holland, 2017; Nieto & Bode, 2018) that teachers' lack

of knowledge about diversity can present hurdles when addressing diversity and multiculturalism in the classroom. The challenges identified by the teachers in my study encompass issues such as text accessibility, students' limited vocabulary that impede their reading comprehension, and the teachers' lack of preparedness in using multicultural texts. They expressed concerns about their own unfamiliarity with diverse cultures which made them question their ability to fulfil their roles. The statement from Miss Pilin from Sekolah Merapi underscores this issue: "How should I answer if the children ask questions?"

7. 3 The Child

My first research objective aimed to investigate how children respond when they read and engage with multicultural children's literature. The data collected was rich and presented the overarching theme of children forming meaningful and complex interactions with multicultural texts.

I came to the reading sessions with the children with assumptions that conversations about cultures, diversity, and tolerance would flow naturally after reading the texts. However, the students' responses surprised me in the first session and continued to do so for all five of the sessions I had in each school. The students mentioned various elements in the texts, but not necessarily what I had assumed to be "multicultural issues". I then realised that I had positioned myself more as a teacher and less as a researcher when I was in the presence of the students.

Even with this realisation, I struggled to make meaning of my data once the fieldwork had wrapped up and I had moved on to the analysis stage. Still positioning myself as a teacher with pedagogical assumptions about multicultural texts, I combed the data for "valuable responses", expecting to find specifically culture-related comments. Applying Mingshui Cai's (2002) multidimensional model was an attempt to identify such responses, but it proved unsuccessful. As I went back over my data, I reflected on the research question that had directed my study: "How do children read and respond to multicultural texts, and what are the teachers' perspectives on such texts?"

Indeed, whilst compiling the literature review, I found that studies on reader responses to multicultural literature have mostly had pedagogical goals, such as measuring readers'

comprehension, increasing empathy, or gauging readers' intercultural knowledge. Instead, my aim has been to explore children's responses with little intervention other than the multicultural texts themselves. My methodology was designed with the Indonesian education system in mind and what the use of multicultural texts could look like in the future. This, I believe, was the largest revelation for me during data analysis: to see the students' responses as valuable and valid reactions to their encounters with multicultural texts. As a researcher, my task was to understand them such as they actually were, not as I wished them to be. James Banks's approaches to multicultural content integration and Brooks & Browne's culturally situated reader responses helped me move on and provided the most suitable framework for structuring and understanding the students' responses. Two primary strands emerged as my findings: reactions to the differences the students encountered in the texts were pivotal as part of their reading, as was the bringing of their multi-layered identities to texts; both of these aspects played significant roles in their meaning-making processes.

The variety of responses that I grouped in the Navigating Difference category seem to indicate that readers' transactions with multicultural texts present in different facets of engagement. The so-called superficial level of learning about culture through food, festivals, and fashion was apparent throughout the sessions, as the students were drawn to discrete cultural elements, particularly food. Rather than seeing this as a negative situation, this primary reaction might act as a critical gateway to further conversations about culture and show cultural groups' meaningful contributions to a diverse society. Another way the students navigated differences in my data was by demonstrating visceral reactions of shock or fear. This suggests that although multicultural texts for children are intended to educate and nurture tolerance, some students will probably experience some forms of disorientation. These can lead to critical moments to guide students from tendencies to "Other" the groups depicted due to these differences to understanding them as parts of the rich and complex human diversity. Multicultural texts may provide potential opportunities for this type of learning, as suggested by another of the key responses from my participants: a curiosity to learn about cultures different from their own. Questions emerged as they expressed their inquisitiveness after reading about a new culture, either directly during the discussions or indirectly in their annotations. This curiosity could be the focus of the first step to increasing multicultural awareness and understand diversity.

In making meaning of texts, readers attempt to make connections with their own lives (text-to-life). This was on display in the second category of responses demonstrated, which is vital to reading and understanding multicultural texts. The fourth-graders in my study made links between the texts and their personal lives and identities as young members of the multicultural, multireligious country of Indonesia. This multi-layered identity seems to serve as a mirror to the society, emphasising the importance of religion, the awareness of the diversity of ethnic groups and faiths, and more welcoming attitudes towards Chinese Indonesians. This suggests that the children in the study were aware of the social world around them and the need to bring their identities to the texts as part of their meaning-making processes.

