

Development of Multicultural-Based School Organizations in Border Regions: A Systematic Literature Review of the Strategic Role of School Principals

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ABSTRACT

Border regions in Indonesia are characterized by high levels of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, creating both opportunities and challenges for educational development. Schools in these areas play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion, tolerance, and national identity through multicultural education. This study aims to analyze the strategic role of school principals in developing multicultural-based school organizations in border regions and to identify leadership practices that support inclusive and adaptive educational environments. The research employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach based on the PRISMA framework. A total of ten relevant articles published between 2020 and 2025 from accredited national journals and reputable international journals indexed in Scopus and SINTA were systematically selected and analyzed. The findings revealed three major themes. First, school principals act as transformative leaders who promote inclusive school cultures by integrating multicultural values into learning and extracurricular activities. Second, principals strengthen collaboration with local communities, parents, and cultural leaders to ensure that educational practices reflect local needs and values. Third, principals encourage curriculum innovation by incorporating local wisdom and cultural diversity into teaching and learning processes. The study concludes that the success of multicultural education in border regions largely depends on the leadership capacity of school principals to manage diversity, foster participation, and implement context-responsive educational strategies. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and educational practitioners seeking to strengthen inclusive education in culturally diverse regions.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's border area is a very distinctive area, both geographically, socially, and culturally (Indonesia Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). Its location far from the center of government, challenging geographical conditions such as dense forests and hills, and limited access to infrastructure make this area face various challenges in the implementation of education (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; World Bank, 2021). However, what is more prominent about the border area is the ethnic, linguistic, religious, and socio-economic background of its people (Banks, 2020; Nieto, 2018).

On the one hand, this diversity is an extraordinary cultural richness, but on the other hand, it also has the potential to cause social friction and integration problems if not managed properly (Parekh, 2017; Tilaar, 2019).

In this context, education plays an important role as the main medium to build social harmony and strengthen national integration (Gorski, 2016; Sleeter & Grant, 2020). Schools, as formal educational institutions, have a strategic responsibility in instilling the values of tolerance, mutual respect for differences, and forming a strong national identity (Banks, 2020; UNICEF, 2023). In various studies in schools in border areas such as in Badau District, West Kalimantan, it was found that local culture-based learning approaches such as the use of folklore, traditional dances, and regional languages in the teaching and learning process succeeded in increasing students' multicultural awareness and strengthening their sense of nationality (Suyanto, 2021; Hadi, 2022). The integration of these local elements not only enriches the learning process, but also becomes an effective means of building intercultural understanding among students (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021). However, the implementation of multicultural education in border areas is not easy. Many teachers have not received specific training on multicultural approaches and experience difficulties in compiling teaching materials that are relevant to the local context (Santoro, 2017; Arends, 2020). In addition, limited educational infrastructure, such as classrooms, internet access, and learning resources, also hinder an inclusive and adaptive learning process (OECD, 2021; World Bank, 2022). Not to mention, the government's attention to schools on the border is often still ceremonial and has not touched the real needs on the ground (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2023; Syafaruddin, 2020).

Various efforts continue to be made to overcome these obstacles. For example, strengthening teacher training through the Independent Curriculum program in border schools is starting to show positive results. Teachers are encouraged to design contextual learning that prioritizes local wisdom and strengthens students' character. Some regions have also built Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and the private sector to provide access to alternative education for migrant children living in border areas, especially around palm oil companies that directly border Malaysia. In addition, the integration of local values such as mutual cooperation, religiosity, and social concern in character education has been proven to be able to form students who are more tolerant and appreciate differences (Mashoedi et al., 2025; Shawmi et al., 2025). Research also shows that strengthening national values through religious lessons and extracurricular activities in border schools can be an important strategy in maintaining the spirit of nationalism in the midst of the rapid influence of foreign cultures.

