

Multicultural Learning Design in Education: A Systematic Literature Review of Pedagogical Practice and Innovation

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ABSTRACT

The diversity of cultures, languages, religions, ethnicities, and social identities of students demands a learning design that not only incorporates cultural content, but also transforms strategies, assessments, media, and pedagogical relationships in an inclusive manner. This research aims to analyze the concept of multicultural learning design, identify practices that have been applied in various educational contexts, and map pedagogical innovations that emerge from its application. The research uses the Systematic Literature Review approach with the Scopus database. Articles were selected through the PRISMA flow based on the criteria of empirical, open access, English-language research articles, published in reputable journals in the period 2025-2026, and relevant to the theme of multicultural learning design, so that 30 articles were obtained for thematic analysis. The results show that multicultural learning design develops into a holistic framework that integrates cognitive, affective, social, linguistic, digital, and ideological dimensions. Dominant practices include culturally responsive teaching, translanguaging, culturally responsive assessment, religious moderation, integration of local wisdom, community-based learning, and psychosocial support. Pedagogical innovations include the use of generative AI, cross-cultural simulation, adaptive gamification, interactive digital media, autoethnography, and international collaboration. This study concludes that multicultural learning design needs to be designed as an equitable, reflective, adaptive, and transformative learning ecosystem.

1. INTRODUCTION

The diversity of cultures, languages, religions, ethnicities, and social identities of learners has become a pressing issue in contemporary education because today's classrooms can no longer be understood as homogeneous learning communities. Globally, PISA 2022 shows that an average of 13% of 15-year-old students in OECD countries have an immigrant background, even in 11 education systems the proportion exceeds 25%, so schools are required to be able to design learning that is responsive to the differences in culture, language, and social experiences of students (Kusmaryono & Kusumaningsih, 2023). In the Indonesian context, this urgency is even stronger because Indonesia has 718 regional languages, while data from the 2024 Language Agency shows that only 18 languages have a safe status, while some others are vulnerable, threatened, critical, and even extinct (Yohantho, 2025). This condition shows that multicultural learning design is a strategic need to answer the challenges of 21st century education, especially in ensuring that curriculum, methods, media, assessments, and classroom interactions are able to accommodate the

diversity of students in a fair and meaningful manner. Previous studies have confirmed that teachers' understanding of the concept of "culture" is an important foundation for the success of multicultural education, as the way teachers interpret culture will affect material choices, learning strategies, and relationships with students (Silva, 2022). *Culturally responsive teaching* is concerned with teacher-student relationships and a sense of belonging in schools, especially in classrooms involving immigrant and refugee students (Ialuna, Civitillo, & Jugert, 2024). Meanwhile, the implementation of culturally responsive teaching is not always simple because there can be mismatches between teachers' beliefs, classroom practices, and the emergence of unconscious microaggressions (Kehl, Krachum Ott, Schachner, & Civitillo, 2024). These findings show that multicultural learning design is not only a matter of incorporating cultural content into teaching materials, but also involves the transformation of pedagogical relationships, critical teacher awareness, inclusive assessment, and the design of learning experiences that provide space for students' identities. *The state of the art* of this research lies in the shift in the study of multicultural education from a normative approach to a more operational and innovative pedagogical design. The latest literature no longer only discusses the importance of tolerance or recognition of diversity, but begins to emphasize how learning design is designed through task differentiation, integration of local wisdom, problem-based learning, culturally responsive assessment, cross-identity collaboration, and the use of technology to expand learner participation. Studies on *culturally responsive assessment* in Vietnam show that culturally aligned assessment instruments, local feedback, stakeholder engagement, and teacher development are important factors in the effectiveness of assessments in ethnic minority primary schools (Duong & Khuong, 2025).