These key findings suggest that when the children in this research read and engaged with multicultural literature, two types of responses *could* emerge. The first possible response involves their need to navigate the differences they encountered in the texts, which could include recognizing discrete cultural elements, experiencing moments of disorientation, and expressing curiosity. The second possible response highlights the significance of incorporating their multi-layered identities into their interaction with the texts. Encouraging and acknowledging these potential responses are vital for construction of meaning.

The concept of multi-layered identity has emerged as a critical issue in discussions on multicultural education. Nieto et al. (2007) assert that re-evaluating multicultural education necessitates consideration of multifaceted concerns, including the notion of multiple identities. They advocate for adopting nuanced perspectives on identity and culture, challenging the conventional perception of identity as “fixed, unchanging, and essentialist” and instead, encouraging the view that it is “fluid, multiple, and complex” (p. 177). A similar call has been made by Banks (2020), who emphasizes the importance of recognizing the complex nature of identities. He argues that identity is “*multiple, changing, overlapping, and contextual, rather than fixed and static*” (2020, p. 120, italics original). This contemporary conceptualisation of identity, as proposed by scholars in multicultural education, corresponds with a key finding of my study wherein students’ multi-layered identities played a significant role in their engagement with multicultural texts.

7. 4 The Message, the Socializer, and the Child

This study demonstrated that the message, the socializer, and the child are interrelated in fostering an appreciation for cultural diversity within educational settings, which aligns with one of the key objectives of multicultural education (Banks, 2020).

During the fieldwork, it became evident that “the message” that worked, i.e., the texts that elicited meaningful responses from the students, were those that not only introduced new cultures but also presented real-life experiences of minority cultural groups. This is the reason *Berani Menjadi Joki* and *Marapu dan Kampung Tarung* became the texts that prompted moments of curiosity and learning among the students. In both narratives, readers encountered stories of a child courageously participating in a bull-race tradition and another child enduring oppression from his classmates due to his indigenous faith. Another text that initiated talks on religious diversity was *Joko dan Jenar Jalan-Jalan*, which cleverly implied different religions through illustrations rather than explicit text, prompting students to fill “the gap” and discuss the possibility of mixed-faith families.

In their role as “the socializer”, the teachers’ positive attitudes towards and preparedness to use multicultural texts in educational settings, even with their challenges, would foster a supportive environment for “the child” to navigate differences and incorporate their multi-layered identities into the process of meaning making. Conversely, the insights gained from students’ responses can provide teachers with valuable information about what to anticipate when they introduce multicultural texts in their classrooms. The students’ evident need to navigate differences reveals the importance of teachers’ support in guiding their students towards moving beyond Othering and nurturing a deeper understanding of multicultural issues.

The ultimate goal of the effective collaboration between the message, the socializer, and the child is to attain what Nieto (2017) defines as the ideal student of a successful multicultural education, i.e., someone who is “a curious and enthusiastic learner, open to new and different perspectives” (p. 7) and “empowered to help leave the world better than he found it” (p. 8).

7.5 Pedagogical Reflection

Now, I turn to the pedagogical implications of this research, where several key points come to light. The first one pertains to the research methods employed, ranging from literature circles to creative responses. The use of literature circles for reading multicultural literature with children seems to be a tried-and-tested approach for this type of text, as suggested by prior studies discussed in the literature review. My research further highlights the effectiveness of this method by showcasing the benefits of discussions conducted either before, during, or after reading the texts. It is essential to recognize that responses are as significant as the act of reading itself, as they enable children to gain literary pleasures and actively construct meanings (Sipe, 2002). Throughout my fieldwork, I observed that engaging in discussions prompted students to form deeper connections with the texts. Additionally, creative responses emerged as a valuable tool, offering alternative communication means and providing additional time and space for processing the often complex themes encountered in multicultural literature. As shown by the students in my research, annotating activities unearthed further thoughts and revealed questions that were not vocalized during the discussions.