The strategy to strengthen the role of schools in the context of multicultural education in border areas requires synergy between the central and regional governments, educational institutions, and local communities. The national curriculum needs to be designed to be more flexible and responsive to local socio-cultural conditions. Teachers must be equipped with ethnopedagogical training and given space to develop learning materials based on local realities. Meanwhile, education policies must also target equitable distribution of resources, improvement of infrastructure, and appropriate incentive support for educators serving in border areas. Education at the border is not only about access, but also about quality, relevance, and alignment with the reality of Indonesia's diversity. Schools in these areas should be lively

social laboratories, places where children from different backgrounds learn to understand each other, appreciate differences, and grow in a spirit of unity. When managed strategically, multicultural education at the border is not only a solution to social challenges, but also a solid foundation for strengthening national identity and the sustainability of the Republic of Indonesia.

Several previous studies have highlighted the urgency of multicultural education in the national education system. The leadership of school principals has a significant influence on the creation of a tolerant school culture. However, these studies tend to focus on urban areas or culturally homogeneous areas, so they do not reflect the complexity of the challenges faced by schools in the country's border areas. In addition, there has not been many studies that specifically examine the strategic role of school principals in the context of the systematic development of multicultural-based organizations.

This research offers a new contribution through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to examine the role of school principals in the development of multicultural school organizations in border areas. By reviewing relevant literature published in reputable national and international journals, this article seeks to formulate conceptual mapping and strategies that can be used as a reference in the practice of multicultural education leadership in border areas. The purpose of this paper is to identify and analyze the strategic role of school principals in managing cultural diversity in schools, as well as to formulate conceptual recommendations to strengthen the development of multicultural-based school organizations. It is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to the development of education policies that are more responsive to the border context and enrich the scientific treasures in the field of multicultural education management in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study used the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to examine in depth various scientific literature related to the development of multicultural-based school organizations in border areas, with a special focus on the strategic role of school principals. This method was chosen because it is able to provide a comprehensive, structured, and traceable understanding of the theme being studied. This study refers to the systematic procedure developed by Kitchenham and adopts the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines in the process of identifying, selecting, and synthesizing data. The literature analyzed in this study was selected based on certain inclusion criteria, namely articles published between 2020 to 2025, sourced from nationally accredited journals (SINTA 1–5) and reputable international journals, and discussed topics relevant to principal leadership, multicultural education, school management, and border contexts. Sources that do not meet scientific standards, such as popular articles, opinions, or reports that do not go through a peer-review process, are excluded from this review.

The article search process is carried out through several databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and SINTA, using keywords such as Role of principals, multicultural education, border areas, and school organizational development. From the initial search results, a number of articles were obtained which were then filtered through a selection process based on the relevance of the title and abstract, followed by a full content review to determine the feasibility of the analysis. The selected articles were then analyzed using a thematic analysis

approach, to identify repeated and significant patterns of findings. Some of the main themes that emerged include principals' strategies in building inclusive school cultures, leadership challenges in multicultural social environments, and participatory management practices in border schools. The results of this analysis are expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of education policies and leadership strategies in multicultural schools, especially those in the country's border areas. The following PRISMA scheme describes the flow of this research:

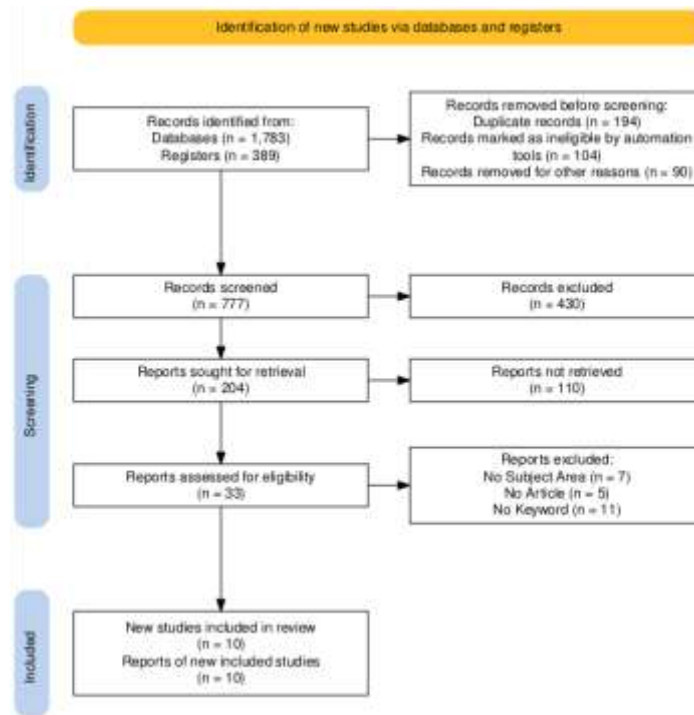


Figure 1. Diagram Flow PRISMA

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, it is the result of a study from several previous articles/studies as follows:

Table 1. Previous Studies

No.	Author/Year	Title	Article Accreditation	Research Results
1	Soobin Choi & Xinyi Mao (2021)	<i>Teacher Autonomy for Improving Teacher Self-Efficacy in Multicultural Classrooms: A Cross-National Study of Professional Development in Multicultural Education</i>	Scopus Q1	Teacher autonomy plays an important role in increasing the effectiveness of multicultural educational training. Teachers who have pedagogical freedom are better able to implement inclusive learning in a real way in diverse classrooms. Support for teacher autonomy is the key to the success of cross-border multicultural education.
2	Mayra, David, Marco, Veronica, & Patricia (2025)	<i>PictoAndes: Customizable Communication Board for Inclusive Education and</i>	Scopus Q1	The study developed PictoAndes, a culturally customizable digital communication board for

		<i>Multicultural Accessibility</i>		children with speech impairments. The results of the evaluation show that the platform has succeeded in improving user participation, emotional engagement, and communication effectiveness. Personalization features, the use of local symbols, and a disability-friendly design make PictoAndes a superior AAC solution in the context of inclusive and multicultural education.
3	Jocelyn L. N. Wong (2025)	<i>Teachers' Perceptions of What Knowledge They Need to Foster Their Multicultural Competence: What Are the Implications for In-Service Teacher Education Programmes?</i>	Scopus Q1	Teachers in Hong Kong feel less prepared to deal with the cultural diversity of students and need a broader multicultural knowledge. Teacher training programs need to emphasize critical reflection, mindset change, and a whole-of-school approach.
4	Indriyani Ma'rifah & Sibawaihi (2023)	<i>Institutionalization of Multicultural Values in Religious Education in Inclusive Schools, Indonesia</i>	Scopus	Religious education in inclusive schools in Indonesia is effective in instilling multicultural values through tolerance materials, respect for differences, and humanist learning approaches.
5	Imran, Iwan Ramadhan, Daniel, & Suriyanisa (2025)	<i>Efforts to Strengthen Nationalist Character Education through Education and Community Empowerment Institutions in the Indonesia–Malaysia Borderlands</i>	Scopus	Strengthening nationalist character education in the Indonesia-Malaysia border area can be done through educational institutions and community empowerment.
6	Rinaldi Datunsolang, Ritmon Amala, & Firman Sidik (2022)	<i>School Principal's Strategy in Instilling Multicultural Education Values</i>	SINTA 2	The principal's strategy is carried out through the integration of multicultural values in learning and extracurricular activities to form an inclusive student character.
7	M. Zainul Hafizi (2025)	<i>Multicultural Learning at the Border: An Implementation Case Study at Junior High School in Sajingan Besar District</i>	SINTA 3	The implementation of multicultural learning is carried out contextually through the integration of local cultures, collaborative projects, and audio-visual media.

8	Siti Masdelina Siregar & Inom Nasution (2024)	<i>The Role of School Principals in Multicultural Education in the Development of Tolerance Attitudes</i>	SINTA 4	Principals play a central role in creating an inclusive and tolerant school climate through democratic leadership styles and anti-discrimination policies.
9	Makmur Syukri, Fachruddin Azmi, Mhd Joni Marpaung, Faisal Fahmi Rambe, & M. Yasir Ridho (2024)	<i>Madrasah/School Organizational Cultural Development and Empowerment System</i>	SINTA 5	The school's organizational culture is formed through mutual agreement and developed through routine activities, exemplary, and conditioning of the physical and social environment.
10	R. Siti Sutarsih (2020)	<i>The Role of the Principal in Building Organizational Culture at Pulau Lebar State Junior High School Musi Rawas Utara</i>	SINTA 5	The principal plays a central role in building a positive school organizational culture through structural and non-structural approaches.