In the context of Indonesian elementary schools, it also shows that multicultural values must be negotiated in the midst of education policies that tend to be centralized, so teachers need pedagogical space to adapt the curriculum to the socio-cultural realities of students (Afifuddin, Amri, Latif, Rosmini, & Bin Tahir, 2025). Thus, pedagogical innovation in multicultural learning develops from simply integrating diversity values to learning designs that involve integrated curriculum, strategies, assessments, technology, identity, and social justice. Although the study of *multicultural education* and *culturally responsive pedagogy* continues to grow, there are still important gaps that need to be systematically examined. First, most of the research still focuses on teacher attitudes, student perceptions, or educational policies, but not many have synthesized learning design practices concretely at various levels and educational institutions. Second, pedagogical innovations that emerge from the application of multicultural learning designs have not been widely studied as a unit, even though these innovations are important to identify learning models that are adaptive, inclusive, critical, and relevant to global education needs. Based on this background, this research is directed to answer three main problem formulations, namely: how the concept of multicultural learning design is developed in the educational literature; what are the practices of multicultural learning design that have been applied in various educational contexts; and what pedagogical innovations emerge from the application of multicultural learning design. These three questions are important because they can provide theoretical contributions in clarifying the conceptual construction of multicultural learning designs, methodological contributions in mapping empirical evidence across educational contexts, and practical contributions for teachers, lecturers, curriculum developers, and policymakers in designing learning that is more equitable, inclusive, and responsive to student diversity.

2. METHODS

This study uses *the Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* approach (Widianingsih, Abdillah, & Adikancana, 2024). This approach is used to explore pedagogical practices and innovations in multicultural learning design in the context of education. Literature searches are performed on the Scopus database using Boolean search: (TITLE-ABS-KEY (learning design) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (multicultural) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (practice) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (education)) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "ARTS")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (OA, "all")) AND PUBYEAR > 2024 AND PUBYEAR < 2025.

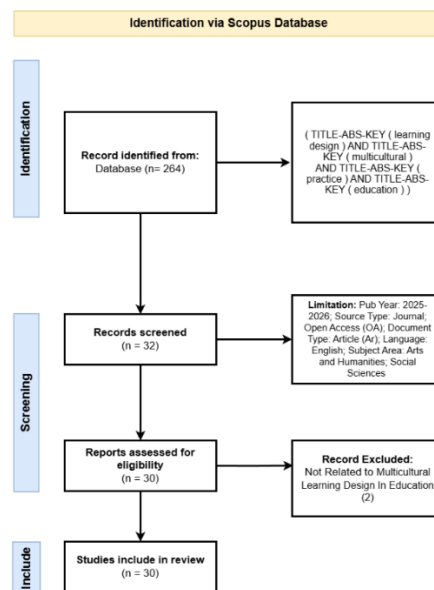


Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram

The initial search results resulted in 264 articles which were then filtered based on empirical research articles published in 2025 to 2026, open access status, in the field of Social Sciences or Arts & Humanities, in English, and published in the reputable journal Scopus, resulting in 32 articles. Furthermore, a screening of inclusion-exclusion criteria was carried out based on the suitability of the title, abstract, and focus of the research with the topic discussed, so that the number of final articles analyzed was 30 articles. The literature selection process is carried out using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which allows the visualization of the search, filtering, and selection flow of articles in a transparent and systematic manner, thereby increasing the validity of the methodology. The literature selection process is carried out using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which allows the visualization of the search, filtering, and selection flow of articles in a transparent and systematic manner, thereby increasing the validity of the methodology. Quality appraisal was carried out on 30 final articles with the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) because the articles studied included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs. MMAT is used to assess the methodological feasibility of articles based on criteria that correspond to the type of respective research design (Hong et al., 2018). This process is also in line with PRISMA 2020 which emphasizes transparency in the selection, assessment, and synthesis of systematic review evidence (Page et al., 2021). Each article was independently assessed by the authors using five MMAT criteria. Scores were given with categories 1 = met and 0 = unfulfilled/unclear, then classified into high (80–100%), medium (60–

79%), and low (<60%). Low-quality articles are still carefully considered so as not to dominate thematic synthesis (Tang, Zeng, Huang, & Symonds, 2025). The articles are then categorized based on the main themes that emerge, and analyzed to review trends, challenges, and opportunities in the implementation of *multicultural learning design*. This study applies an inter-rater reliability procedure at the screening and data extraction stage. Two authors independently assessed the article based on the same inclusions criteria. This procedure is important because a strong SLR needs to report on the number of reviewers, the stage of assessment, how to calculate the agreement, and the mechanism for resolving discrepancies (Belur, Tompson, Thornton, & Simon, 2021).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

3.1 Distribusi Studi

Tables 1 to 3 below present a comprehensive mapping of the 30 selected studies, including the identity of the authors, the context of the country, the methodology used, and the main focus of the research to provide an initial overview of the literature database reviewed.