The second pedagogical reflection arising from this research concerns the availability of multicultural texts. Both the students and teachers in my study demonstrated a readiness to incorporate multicultural texts into their classrooms. However, the process of selecting these texts and discussions with teachers revealed a significant challenge: accessibility. As discussed in Chapter Three, children's books in Indonesia tend to have a short shelf life, and multicultural texts are not typically categorized as bestselling titles. To address this issue, I propose a solution: the government, specifically through the Ministry of Education, should integrate multicultural literature into the national curriculum and include it in primary reading materials. I believe that by positioning multicultural texts within the educational "canon", we can significantly enhance their availability.

The challenge and tensions I encountered during the research due to my positionality as a minoritized researcher have also offered valuable insights into the importance of empowering minority groups at the gatekeeping level. This could take the form of establishing a multicultural panel of educators within the Ministry of Education that oversees the selection, distribution, and implementation of multicultural texts in Indonesian classrooms. This step is crucial not only for representation but also for reshaping power dynamics in the field of

education. Furthermore, the presence of a multicultural panel could extend its role beyond the integration of multicultural literature to include increasing awareness of multiculturalism and diversity issues in education.

The third and final pedagogical reflection from this research emphasizes the importance of integrating multicultural literature into the curriculum while also adequately preparing teachers to effectively utilize these texts. As indicated by scholars who have examined the Indonesian education system (Hoon, 2013; Parker, 2018; Raihani, 2018), there exists a genuine aspiration for the implementation of the principles of multicultural education. The absence of explicit inclusion of multicultural education in the Indonesian national curriculum highlights the pressing need and potential for the incorporation of multicultural children's literature into classrooms. In the current primary-level national curriculum, a notable gap exists in the form of multicultural materials as well as specific guidelines for teachers on how to incorporate multicultural resources into their teaching practices. While the assimilationist approach of the authoritarian past has waned, remnants still linger in the current curriculum, which predominantly follows a didactic learning model. Although students are now exposed to more diversity through textbooks, the avenue of learning through literature remains largely unexplored.

Just as vital as including multicultural literature within the framework of diversity education is the creation of a comprehensive module for teachers to effectively utilize these texts. Informed by my experience in evaluating these texts, such a module, tailored to address specific criteria and challenges that may be unique to the Indonesian context, can empower teachers to create their own multicultural text sets. The key findings derived from students' responses in this study can also serve as valuable input for the module to help teachers anticipate the range of responses they might encounter when introducing multicultural texts into their classrooms. Most importantly, the module will serve as a reminder to teachers to "expect the unexpected," as there are no inherently right or wrong responses. Instead, our objective should be to embrace the diverse range of responses that may emerge when students engage in reading multicultural literature. This approach can foster a deeper understanding of multiple perspectives, which is a fundamental aspect of multicultural education (Banks, 2014).

7. 6 Final Thought and Recommendation

This research project provides an example of how children might read and respond to multicultural texts, but the small number of selected participants yielded a unique set of data that is not readily applicable to different settings. In addition, although I did my best to maintain an open discussion that welcomed any responses, I assume that sometimes the students responded in the way they thought would please me, or because they predicted what the expected or ‘correct’ answers would be, particularly regarding issues of tolerance.

Working with six students in each school in each session overwhelmed me at times and made me miss some cues from the students when multiple interactions took place at the same time, and the audio recordings did not always capture the interactions. This could perhaps have been mitigated with the presence of a research assistant to help with classroom management.

The short time I spent with the teachers due to their packed schedules was another limitation of this study. Ideally, I would have liked to work longer with them and conducted one or two sessions for reading and discussing multicultural children’s literature together so that the teachers could also experience the texts. Despite these limitations, I am pleased with the rich data this study yielded because I believe it has provided beneficial information on the ways children read and respond to multicultural texts, which can be useful in moving forward with an understanding of these texts for teaching purposes.

