

Montessori Approach To Introducing Cultural Literacy To 5-6-Year-Old Children At Aluna Inclusive Montessori School, Jakarta

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Abstract—This study explores the significance of introducing cultural literacy at an early age, particularly among 5-6-year-old children at Aluna Montessori Inclusive School in Jakarta. The research is driven by phenomenon in Indonesia, where many young children remain unaware of the ethnic backgrounds and traditions of their peers' families. Developing cultural understanding at this stage is essential in fostering tolerance and respect for diversity. The Montessori approach, which integrates cultural and scientific learning, provides an effective framework for teachers to introduce children to various cultural traditions and the uniqueness of different countries. This method aims to nurture an appreciation for cultural literacy from a young age. A qualitative research methodology is used, with data collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and observations of classroom activities involving 5-6-year-old students. The findings highlight that educators recognize the importance of early cultural literacy but face challenges due to a lack of appropriate media and games to support cultural learnings especially local culture in early childhood. As a result, teachers rely on their creativity to develop engaging materials and activities. These insights can serve as a foundation for future research to design educational games that introduce Indonesian cultures to young learners.

Index Terms—Cultural Literacy, Montessori Approach, Early Childhood Education

I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a fundamental role in shaping both personal and national identity. For children aged 5-6 at Aluna Montessori Inclusive School in Jakarta, cultural literacy is a key component of their development, helping to foster national identity and a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity. Hirsch (1983) defines cultural literacy as the ability to understand, engage with, and navigate diverse cultural settings effectively. This skill helps children avoid stereotypes, make meaningful connections, and develop respect for others, thereby promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Introducing cultural literacy at an early age is essential in cultivating tolerance and sensitivity to differences. Children who grow up in an inclusive environment that embraces diversity are more likely to appreciate various social and cultural perspectives. Given Indonesia's vast cultural diversity, multicultural education is vital in fostering national unity, aligning with the country's motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) [2]. Beyond academic knowledge, cultural literacy nurtures empathy, awareness, and national pride among young learners.

While diversity is a national strength, misunderstandings can lead to conflict if cultural awareness is not cultivated early. Teaching cultural literacy to 5-6-year-olds helps shape attitudes of tolerance and mutual respect. [3] highlights that culture-based learning strengthens children's understanding of both their own heritage and that of others. Therefore, early childhood institutions, especially inclusive schools like Aluna Montessori, play a crucial role in fostering an environment where differences are valued and celebrated. The Montessori approach is particularly effective in introducing cultural literacy. Through an integrated learning environment, children explore cultural diversity, ethnic traditions, religions, and languages from around the world. This approach aligns with the concept of the absorbent mind [4], where young children rapidly internalize information. Consistent exposure to cultural literacy during this formative stage helps establish lifelong values of respect, inclusion, and appreciation for diversity [5].

The Montessori approach is founded on the belief that every child possesses immense potential to develop into an independent and capable individual. Maria Montessori emphasized that education should focus on holistic personality development, equipping children to navigate life with confidence and independence. This method is universal and adaptable to children from diverse cultural, environmental,

and family backgrounds [6]. Given its emphasis on respecting individuality, the Montessori approach is particularly effective in fostering cultural literacy.

Character development is a core principle of Montessori education, nurturing independence, confidence, responsibility, discipline, and respect for others [7], [8], [9], [10]. This is reinforced through a carefully prepared learning environment that encourages positive interactions. In a Montessori classroom, where children come from various backgrounds, conflicts may arise. However, these moments are seen as valuable opportunities for children to practice problem-solving, understand different perspectives, and learn to respect the rights of others. Additionally, the mixed-age classroom model allows younger children to learn from older peers, while older students develop leadership skills by guiding and supporting their younger classmates. This structure fosters cooperation, respect, and helpfulness rather than competition, allowing each child to learn at their own pace.