Table 1. Distribution of Quantitative Studies

No	Author	Year	Country	Method	Research Focus
1	Sultan	2026	Indonesia	Quantitative	Multicultural competence & anti-hoax disposition
2	Jung & Lee	2025	Multi-country	Quantitative	<i>Open thinking</i> & open education practices
3	Mei	2025	Hong Kong	Quantitative	ICT Acceptance for Students

Table 2. Distribution of Qualitative Studies

No	Author	Year	Country	Method	Research Focus
1	Felix	2026	Afrika Selatan	Qualitative	Autoethnography in architecture
2	Iroth	2026	Indonesia	Qualitative	Lecturer-student interaction and power relations
3	Najib	2026	Indonesia	Qualitative	Traditional pesantren curriculum management
4	Kaushik	2025	India	Qualitative	Generative AI for music education
5	Elsawah	2025	Dubai (UEA)	Qualitative	Gamification in adult education
6	Suengkamo Ipisut & Singhatong	2026	Thailand	Qualitative	Simulation of cross-cultural teamwork
7	Choorat & Kramanon	2025	Thailand	Qualitative	Cross-cultural digital counseling competencies
8	Lin	2025	USA	Qualitative	<i>Culturally responsive Social-Emotional Learning</i> (SEL)
9	Masita	2025	Indonesia	Qualitative	National identity through local culture
10	Gordon	2026	Kazakhstan	Qualitative	CLIL (<i>Forest Gardening</i>) teacher development
11	Aguareles Bautista	2025	Spanyol	Qualitative	Intercultural competence in companies (SMEs)
12	Miles & Boltin	2024	Australia	Qualitative	Pedagogi digital interaktif (<i>The Boat</i>)
13	Capar	2026	Türkiye	Qualitative	Navigation of the diversity of immigrant children
14	Wu & Othman	2025	China	Qualitative	Foreign <i>teacher</i> translanguaging strategy
15	Nugraheni	2025	Australia	Qualitative	Language acquisition mapping

16	Li	2025	China	Qualitative	(LAMP) Cultural translation as a pedagogical tool
17	Giaki	2026	Yunani	Qualitative	Teacher's intercultural mindset
18	Horie	2026	Jepang	Qualitative	Intercultural collaborative learning
19	Huang	2026	Chad	Qualitative	Teachers' perceptions of inclusive education
20	Jatuporn	2026	Thailand	Qualitative	Karen ethnic minority curriculum
21	Ningsih	2026	Indonesia	Bibliometric	Local wisdom education management

Table 3. Distribusi Studi Mixed Method

No	Author	Year	Country	Method	Research Focus
1	Nguyen	2026	International	Mixed Method	A sense of belonging to students
2	Alzubi & Alelaiwi	2025	Arab Saudi	Mixed Method	EFL teachers' perception of Generative AI
3	Seow & Abdullah	2025	Malaysia/Japan	Mixed Method	Cross-cultural self-regulation of preschool children
4	Bentum-Micah	2026	West Africa	Mixed Method	Online Chinese language education

Table 4. Distribusi Studi Research and Development

No	Author	Year	Country	Method	Research Focus
1	Nisa	2025	Indonesia	R&D	CRT and TPACK language module integration
2	Anggaira	2025	Indonesia	R&D	Hybrid material & religious moderation

The data in tables 1 to 4 show that research on multicultural learning design is evenly distributed across continents with a highly contextual focus. The current research focus is no longer limited to basic theory, but has expanded to the integration of digital technologies (such as AI and online simulations) as well as curriculum management based on local wisdom to address the challenges of global pluralism.

