

Public Administration and Multicultural Education: Strengthening Students' Multicultural Literacy through Social Studies Learning

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Abstract:

This study examines the potential of the book "Everything about My Homeland" by Shelomi Angeli (Erlangga for Kids, 2019) as a companion media in strengthening multicultural literacy in social studies subjects at the junior high school level. The background of the study departs from the reality that Indonesia, with 1,340 ethnic groups and 1,211 regional languages (BPS, 2010), faces the challenge of diversity education that has not been adequately resolved by official textbooks. The approach used is descriptive qualitative with a literature study method, where the analysis is carried out based on the Miles and Huberman model (in Moleong, 2017) which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The analysis shows that this book contains seven categories of cultural content, namely traditional clothing, traditional houses, traditional culinary, traditional arts, tourist attractions, flora and fauna, as well as unique facts spread across all 34 provinces, resulting in more than 238 cultural topics in 256 pages. Research findings indicate substantial alignment between the textbook's content and the elements of Phase D Social Studies Learning Outcomes in the Independent Curriculum, particularly the Global Diversity dimension within the Pancasila Student Profile. However, the empirical effectiveness of this textbook's use has not been experimentally tested, requiring policy support and teacher training to ensure its benefits are felt equally.

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INTRODUCTION

Few countries in the world bear the burden and blessing of diversity as profound as Indonesia. According to the 2010 Population Census by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), this archipelago is home to 1,340 ethnic groups with at least 1,211 living languages spoken in daily life (BPS, 2010). These figures are not merely demographic statistics, but also reflect a civilizational legacy formed over thousands of years of cultural cross-cultural interaction, migration, and ecological adaptation across thousands of islands spread from Sabang to Merauke. However, this wealth has not necessarily translated into well-managed capital. Conflicts based on ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA) continue to recur from time to time, reflecting that an understanding of diversity has not yet penetrated deeply into the collective consciousness of Indonesian society (Nugraha, Ruswandi, & Erihadiana, 2020). This issue is not merely a social one but also a fundamental educational one. When

schools fail to instill an appreciation for differences, public spaces will be filled with prejudice and identity exclusivism.

Within the framework of the national education system, Social Studies (IPS) occupies the curricular position most closely related to this issue. Unlike other subjects, IPS integrates the study of geography, history, sociology, and economics within a framework of understanding society and its environment (Sapriya, 2009). Thus, IPS should be a space where students not only acquire factual knowledge about Indonesia but also develop cross-cultural empathy and a deeper historical awareness. The problem is, official IPS textbooks used in schools often fail to fulfill this function optimally. The material is presented in an overly concise and systematic style, reducing the richness of local culture to a list of facts to be memorized, rather than experiences to be felt and reflected upon. Limited illustrations, dry narratives of everyday contexts, and the tendency for uneven representation of Javanese culture compared to other regional cultures have long been highlighted by educational researchers (Tilaar, 2004).

Amidst these limitations, the book "Everything About My Homeland" by Shelomi Angeli, published by Erlangga for Kids in 2019, presents information about 34 provinces in Indonesia systematically, covering geographic location, population, ethnicities, regional languages, traditional clothing, traditional houses, traditional arts, typical cuisine, flora, fauna, and unique facts rarely discussed in conventional textbooks. The publisher's own goal explicitly states that this book is intended to support social studies and thematic learning in schools. With a modern visual design and a narrative style that is close to young readers, this book offers a different approach in presenting Indonesia's diversity. Starting from that situation, this research was conceived. The main question to be answered is: to what extent can the book "Everything About My Homeland" function effectively as a companion media in strengthening multicultural literacy in social studies learning at the junior high school level? To answer this question, the analysis is directed at three aspects: the relevance of the book's content to the applicable social studies curriculum, the book's potential in building students' multicultural awareness, and limitations that need to be considered in its implementation.