The Montessori method also encourages children to take responsibility for their learning. Instead of being directly corrected for mistakes, they are guided to self-correct using Montessori materials designed with built-in control features. This process cultivates patience, self-awareness, and consideration for others, such as waiting for their turn to use learning materials. As a result, the classroom environment becomes a space of harmony, tolerance, and mutual respect, reinforcing values essential for cultural literacy [11].

Montessori education aligns closely with the principles of cultural literacy, recognizing and celebrating each child's uniqueness. Montessori believed in the potential of all children, regardless of background or ability, including those with special needs [12]. Learning is shaped by the environment, which is why the Montessori method emphasizes a well-prepared setting tailored to children's developmental needs. This environment consists of five key learning areas designed to support growth: Practical Life (life skills), Sensorial (sensory exploration), Mathematics, Language, and Culture. The cultural area, in particular, plays a crucial role in introducing children to traditions, customs, and perspectives from different societies, fostering a deep understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity from an early age.

In the Culture Area of Montessori education, 5-6-year-old children at Aluna Montessori Inclusive School in Jakarta engage in learning about animals (zoology), plants (botany), history, and geography. This area provides materials that help young learners develop an understanding of cultural diversity and the unique characteristics of various countries. Maria Montessori emphasized the importance of introducing respect for cultural differences at an early age, fostering an appreciation for the richness of global traditions [11].

The Culture Area plays a crucial role in enhancing cultural literacy by allowing children to explore world cultures, geography, history, and scientific concepts. Through hands-on activities and interactive learning, children begin to recognize and appreciate different cultural backgrounds. Given its emphasis on respect and inclusion, this study aims to explore how the Montessori approach supports early cultural literacy development among young learners.

II. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology. As stated by [13], qualitative research is based on post-positivistic philosophy, which focuses on studying natural phenomena rather than conducting controlled experiments. In this approach, natural objects are observed as they exist, without manipulation, and the researcher's presence does not interfere with the dynamics of the subject being studied. Additionally, the researcher acts as the primary instrument in data collection.

For this study, data sources were selected purposively, considering specific research objectives rather than random sampling. As a result, the findings are not intended for broad generalization but rather to provide detailed, context-specific insights. Qualitative research is typically conducted in real-world settings, where data is collected descriptively and narratively to capture in-depth observations of behaviors and interactions.

This study follows a qualitative case study approach, conducted over two months in an actual learning environment to obtain comprehensive insights. The primary objective is to explore how the implementation of the Montessori approach can foster cultural literacy in early childhood.

III. RESULTS

This study focused on 5-6-year-old children in early childhood education (PAUD) at Aluna Montessori Inclusive School in South Jakarta, where the Montessori method is applied in daily learning. Aluna Montessori follows a mixed-age classroom model, allowing younger children to learn from older peers while older children take on nurturing roles, fostering a sense of peace, cooperation, and mutual respect. The research was conducted over two months in four different classrooms, all consisting of children aged

5-6 years. Observations were carried out to examine the impact of the Montessori method on multicultural education. The study found that children generally understood and followed Montessori-based classroom rules. At the beginning of each session, teachers reminded them of essential guidelines, such as walking instead of running, selecting a work mat corresponding to the Montessori material they were using, working with only one material at a time, and returning materials to their designated places after use.

In the classroom, children had the freedom to choose Montessori materials to work with, adhering to the principle of "freedom within limits." This allowed them to select materials independently while respecting others' choices. If a material was already in use, children learned to wait their turn or request to share. Additionally, children invited to participate in an activity had the right to decline, helping them develop assertiveness and an understanding of personal boundaries.



Figure 1 The child is exploring Montessori cultural area materials.

The use of work mats also played a role in teaching children respect and personal space, as they learned not to take or place materials on another child's mat. This practice encouraged manners, mutual respect, and tolerance, which align with the goals of the Montessori approach.