3.2 Geographic Distribution

The geographical distribution of the research shows how the issue of multiculturalism is contextualized in different parts of the world. Table 5 details the distribution of research locations and their relationship to the dominant focus and methodology in each of these regions.

Table 5. Geographic Distribution Author

Country	Number of Studies	Research Focus	Dominant Methodology
Indonesia	7	Local wisdom, pesantren, religious moderation, CRT	Qualitative & R&D
Thailand	3	Digital counseling, business simulation, ethnic minorities	Qualitative
Australia	2	Interactive digital pedagogy, language acquisition	Qualitative
China & HK	3	<i>Translanguaging</i> , cultural translation, ICT acceptance	Mixed Method
Afrika (Chad, West Africa, SA)	3	Inclusive education, online Mandarin, autoethnography	Qualitative
Eropa (Yunani, Spanyol, Türkiye)	3	Teacher mindset, SME competence, immigrant children	Qualitative
Negara Lainnya	9	Music AI, gamification, SEL, self-regulation	Varies

Indonesia emerged as the dominant research center in this data set, this is due to the high diversity of cultures, religions, languages, and ethnicities that makes the issue of multicultural learning very relevant contextually. In addition, national agendas such as strengthening religious moderation, preserving local wisdom, and curriculum transformation have encouraged many Indonesian researchers to examine learning designs that are responsive to diversity. Globally, research in Asia and Africa shows a focus on accessibility and inclusion for minority groups, while in Europe research places more emphasis on cross-cultural communication competencies in the professional sector.

3.3 Distribution Methodology

An analysis of the scientific frameworks used by the researchers is presented in this table 6 which details the frequency and percentage of use of various research designs to see the trends of methodological approaches in the multicultural educational literature.

Table 6. Distribution of Research Methodology

Method	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Time Period Dominance
Qualitative (Ethnography, PAR, Phenomenology)	18	60%	Dominant in 2026 (Focus on depth of experience)
Mixed Methods	5	16.7%	Balanced distribution between 2025–2026
Quantitative (Survey, Bibliometric)	4	13.3%	Dominant in 2025 (Focus on technology acceptance)
Research & Development (ADDIE/R&D)	3	10%	Centralized in 2025 (Module/device development)

Qualitative methodology remains the main instrument (60%) due to the highly dependent nature of multicultural education on the interpretation of meaning, power relations, and diverse learners' life experiences. However, there is a growing trend in the use of *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM) to test psychological and technological variables, as well as R&D methods to validate innovative learning products before they are widely implemented.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review show that multicultural learning design has evolved from simply adding cultural content to a holistic pedagogical design that integrates curriculum, technology, identity, social relations, and educational justice. In this framework, Musa Ash'arie's thinking is relevant as a philosophical foundation because it views plurality as an ontological reality, human beings as multidimensional beings, and multicultural education as a process of fostering sincerity in respecting differences (Rahmawati, Asy'arie, Aryani, & Waston, 2024) (Zaprul Khan, 2020) (Gunawan & Jaya, 2023). Thus, this discussion is arranged in four main subthemes.

Digital Innovation

Digital innovation is an important direction in multicultural learning design. The literature shows that technology serves not only as a medium of learning, but also as a tool to expand access, participation, and cultural representation. Generative AI is used in multicultural music education to maintain traditional styles in cross-cultural creative collaborations (Kaushik et al., 2025). Meanwhile, in EFL learning, AI helps teachers design multilingual assignments and culturally responsive materials (Alzubi & Alelaiwi, 2025). The integration of CRT with TPACK also gave birth to an interactive digital module based on local folklore and the "Explore Digital Culture"

project (Nisa, Syafitri, & Simanungkalit, 2025). In other contexts, ICT needs to be adapted to local languages and device access so as not to strengthen the digital divide (Mei, Atmadja, Artini, & Rahmawati, 2025). Other innovations are seen in the use of OEP, adaptive gamification, online simulation, WhatsApp, and digital graphic novels to build collaborative, reflective, and inclusive learning (Jung & Lee, 2025)(Elsawah, 2025)(Suengkamolpisut & Singhatong, 2026)(Bentum-Micah et al., 2026)(Miles & Boltin, 2025).