This research seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on the use of multicultural children’s literature in the primary classroom, given that this type of literature continues to be needed to promote intercultural understanding across the globe. The appropriation of Banks’s typology for multicultural content integration to accommodate reader responses can be seen as a contribution for future studies using texts, as prior research has mostly applied Banks’s approaches for the teachers and not for looking at reader responses. My study also provides glimpses into how a group of children responded to multicultural texts in a society where religion was an important aspect of multiculturalism. Furthermore, this study offers significant insights for educators who expect to use such multicultural literature, i.e., the value of literature circles and response-inviting strategies and the types of responses that might occur when students read multicultural literature.

A more specific contribution of my study is the contextualised research of reader response in Indonesia, where children’s literature, reader responses, and teachers’ perspectives have been

largely under-studied. The fact that my PhD has been fully funded by the Indonesian government suggests that they support the intention of using multicultural children's literature and understand the urgency of studying how children's books on diversity are read and can be beneficial to remedy potential tensions.

I recommend three possible areas for future research. Firstly, it would be beneficial to replicate this study in different types of schools with a variety of student demographics. Future studies can also pay attention to the link between readers' cultural backgrounds and the cultures presented in the texts. The second recommendation is to use different types of multicultural children's literature. How can multicultural texts meet their full potential? How can we measure that? My final recommendation is to conduct longer studies involving teachers as they incorporate multicultural texts into their lessons. The longer projects would benefit from exploring the best strategies to take children and young people from the Transformation level to Social Action: to move forward from responses in the classrooms toward taking meaningful action in society.

My study has provided insight into the potential of multicultural literature to inform and empower students (Cai, 2002), while also supporting them in navigating life within diverse contexts (Bishop, 2012). Furthermore, it has underscored the complexity of interpreting and implementing the national motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or Unity in Diversity, within the texts and the perspectives of students and teachers. Just as the conceptualization of multiculturalism should serve as "a point of departure for dialogue" (Johansson, 2022, p. 3), we need to encourage conversations that embrace multiple perspectives, including those of children, to enhance our collective understanding of the concept of diversity.

The message, the socializer, and the child (Aboud, 2009) are all integral and interconnected in creating an ecosystem where students can develop the necessary knowledge to actively engage in their multicultural society (Banks, 2020). To bring about meaningful change, a deliberate and careful process is required, involving the integration of multicultural texts into the curriculum, the preparation of gatekeepers and facilitators in effectively implementing multicultural education and utilizing multicultural texts, and the encouragement of students to take action. As James Banks (2006) reminds us, multicultural education is an ongoing process that begins with the crucial step of empowering children "to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world" (p. 129). I hope that my research serves as the initial step in this transformative journey.

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Appendix 1: Ethical Approval from University of Glasgow



College of Social
Sciences

24 June 2019

Dear Herdiana

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Project Title: Multiculturalism in Indonesian children's books, children's responses, and teachers' perspectives

Application No: 400180227

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 24/06/2019
- Project end date: 30/09/2022
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences. Permissions you must provide are shown in the *College Ethics Review Feedback* document that has been sent to you as the Collated Comments Document in the online system.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research:
(https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf)
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The *Request for Amendments to an Approved Application* form should be used:
<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/>

Yours sincerely,

Dr Muir Houston
College Ethics Officer

Muir Houston, Senior Lecturer
College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer
Social Justice, Place and Lifelong Education Research
University of Glasgow
School of Education, St Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street
Glasgow G3 6NH
0044+141-330-4699 Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Plain Language Statement for students



College of Social
Sciences

Invitation to Take Part in a Project



Hello! My name is Herdiana Hakim. You can call me Diana. I am a researcher at the University of Glasgow, Scotland.



Do you love books? Me too! In fact, this is what I'm researching about.



I'm especially interested in books that portray our diversity. They are usually known as **MULTICULTURAL BOOKS**. I want to know what you think about these books and help me find out whether or not these books are awesome!



To do this, I'd like to make a LITERATURE CIRCLE (although it's not actually a circle). This means we're going to have a cool book club. We will read together, chat about the books, and make creative arts, such as drawings or poetry.



We will do this during the library time at your school, and we will possibly have 4 to 5 sessions (there are lots of great picture books and novels I'd like to share with you!). I will agree on the schedule with your parents and your teachers.