THEORITICAL REVIEW

1. Multicultural Education: Conceptual Roots and Its Relevance for Indonesia

Multicultural education, in its most basic sense, is a systematic effort to integrate diverse cultural perspectives into the learning process, with the goal of creating equal opportunities for all learners regardless of ethnic background, religion, or social class (Banks, 2004). James A. Banks, widely recognized as the architect of contemporary multicultural education theory, formulated that the ultimate goal of this type of education is not merely passive tolerance, but rather active openness and the ability of students to operate effectively in a pluralistic society. In the Indonesian context, this idea finds its unique relevance. Tilaar (2004) argues that multiculturalism is not an imported Western concept imposed on Indonesian society, but rather something that has been a lived reality of the Indonesian archipelago long before the concept received its academic name. The challenge is not whether Indonesia needs to be multicultural, but how its education system is designed to recognize, celebrate, and strengthen that diversity, rather than suppress it in the name of unity.

Ainul Yaqin (2005) expands on this perspective by emphasizing the importance of a cross-cultural understanding approach, namely the ability to understand and experience other

groups from within, rather than simply observing them from the outside. This approach is relevant to the context of junior high school students who are psychologically in the identity formation phase, an age where exposure to diversity presented authentically and non-judgmentally will leave a far deeper impression than memorizing facts. Furthermore, Mahfud (2004) reminds us that healthy multicultural education is not enough to stop at simply recognizing differences. It must go further, towards building social justice, a condition where all cultures receive equal representation and are valued proportionally in public spaces, including the classroom. This is what distinguishes multicultural education from more superficial approaches such as annual cultural celebrations or displays of traditional clothing in school corridors.

2. History of Social Studies Education and Multicultural Content in Indonesia: From Colonial to Independent Curriculum

To understand where IPS stands today, it's necessary to trace the long history that shaped it. That journey didn't begin at the curriculum-making desks in post-independence Jakarta, but rather, it goes back much further than the Dutch colonial education policy, which systematically established segregation as a fundamental principle of its education.

a. Colonial Period: Education as a Tool of Differentiation

During the Dutch colonial era, the Indonesian education system was never intended to foster a collective awareness of the diversity of the archipelago. Instead, it was designed to segregate: there were special schools for Europeans, schools for the priyayi and indigenous elite, and schools for the common people, fraught with limitations (Nasution, 1987). This division indirectly instilled a social hierarchy linked to ethnic and class identities, a legacy that was not easily erased even after independence. Furthermore, the curriculum at that time made no room for dignified knowledge of local cultures. The history taught was European, and the geography discussed was one that placed Europe at the center of the world. Indigenous children learned about their homeland through a foreign and often demeaning perspective. As a result, local cultural identities were never legitimized in formal education.

b. The Independence Period and the Old Order: Building National Identity

Following the proclamation of independence in 1945, the Indonesian government quickly established a new national education system. The 1947 Curriculum Plan (Plan Pelajaran Terupak 1947) carried a significantly different spirit than its predecessors. Its emphasis was on developing the character of an independent, sovereign Indonesian with a strong sense of nationalism (Nasution, 1987). National values and patriotism were included as non-negotiable educational goals. The 1952 Detailed Curriculum Plan (Plan Pelajaran Terupak 1952) continued this spirit by connecting subject matter to students' daily lives, a small but significant step toward contextualizing education. During this period, the beginnings of social studies began to emerge, although not yet in the integrated form we know today. Geography, history, and social studies were still taught separately. The 1964 curriculum, which emerged at the end of the Old Order era, introduced the Pancawardhana approach, which sought to develop five aspects of students' personalities in a balanced manner: morality, intelligence, emotional intelligence, skills, and physical abilities. This approach implicitly contains a multicultural dimension in its moral and emotional aspects, although the emphasis is more on the formation of a complete Indonesian person rather than an explicit recognition of cultural diversity.