Identity And Belonging

Multicultural learning design is also centered on strengthening students' identities and sense of belonging. CR-SEL emphasizes the importance of a learning environment that represents student identity, family involvement, and culturally responsive social-emotional experiences (Lin, Ingram, Yang, Cheung, & Lim, 2025). Belonging strategies at the micro and meso levels help reduce student alienation in international boarding schools (Nguyen, 2026). At the same time, the development of an intercultural mindset through reflective practicum helps teachers move from a defensive attitude to cultural adaptation (Giaki, Arvanitis, & Chryssanthopoulou, 2026). Other studies show that multimodal translanguaging, cultural translation, LAMP, as well as understanding children's self-regulation through the lens of collectivist-individualistic cultures can strengthen linguistic security and validation of students' identities (Wu & Othman, 2025)(Li, 2025)(Nugraheni, Siwi, & Abroto, 2025)(Seow & Abdullah, 2025).

LOCAL WISDOM

Local wisdom is an important foundation in the design of multicultural learning, especially in the context of Asia and Islamic education. In Indonesia, the pesantren curriculum is understood as a lived practice through the habituation of values, social discipline, and symbolic authority that form a multicultural character (Najib, Maskuri, & Sa'id, 2026). The integration of religious moderation in hybrid learning through the Moodle LMS strengthens tolerance and peace in Islamic higher education (Septi Anggaira, Madkur, Setiyana, Agustina Sari, & Aryanti, 2025). Local wisdom also emerges in the integration of folklore, traditional foods, tourist attractions, and social justice issues into English and science learning (Masita & Hidayat, 2025). In Northern Thailand, Karen weaving activities are integrated into mathematics and art through the participation of indigenous elders (Jatuporn, Youngwan, Wu, & Li, 2026). At the institutional level, Tri Hita Karana-based education management shows how local wisdom can be the basis for the decolonization of educational leadership (Ningsih, Pahrudin, & Fauzan, 2026).

Intercultural Collaboration

Inclusive Intercultural Collaborative Learning creates a safe space for international and local students to interact meaningfully and reduce the fear of failure (Horie, Liang, & Azuma, 2026). Online simulations support "internationalization at home" through the stages of simulation, theory, and reflection (Suengkamolpisut & Singhatong, 2026). The practice of autoethnography also helps educators and students dismantle personal biases in understanding the plurality of learning spaces (Felix, 2026). In the context of inclusion, heterogeneous seating strategies, structured orientation, and ongoing language support help minority and immigrant students adapt socially as well as academically (Djekourmane, Huang, & Xu, 2026) (Çapar, Nazaroğlu, Caner, & Caner, 2026). The professional development of teachers through the metaphor of "forest gardening" emphasizes the importance of plurality, connectivity, and sustainability in multilingual learning communities (Gordon, 2025). Overall, these findings confirm that multicultural learning design is a dynamic pedagogical ecosystem. She not only teaches diversity, but also designs learning experiences that connect technology, identity, local wisdom, cross-cultural collaboration, and social justice. In Musa Asy'arie's perspective, this kind of design becomes a humane educational praxis because it respects

plurality, rejects the reduction of human beings to one dimension, and fosters sincerity in living together in the midst of differences (Sultan, Rapi, & Saleh, 2026) (Ali, Iroth, & Tatipang, 2026) (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

Multicultural learning design has evolved from simply integrating cultural content into a holistic pedagogical framework that combines curriculum, technology, identity, local wisdom, social relations, and educational justice. The findings of this SLR show that the practice of multicultural learning design is applied through culturally responsive teaching, translanguaging, CR-SEL, intercultural collaboration, integration of religious moderation, and the use of local wisdom in various educational contexts. Emerging pedagogical innovations include the use of generative AI, interactive digital modules, online simulations, adaptive gamification, open educational practices, and culture-based multimodal learning. Thus, multicultural learning design becomes a strategic approach to create learning that is inclusive, equitable, culturally responsive, and relevant to the challenges of 21st century education.

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