Source: Compiled from selected literature review studies (2020–2025).

Based on a systematic review of the scientific literature published between 2020 and 2025, a number of important findings were found that reveal how school principals play a strategic role in the development of school organizations that are adaptive to the multicultural realities of Indonesia's border regions. The thematic analysis of the selected articles produced three main themes, namely: transformative leadership in forming an inclusive culture, strategies to strengthen community participation, and curriculum innovation based on local wisdom.

First, the results show that school principals in border areas are required to carry out the role of agents of change who are able to form a school culture that respects diversity. This is done by creating learning spaces that allow students from different ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds to feel accepted and valued. Some of the good practices found in the literature include the principal's initiative in organizing cross-cultural activities, the integration of tolerance values in extracurricular activities, and the use of ethnopedagogical approaches in classroom learning. This transformative role requires the principal to act not only as an administrator, but also as a moral and social leader who understands the dynamics of diversity in his or her school environment.

Second, the role of school principals in strengthening local community involvement is also a key finding. In border areas, the involvement of communities, traditional leaders, and parents is key to the success of developing schools that are responsive to local values. The principal acts as a bridge that connects the school with the surrounding community, both in designing school policies and in the implementation of local culture-based programs. These findings show the importance of participatory and open leadership to the aspirations of the community, while strengthening the cultural roots of students in the education system.

Third, in terms of curriculum and organizational management, school principals in border areas have been proven to encourage the birth of learning innovations based on local wisdom. For example, the use of folklore as teaching materials, the development of multicultural

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thematic learning modules, and the involvement of students in culture-based school projects. This shows that school principals not only manage the administration of the national curriculum, but are also able to modify and develop the curriculum to be more contextual and relevant to the needs of students in their regions. In this context, the role of school principals is key in bridging central policies with local needs, especially in the development of flexible, adaptive, and inclusive school organizations.

The novelty of the results of this study lies in its specific focus on the context of the border area of a region that has tended to be marginalized in the discourse of multicultural education in Indonesia. Most previous research has focused on schools in urban or culturally homogeneous areas. Therefore, this article enriches the scientific treasure by highlighting the role of school principals as a catalyst for change in culturally and geographically complex educational environments. In addition, the systematic literature review method used allows a more in-depth and structured search of leadership dynamics in border schools. These results confirm that the development of multicultural-based school organizations in border areas does not only depend on structural policies from the central government, but also depends on the capacity and sensitivity of school principals in responding to local socio-cultural needs. Principals who are able to incorporate transformative, participatory, and adaptive approaches to multicultural contexts will be more successful in building inclusive, equitable, and competitive school organizations.

CONCLUSION

School principals play a central and strategic role in the development of multicultural-based school organizations in border areas. Through transformative leadership, the principal serves not only as an administrative manager, but also as a moral and social leader who shapes the inclusive school culture. The active involvement of the principal in integrating the values of tolerance, respecting differences, and the use of ethnopedagogical approaches in learning are key in creating a safe and inclusive learning space for all students. In addition, strengthening relationships with local communities is an important factor in the success of multicultural education, where the principal acts as a facilitator of collaboration between the school and the community. Innovation in curriculum development based on local wisdom also shows that school principals are able to adapt the national curriculum to be more contextual to the socio-cultural environment of students. This study provides an understanding that the success of multicultural education in border areas is highly dependent on the capacity of school principals to respond to the complexity of local challenges in an adaptive and participatory manner. The practical implications of these findings point to the need for specific training for school principals related to multicultural leadership, flexibility in curriculum implementation, and policies that support school-community collaboration. For further research, it is recommended that field studies be conducted that combine qualitative approaches to explore best practices in more depth, as well as the development of evaluation instruments to measure the effectiveness of the role of school principals in the context of multicultural education in various border areas of Indonesia.

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