c. New Order: Unity Over Diversity

When the New Order took power after 1965, the orientation of education underwent a significant shift. The 1968 curriculum replaced the Pancawardhana curriculum with an approach more geared toward strengthening state ideology and developing Pancasila-abiding individuals. The 1975 curriculum introduced the Instructional System Development Procedure (PPSI) and marked a significant milestone in the history of Indonesian social studies, as it was the first time social studies was officially introduced into the national primary and secondary school curriculum. However, multicultural content in social studies during the New Order era remained limited; regional cultures could be mentioned as ornaments of national wealth, but should not be positioned as identities competing with the national identity (Fauziah et al., 2024). The New Order period was also marked by an ironic fact revealed by the Statistics Indonesia (BPS): the collection of data on ethnic groups, which had begun with the 1930 Dutch Population Census, was completely halted during this era, as discussing ethnicity was considered a political taboo (BPS, 2015). It was not until the Reformation era that ethnicity data began to be collected again. This fact reflects the depth of repression of multicultural awareness in Indonesian public discourse for over three decades. The 1984 and 1994 curriculum reforms brought gradual improvements in the social studies approach, beginning to integrate social sciences within a single learning framework. The 1994 curriculum, in particular, placed greater emphasis on local content as part of the curriculum, although its implementation varied widely across regions.

d. Era of Reform and Decentralization: Diversity Finds Its Space

The fall of the New Order in 1998 opened a new chapter for multicultural education in Indonesia. The decentralization of power that accompanied political reforms opened up space for regional identities to re-emerge. The 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) and the 2006 School-Level Curriculum (KTSP) granted schools and regions greater autonomy to develop curriculum content relevant to their respective local contexts (Mulyasa, 2013). The 2013 Curriculum further strengthened this orientation by integrating attitudinal competencies (KI-1 and KI-2) into all subjects, including social studies. At the junior high school level, social studies is taught in an integrated manner, integrating geography, history, sociology, and economics into a single thematic unit. This approach provides teachers with greater opportunities to present cultural diversity not in isolation, but as part of a larger narrative about Indonesia's complex and ever-changing society. The pinnacle of this evolution, at least to date, is the Independent Curriculum, which has been gradually implemented since 2022. This curriculum not only revises basic competencies, but also fundamentally changes the perspective on educational goals, from content-oriented education to character-building and life-long competencies (Kemendikbudristek, 2022a).

3. Independent Curriculum and Social Studies: Phase D Learning Outcomes

Within the Merdeka Curriculum structure, junior high school social studies (IPS) is included in Phase D, which covers grades VII through IX. The Phase D Learning Outcomes (CP) established through Decree of the Head of the BSKAP of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 033/H/KR/2022 define two main elements in IPS: Conceptual Understanding and Process Skills. In the Conceptual Understanding element, students are expected to understand the existence of themselves and their families in the broader

context of society, including understanding socio-cultural diversity at the local, regional, national, and global levels. What distinguishes the CP IPS in the Merdeka Curriculum from the previous curriculum is its more explicit emphasis on the development of identity and diversity. The Pancasila Student Profile, which serves as the normative framework for the Merdeka Curriculum, places the "Global Diversity" dimension as one of the six main dimensions that must be developed in each subject (Kemendikbudristek, 2022b). This dimension includes the ability to recognize and appreciate culture, reflection and responsibility for the experience of diversity, and openness to intercultural interaction.

4. Supporting Media in Social Studies Learning

The limitations of official textbooks in presenting cultural diversity in depth are not unique to Indonesia. In many countries, the use of supplementary media, whether in the form of popular reading materials, magazines, digital materials, or picture books, has become a common practice to enrich students' learning experiences beyond the confines of conventional textbooks. Theoretically, the use of supplementary media in social studies learning is strongly justified by Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism. Within this theoretical framework, meaningful learning occurs when material is presented through cultural tools that are familiar and meaningful to students, such as language, images, narratives, and symbols that have become part of their cognitive world (Supardan, 2016). Picture books with illustrations typical of local cultures, in this case, can function as one such cultural tool, especially if designed with sensitivity to aesthetics and references close to the lives of the younger generation.

Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is also relevant here. The ZPD refers to the distance between what a student is already capable of doing independently and what they could potentially achieve with appropriate support (scaffolding). A well-designed companion book can serve as such scaffolding, helping students reach a deeper understanding of diversity that textbooks alone cannot. From a developmental psychology perspective, junior high school students are in a phase that developmental experts call the identity search period. At this age, questions about "who I am" and "where I fit into society" become increasingly active. Exposure to cultural diversity presented in an authentic and engaging manner during this phase can leave a significant impression on the formation of their cultural and civic identity.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, namely an approach that seeks to describe, explain, and interpret a phenomenon in depth without relying on statistical quantification as its main instrument. The choice of this approach is based on the consideration that the object of the research study—namely the content of a book and its relevance to educational objectives—is interpretative and contextual, so it is more appropriate to approach it with qualitative analysis rather than quantitative measurement. The data collection method used is library research, namely the collection and analysis of data sourced from relevant written materials, including the book "Everything about My Homeland" as the main object of study, academic literature on multicultural education and the history of social studies education in Indonesia, as well as applicable curriculum policy documents. Library research was chosen because this research is analytical-descriptive in nature, rather than field research that requires primary data collection from participants.

Data analysis was conducted with reference to the Miles and Huberman model (in Moleong, 2017), which organizes the analysis process into three dynamically interrelated stages: first, data reduction, which is the process of selecting and focusing on the most relevant information from books and collected literature sources; second, data presentation, which is organizing the reduced information into a systematic and meaningful arrangement; and third, drawing and verifying conclusions, which is the process of formulating research findings based on the analysis that has been carried out and checking its consistency with the available data. Specifically, the analysis is directed at three main aspects of the study object: (1) the scope and depth of the book's content in representing Indonesian cultural diversity; (2) the suitability of the book's structure and content with the elements of Phase D Social Studies Learning Outcomes in the Independent Curriculum; and (3) the potential and limitations of books as supporting media for Social Studies learning in the context of strengthening multicultural literacy.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of Book Content

The book "Everything about My Homeland" presents information about all 34 Indonesian provinces in 256 pages. Divided equally, each province gets about 7.5 pages, enough to include information that goes beyond just the name of the capital city and a folk song, yet is still presented in a way that doesn't overwhelm young readers. Seven consistent content categories for each province—traditional clothing, traditional houses, traditional cuisine, traditional arts, tourist attractions, flora and fauna, and unique facts—result in a total of more than 238 cultural topics covered in one book. Geographically, the book covers the entire Indonesian archipelago without exception: from Aceh Province at the western tip of Sumatra to Papua at the eastern tip. This is a strength that should not be underestimated. One criticism often leveled against conventional social studies textbooks is their tendency to give a disproportionate portion to Javanese culture compared to the cultures of other provinces (Tilaar, 2004). Angeli's book, with its balanced provincial structure, structurally avoids this pitfall.

The following is an overview of the analysis of book content coverage based on category and region:

Content Categories	Number of Topics (34 Provinces)	Multicultural Values	Relevance of CP IPS Phase D
Traditional clothes	34 topics	Visual identity of local culture	Understanding socio-cultural diversity
Custom home	34 topics	Architecture & spatial identity	Human & environmental relations

Traditional Cuisine	34 topics	Local wisdom, food ecology	Economic & social life of society
Traditional Arts	34 topics	Cultural expression & creativity	Understanding local culture & arts
Tourist attraction	34 topics	Geography & natural environment	Human-environment-space interaction
Flora and Fauna	34 topics	Local ecological wisdom	The relationship between humans and nature
Unique Facts	≥34 topics	Local historical awareness	Understanding history & identity