With your permission, I'd like to record our book clubs, so I can remember what we all say and do.



Don't worry, if you do not want to, you do not have to answer any questions or do any creative activities. You should also know that your participation in this study will not affect your attainment or grades at school.



If you have any questions, please talk about this to your teacher or parents and let me know.

Thank you!

Appendix 3: Consent Form for students



Consent Form (Students)

I'm Herdiana, and I would like to hear what you think about multicultural picture books and novels.

Please remember:

- You do not have to answer any questions you do not like.
- You can stop talking to me at any time.

Would you allow me to include you in our book club?

Please put a circle around your answer.



Can I record our discussions? Please put a circle around your answer.



Can I use your words and ideas in the big essay I am going to write about for my research? I will not mention your real name.

Please put a circle around your answer.



Please write your name in the box below.

Thank you!

Appendix 4: Plain Language Statement for parents



College of Social
Sciences

Participant Information Sheet Parents

Research Title and Researcher

Project title: Multiculturalism in Indonesian children's books, children's responses, and teachers' perspectives

Researcher: Herdiana Hakim (E-mail: [@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:herdiana.hakim@student.gla.ac.uk))

Programme/course: PhD in Education (Children's Literature and Literacies)

Invitation

This is an invitation for your child to take part in my research project, because your child's classroom has been chosen for this study with the permission of the head teacher and teacher.

Before you decide to allow your child to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Therefore, please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with me or the other parents/carers if you wish. Feel free to contact me to ask questions about anything that is not clear or if you would like to have more information, and take your time to consider whether you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of this research?

As a PhD candidate in Children's Literature and Literacies, I believe in the power of children's readings. I'm particularly interested in how stories about multiculturalism and diversity can be used to promote tolerance in children. My study will look at selected Indonesian children's books that promote multicultural values and examine how children, particularly middle-graders, read and respond to these books. I will also explore the teachers' perceptions on the books.

Why do I get this Participant Information Sheet?

Your children's class has been selected by the head teacher to hear some stories from multicultural children's books. I will visit your children's class and do a storytelling from these books to the whole class. Afterwards, I will hand out the Participation Information Sheets and the Consent Forms to all students. With the guidance of the head teacher, 4 to 6 students that return the Consent Forms will be selected to proceed with the next stage, which is the Literature Circles. The selection will be made through a sampling method to obtain a group of students from different

gender and cultural backgrounds. I will work with the school to make sure all children will be happy with the outcome.

Should you choose to give permission for me to conduct the study with your children, please sign the Consent Form and your children can submit it to their teacher. Taking part in this study is not compulsory. You can choose to participate or to refuse. You should also know that your decision (whether your children take part or not in this study) will not impact your children's attainment or grades in school.

What will happen to my children if I choose to participate?

I will form a Literature Circle with 4 to 6 students and agree on a time and place to meet. Literature Circle is a well-known term in education where students participate in a book discussion that meet regularly to read together and talk. I prefer to do the Circle during library time (45 minute, once a week), but I'm open to suggestions from you and advice from the head teacher for the best schedule.

Once the group has been formed, we will do up to 5 sessions to read and discuss about the multicultural picture books and novels. Your children will be asked about what they think about the stories, whether they like them or not, and what they will do if they were the characters in the books. All sessions will be audio-recorded.

I will also invite your children to respond to the stories in creative ways, either by drawings, poetry writings, or poster makings. Additionally, I will ask them to bring their own "multicultural artefact", which is any object that represents their cultural backgrounds, such as photos of family traditional weddings, their favourite religious children's book, or their Qur'an or Bible. Pictures of the creative responses and the multicultural artefacts will be taken.

There's no right or wrong way to do this. Any forms of your children's participation and responses are equally valuable and very much appreciated. They also do not have to answer any questions that they don't want to or create/bring anything that they don't like. Even after your child has begun to take part, you can withdraw your child's data up until 10 January 2020.

Keeping information confidential

Your children's responses in the literature circles will be analysed and anonymised in my study conclusion. I will not use their real names or any other personal information. Instead, I will use codes for the names so they cannot be recognised. Your children's names will also not appear in my published research.