Moreover, the Culture Area in Montessori classrooms provided valuable opportunities for children to engage with cultural literacy from an early age. The geography section included hands-on materials such as globes, world maps, country flags, and representations of cultural elements like landmarks, indigenous tribes, and traditional houses, presented through picture cards and miniatures. Consistent with Montessori principles, these materials featured real-life images rather than animated depictions, as Montessori believed that children under six years old find it challenging to grasp fictional concepts. Teachers introduced these materials through presentations, after which children were encouraged to explore them independently, fostering curiosity and a deeper understanding of global diversity.

The research data was gathered through teacher interviews and direct classroom observations. The subjects of this study were the teachers at Aluna Montessori School, which has been implementing the Montessori approach for early childhood education for 12 years. The school is located in South Jakarta, Indonesia.

Several notable responses emerged during the interviews, including the question: "How is the Montessori method applied in your classroom to introduce cultural diversity?" Teachers explained that the Montessori approach incorporates mixed-age classrooms, allowing children to learn from and support one another. Additionally, as an inclusive school, Aluna Montessori welcomes all children regardless of their social, economic, or religious backgrounds. This diverse environment enables children to develop adaptability and appreciation for different cultures. Teachers also emphasized that each child is unique, with individual needs and learning speeds, which the Montessori method accommodates.

In Montessori classrooms, teachers utilize materials from the Culture Area, which includes geography-based learning tools and materials representing different countries worldwide. Classroom activities follow Montessori principles, ensuring a peaceful and structured learning experience. However, teachers pointed out a key challenge: a limited variety of Montessori materials specifically designed to introduce Indonesian culture. They expressed the need for more culturally relevant Montessori apparatus to effectively teach children about Indonesia's rich heritage.



Figure 2 The Child is Playing Puzzle Map

The findings of this study suggest that the Montessori approach effectively cultivates cultural literacy in young children. The key outcomes of the research are as follows:

1. Integrating Cultural Awareness into Everyday Learning

Children are exposed to diverse cultures through the Culture Area in Montessori classrooms, which features materials such as world maps, globes, national flags, traditional houses, and cultural attire from various countries. To help young learners grasp abstract cultural concepts, teachers incorporate visual aids like picture cards and miniatures, making learning more tangible and engaging.

2. The Role of Teachers in Encouraging Cultural Understanding

Teachers play a vital role in fostering cultural awareness by leading discussions and storytelling sessions. They introduce children to landmarks, languages, and customs from different regions, helping them recognize and appreciate cultural uniqueness. This approach nurtures curiosity and encourages respect for various traditions.

3. Creating an Inclusive and Culturally Diverse Classroom

Aluna Montessori School implements a mixed-age classroom model, where children of different ages, social, economic, and religious backgrounds learn together. This setting promotes collaboration and inclusivity, allowing children to interact naturally with peers from diverse backgrounds while fostering mutual respect and appreciation for cultural diversity.

4. Challenges in Implementation

One of the main challenges in fostering cultural literacy through the Montessori approach is the limited availability of teaching materials that specifically highlight Indonesian culture. While Montessori materials covering global cultures are well-established, educators often need to develop their own resources to effectively introduce Indonesian traditions, customs, and heritage.

Interviews and observations indicate that the Montessori approach helps children understand cultural diversity, traditions, and religions from around the world through both the provided materials and the Montessori philosophy. Additionally, children learn to respect one another's rights, contributing to a harmonious and inclusive classroom environment. The Montessori classroom functions as a microcosm of society, allowing children to develop socialization and collaboration skills from an early age.

IV CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Montessori approach is an effective method for introducing cultural literacy in early childhood, aligning with young children's developmental needs. Through this approach, children grow accustomed to diverse environments and learn to respect others' rights. The values instilled at an early age are expected to become lifelong habits, shaping their attitudes as they grow.

Given Indonesia's rich cultural diversity, it is crucial for young children to develop an understanding of their heritage. This awareness fosters mutual respect, tolerance, and national pride, contributing to the growth of an inclusive and culturally aware generation. Therefore, further research and development are necessary to create educational materials or games that specifically highlight Indonesian culture and traditions.

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