Table 1. Mapping of Book Content and Its Relevance to CP IPS Phase D

2. Historical Content and Its Relevance to Social Studies Learning

One dimension that makes this book more than just an encyclopedia of popular culture is its ability to present facts that reveal the relationship between humans, the environment, and their history. An example presented in the publisher's official review is quite illustrative: when discussing West Sumatra, the book does not simply mention the name of the traditional Minangkabau house, but explains the relationship between the Andalas tree, an endemic wood that is very hard and strong, and the construction of the Rumah Gadang. This kind of information instills the understanding that traditional architecture is not merely ornamental, but rather a reflection of the ecological intelligence of local communities in responding to the natural conditions around them. From the perspective of history education, this approach supports the development of what historians call historical consciousness, namely the awareness that the conditions of present-day society are the result of the accumulation of long processes in the past. When students read about how the traditions of a particular tribe developed in response to its geographical conditions or political history, they not only increase their factual knowledge but also develop causal ways of thinking about society and culture that are at the heart of social studies learning.

3. Multicultural Values in Book Illustrations and Design

It's important to recognize that in the context of today's generation of junior high school students, who have grown up with intense visual stimulation from digital media, the way a book presents information visually has an impact no less important than the substance of the text. This is where Angeli's book demonstrates its most obvious advantages over conventional textbooks. Based on the cover and information available from the publisher, this book uses distinctive character illustrations featuring figures from various regions in their respective traditional costumes with a fresh and modern drawing style. The images that show the diversity of traditional clothing, traditional ceremonies, regional musical instruments, and natural scenery from various parts of Indonesia indirectly build a sense of familiarity and empathy in students towards cultures different from their own. In multicultural education, the process of building visual familiarity with cultural diversity is an important first step. Ainul Yaqin (2005)

calls this process "empathic recognition", when someone begins to see the beauty in the cultural expressions of others, resistance to difference tends to decrease and openness to cross-cultural dialogue tends to increase. An attractively designed picture book, in this case, can serve as an entry point to a deeper multicultural understanding, although it alone is not enough to bring students to that stage without teacher guidance.

4. Compliance with the Social Studies Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum

To assess the relevance of this book to the applicable curriculum in a more structured manner, the following is a mapping between the book content and the elements in the Phase D Social Studies Learning Outcomes and the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile:

Book Content	CP IPS Phase D Element	Dimensions of Pancasila Student Profile
Traditional clothing & traditional houses of 34 provinces	Understanding Indonesia's socio-cultural diversity	Global Diversity
Geographical location & flora/fauna per province	Human-environment-space interaction	Critical Reasoning
Unique facts & local history of the area	Historical awareness & national identity	Have faith, be pious, have noble character
Traditional cuisine & local wisdom	Economic & social life of local communities	Global Diversity
Traditional arts per province	Local cultural expression & creativity	Creative & Global Diversity
Natural & cultural tourist attractions	Geography & potential of Indonesian regions	Independent & Critical Thinking

Table 2. Mapping of Book Content with CP IPS Phase D and Pancasila Student Profile

From the mapping above, it appears that almost all categories of book content have a clear correspondence with elements in the Phase D Social Studies Learning Outcomes. This is not a mere coincidence, the publisher explicitly states that this book is indeed designed to support social studies learning in schools. What is interesting is that this mapping also shows that this book has the potential to contribute to more than one dimension of the Pancasila Student Profile at once, not only on Global Diversity. It should be noted, however, that the structural fit between the book content and the curriculum does not in itself guarantee the effectiveness of learning. The Process Skills elements in the Phase D Social Studies CP which include the ability of inquiry, analysis, and critical communication cannot be fulfilled simply by reading a book, no matter how effective the book is. This is where the role of the teacher as a mediator becomes irreplaceable.