Research data, such as transcripts from the audio recordings, will be kept securely for ten years in my laptop and at the university, both secured by passwords. Paper copy of the data will be secured in my office room at the university during the research period. My office has a cabinet for these paper records and it will be locked all the time, and I am the only one who has the key. However,

it is important to know that it will not possible to maintain confidentiality in the event of disclosure of harm or danger to anyone.

After the research is complete, the electronic files, the audio recordings, and the papers which contain the personal data from all participants, will be destroyed.

What will happen to the results of the research?

Once I have collected the information in this study, I will write what I have learned from this information in my doctoral thesis. The result may also be published in academic journals or media. If you are interested, I will prepare a summary of the research findings for you and the other participants.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been considered and approved by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at my e-mail: [@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:>@student.gla.ac.uk), or WhatsApp at (+44)

This PhD research is supervised by:

Dr Evelyn Arizpe (E-mail: Evelyn.Arizpe@glasgow.ac.uk)

Dr Jennifer Farrar (E-mail: Jennifer.Farrar@glasgow.ac.uk)

Prof Robert Davis (E-mail: Robert.Davis@glasgow.ac.uk)

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you may contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, e-mail: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk.

Thank you for reading this!

Appendix 5: Consent Form for parents



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form (Parents)

Title of Project: Multiculturalism in Indonesian children's books, children's responses, and teachers' perspectives

Name of Researcher: Herdiana Hakim

Consent:

Your signature below indicates that the information about this study has been discussed with you and that you have been given a copy of this letter. Your signature also indicates that you freely and willingly give your consent for your child to be involved in the study. You may withdraw your permission at any time without any consequences. If you withdraw, all data collected will be deleted from the researchers' files.

Your child's name will not be used in any publications.

As parent/guardian of _____, I hereby grant the researcher, Herdiana Hakim, a PhD student from the University of Glasgow, the following permissions:

I give permission for my child to participate in these data collection methods:

- Audio recording of each session
- Literature circle (book club with discussions)
- Multicultural artefact (object related to student's multicultural background)
- Creative response (drawings, poems, posters, etc).

Other permissions:

- I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.
- I give permission for the researcher to take photos of my child's cultural objects. (Faces will be blurred unless explicit permission is given to the researcher.)
- I give permission for the researcher to store the audio recordings for future research and archival purposes.

Name of Person Giving Consent
(Parent/Carer)

Date

Signature

Name of Child

Appendix 6: Plain Language Statement for teachers



College of Social
Sciences

Participant Information Sheet Teachers

Research Title and Researcher

Project title: Multiculturalism in Indonesian children's books, children's responses, and teachers' perspectives

Researcher: Herdiana Hakim (E-mail: [@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:herdiana@student.gla.ac.uk))

Programme/course: PhD in Education (Children's Literature and Literacies)

Invitation

Hello! You are being invited to take part in my research project. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with me if you wish. Feel free contact me to ask questions about anything that is not clear or if you would like to have more information, and take your time to consider whether you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of this research?

My research aims to find out how multicultural children's books can be effectively used to promote tolerance and reduce prejudice in a pluralistic society. This study will analyse selected children's books from Indonesia and examine how children, particularly middle-graders, respond to these books. I would also like to explore the teachers' perceptions on the books and multicultural education.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are an educator, whether you are a teacher, a librarian, or a head teacher in an elementary school.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this study is not compulsory. You can choose to participate or you can choose to refuse. Your decision (whether you decide to take part or not) will also have no detrimental impacts on your employment. However, I would like you to know that your participation will be much appreciated and your views will be very important for this research.

What will happen to me if I choose to participate?

I would like to invite you and some other educators from your school to take part in two sessions of focus group discussions, each will last about 45 minutes. I will bring an article on multicultural education and a selection of children's books for our discussions, and the discussions themselves will be audio-recorded. I will ask your opinions on the potential of multicultural education, how educators can play important roles in promoting tolerance, and your thoughts about the multicultural children's books. You do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to.