5. Comparison with the Official Social Studies Textbook

One of the most effective ways to understand the added value of a companion textbook is to compare it directly with the primary textbook. The following table presents this comparison based on several relevant aspects:

Aspect	Official Social Studies Textbook	Everything about My Homeland
Regional cultural coverage	General, uneven	34 provinces, 7 categories/provinces
Visual approach	Limited, minimal illustrations	Typical, modern, colorful illustrations
Language style	Formal-academic	Narrative, close to young readers
Depth of local context	Shallow, tends to be national-centric	Area specific, ecological
Interdisciplinary connectivity	Structured per chapter of scientific discipline	Integrated in the narrative per province
Accessibility for junior high school students	Sometimes it feels heavy and dry	Light, interesting, easy to digest

Table 3. Comparison of the Official Social Studies Textbook with the Book Everything about My Homeland

This comparison is not intended to discredit official textbooks, which have their own functions and advantages, particularly in terms of systematic and in-depth social science concepts. However, it does demonstrate that there is a significant gap between what textbooks can provide and what is needed to strengthen multicultural literacy, a gap that a companion book like this could potentially fill.

6. Limitations to Consider

Academic honesty demands that supporting findings be paired with a critical analysis of existing limitations. There are at least three major limitations that need to be considered before widely recommending this book as supplementary media. First, economic accessibility. With a retail price of Rp149,000, this book is beyond the reach of many students from lower-middle-class families, especially those in remote areas who, ironically, are most in need of representation of their local culture in teaching materials. This limitation is not simply a distribution issue, but a more fundamental issue of educational equity.

Second, there is the absence of pedagogical guidance. The book lacks teacher guidance on how to integrate it into social studies instruction in a structured manner. Without explicit scaffolding, the book's effectiveness relies heavily on the initiative and creativity of individual

teachers, whose competency and motivation levels naturally vary across schools and regions. Third, there has been no empirical testing of its effectiveness. All arguments about the book's potential for strengthening multicultural literacy are based on content analysis and curricular mapping, not on experimental or quasi-experimental data measuring actual changes in student understanding or attitudes. Further research testing the book's effectiveness through more rigorous research designs for example, comparing groups of students who use the book with those who do not is needed to substantiate these claims.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examines the book "Everything about My Homeland" as a companion medium for social studies learning in the context of strengthening multicultural literacy at the junior high school level. Based on the analysis, several key findings were obtained, which can be formulated as follows. From a historical perspective, the journey of social studies education in Indonesia reflects a complex dynamic between the interests of building national unity on the one hand and the need to recognize local diversity on the other. The current Merdeka Curriculum represents the most mature stage in this long process, as it explicitly positions diversity not as a threat to be controlled, but as a competency to be developed.

From a content analysis perspective, Shelomi Angeli's book has substantial potential as a companion medium for social studies learning. Its coverage of all 34 provinces, with seven cultural content categories per province, yields more than 238 topics relevant to the elements of Phase D Social Studies Learning Outcomes. The balanced provincial structure implicitly corrects the Javanese-centric bias that is often a weakness of conventional textbooks. Its modern visual design and narrative style, which is close to young readers, make it more cognitively and emotionally accessible to junior high school students. However, this potential will not be optimally realized without appropriate interventions at the policy and implementation levels. Three strategic recommendations can be put forward: first, there is a need for policies that facilitate the equitable provision of such companion books in school libraries, especially in schools serving students from families with limited economic means; second, there is a need to develop a guide for the use of this book for teachers, containing a structured learning activity plan that integrates the book with social studies competencies; and third, further research is needed to empirically test the book's effectiveness through a more rigorous design, so that claims about its benefits can be scientifically justified.

Ultimately, "Everything about My Homeland" is a timely response to a long-standing need—namely, the need for learning media that can authentically bring the values of diversity closer to the younger generation, spark curiosity, and be relevant to their lives. Whether or not this potential will result in meaningful learning ultimately depends on the policy ecosystem, teacher capacity, and our collective awareness that celebrating diversity is a never-ending educational project.

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