Keeping information confidential

Your responses in our group discussions will be analysed and anonymised in my study conclusion. Due to the nature of focus groups, complete confidentiality will be impossible; however, I will not use your name or any personal information in this study. Instead, I will use codes for your names so you cannot be recognised. Your name will also not appear in my published research.

Research data will be kept securely for ten years. I will keep the data saved in my laptop and at the university, both secured by passwords. Any paper copy of the data will be secured in my office room at the university. My office has a cabinet for these paper records and it will be locked all the time, and I am the only one who has the key. However, it is important to know that it will not possible to maintain confidentiality in the event of disclosure of harm or danger to anyone.

After the research, the electronic files, the audio recordings, and the papers which contain the personal data from all participants, will be destroyed.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The data from the focus groups will be analysed in my doctoral study and will result in my PhD thesis. The result may also be published in academic journals or media. If you are interested, I will prepare a summary of the research findings for you and the other participants.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (Ministry of Finance, Republic of Indonesia).

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been considered and approved by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at my e-mail: [@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:student.gla.ac.uk), or WhatsApp at (+44)

This PhD research is supervised by:

Dr Evelyn Arizpe (E-mail: Evelyn.Arizpe@glasgow.ac.uk)

Dr Jennifer Farrar (E-mail: Jennifer.Farrar@glasgow.ac.uk)

Prof Robert Davis (E-mail: Robert.Davis@glasgow.ac.uk)

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you may contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, e-mail: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk.

Thank you for reading this!

Appendix 7: Consent Form for teachers



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form (Teachers)

Research Title: Multiculturalism in Indonesian children's books, children's responses, and teachers' perspectives

Name of Researcher: Herdiana Hakim

Consent:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Participation Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.
3. I agree to take part in the **focus group discussions**.
4. I consent to the audio recording of the focus group discussions.
5. I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.
6. I understand that the data collected from this research will be stored securely with my personal details removed.
7. I give permission for the researcher to store the audio recordings for future research and archival purposes.
8. I understand that any personal data will be destroyed after the research has been completed.

Name of Participant _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Appendix 8: List of books and response activities with students

Session 1			
Title	Year	Genre	Synopsis
Berani Menjadi Joki [Courage to be Jockey]	2019	Picturebook	A Maduranese boy who is traumatised to practice his cultural tradition due to a past accident manages to find courage to be a bull-racing jockey.
Pair reading			
Bunga dan Burung Cenderawasih [Bunga and Cenderawasih Bird]	2018	Story collection	A rendition of a traditional song from West Papua about a little girl's reunion with her mother.
Warna-warni Cerita Seru dari Raja Ampat [Stories from Raja Ampat]	2017	Story collection	Six stories on West Papua, covering children's lives and endemic animals.
Mandala	2014	Picturebook	A young horse rider from Sumbawa Island anticipates a present for his achievement in school.
Session 2			
Kisah dari Sumba [Stories from Sumba]	2018	Story collection	Various stories about children in the small island of Sumba, including one boy who is bullied due to his indigenous religion.
Creative response	Annotation		
Session 3			
Individual reading			
Kisah dari Sumba	2018	Story collection	
Creative response	Writing a letter to the story's character		
Session 4			
Shared reading			
Di Mana Pisangnya? [Where's the Banana?]	2018	Story in a collection	A funny misunderstanding between two cousins due to their different local languages, Javanese and Sundanese.
Take-home books (individual reading)			
Misteri Taman Berhantu [Mystery of the Haunted Park]	2017	Middle-grade novel	Adventure story set in Taman Nasional Bantimurung, Sulawesi. historical Hindu Kingdom of Padjajaran in West Java.
Misteri Batu Bertulis [Mystery of the Carved Stone]	2014	Middle-grade novel	An adventure surrounding a missing painting from an arts museum in Batavia (Jakarta in the colonial era).
Misteri Museum di Batavia [Mystery of the Batavia Museum]	2014	Middle-grade novel	Adventure in the Betuah Island involving a rare turtle species.
Misteri Pulau Betuah [Mystery of the Betuah Island]	2019	Middle-grade novel	Adventure in a tea plantation involving rare white tea.
Misteri Bukit Berkabut [Mystery of the Foggy Hill]	2014	Middle-grade novel	Mystery in Indramayu and the world of the traditional <i>topeng</i> dancers.
Misteri Kota Topeng Angker [Mystery of the Scary Mask Town]	2017	Story collection	Six stories on West Papua, covering children's lives and endemic animals.
Session 5			
Recap books + free creative responses			

Appendix 9: Focus Group Discussion material with teachers

**Exploring Teachers'
Perspectives on Multicultural
Children's Books**

FGD Madania Primary School

1

My Study

Research Title:
Multiculturalism in Indonesian Children's Books, Children's Responses, and Teachers' Perspectives

Background:
Children's books currently represent the largest market share in Indonesia, including a growing number of books depicting our religious and cultural diversity. These multicultural texts offer potentials for both the younger Indonesian generations and for the larger society, but they have yet to be examined.

Aim:
Exploring what happens when children read multicultural books and examining the best way to utilize literature in education for multicultural competence.


Methodology:
Students — Reading Indonesian multicultural stories with fourth-graders; interactive discussions; creative responses with annotations, letter writing, role play, etc.; multicultural artefacts
Teachers — Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

2

Why Teachers?

- Teachers' role: "assisting children as they develop into productive citizens in a pluralistic society." (Colby and Lyon 2004: 26)
- "The values, beliefs, dispositions, and practices of the teachers influence their working ability with the students effectively in the classrooms." (Jackson, 1995)
- Teachers are potential gatekeepers for employing multicultural literature in educational settings, "creating classrooms where all students are valued" and "children can celebrate their own cultures and explore the uniqueness of others." (Colby and Lyon 2004: 28)
- However, multicultural children's literature is different from other kinds of literature, and methods for using it also differ (Dong 2005). This can be the main reason teachers feel reluctant in using it.

Kisah dari Banggai (BSP 2017)



3

Multicultural Children's Literature

What is it?


- Literature that reflects "the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world." (Bishop 1997: 3)
- Stories about underrepresented groups! The focus can be either on the group's distinctive experience or cross-cultural relations.

What's it for?


- Promotes empathy, respect, and multicultural competence.
- Achieves the goals of multicultural education: diversity and equity.
- Helps children identify with their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens dialogue on issues regarding diversity.
- "Literature does more than change people's minds; it changes people's hearts. And people with changed hearts are people who can move the world." (Rasinski & Padak 1990: 580)
- "With children, multicultural literature has been shown to increase cultural sensitivity and appreciation, especially when combined with exploratory activities and reflection." (Howrey & Whelan-Kim 2009: 125)

4


Mirrors, Windows, Sliding Glass Doors (Bishop 1990)



Readers see their "lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience." (Bishop 1990: ix).



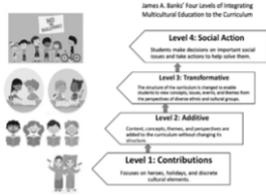
As windows, books show children the imaginary worlds and the reality. It is in books that children can encounter people who are different from them and learn about the multicultural world.



"These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or presented by the author." (Bishop 1990: ix)

5

Multicultural Education



James A. Banks' Four Levels of Integrating Multicultural Education to the Curriculum

Level 4: Social Action
Students make decisions on important social issues and take actions to help solve them.

Level 3: Transformative
The structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to see multiple, conflicting, and diverse views. The structure of the curriculum is changed to include the contributions of diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

Level 2: Additive
Content, concepts, theories, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure.

Level 1: Contributions
Focuses on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements.

6

Discussions

How does your cultural and religious backgrounds influence your perspectives/attitudes?

How does this cultural identity affect your teaching?

When are talks about diversity usually brought up in your class? What is your nature of approach in addressing it? (Do you use props, stories, photos?)

How do you define "tolerance"?

In your view, what's the best way to instill it in our children?

7

Discussions

On multicultural children's literature

What's your thought on multicultural children's books?

What do you think are the potentials and challenges of using these books in the classrooms?

If you have to choose one multicultural children's book to use, which one will it be? How will you use it?

Thank you for your wonderful input!

WhatsApp: +44 7784707937
Email: h.burrows@nps.uk

8