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WHEN VALUES BECOME A MULTICULTURAL LEARNING SPACE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDENTS AT GREEN SCHOOL BALI

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Abstract

This study examines how school values and local wisdom are integrated into learning activities and everyday interactions relevant to multicultural education at Green School Bali's early childhood program, as well as the strategies and challenges associated with their implementation. A qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected from March 9–13, 2026, through observations, interviews with teachers, parents, and non-teaching staff, and document analysis of curriculum materials and two lesson plans. Participants comprised 20 children aged 4–5 years, five teachers, five parents, and five non-teaching staff members. Data were analyzed thematically using an inductive approach, with information compared across data collection techniques. The findings indicate that activities such as Peace Day, Indonesian Assembly, the Ogoh-Ogoh Festival, and environmental learning provide contexts for children to encounter cultural traditions, participate in shared activities, and interact with peers. An observation of a child helping a peer after a fall offers a concrete example of prosocial behavior in everyday interaction. Language differences and diverse cultural backgrounds were identified as challenges, while regular communication and parental involvement formed part of the school's responses. Curriculum documents indicate a local-to-global learning orientation and the relevance of Tri Hita Karana within the school context. This case study offers contextual insights into values-based multicultural education without claiming causal effects or generalizability to all early childhood education settings.

Keyword: multicultural education, early childhood education, qualitative case study, IRESPECT, Tri Hita Karana.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a pluralistic society characterized by diverse ethnicities, languages, religions, and cultural traditions. While this diversity serves as a rich source of social learning, it also demands the ability to coexist peacefully with mutual respect. Education, therefore, is not merely concerned with academic achievement, but also with shaping attitudes of appreciation for diversity, empathy, and peaceful interaction skills. In early childhood

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education (ECE), daily social experiences provide a crucial context for children to construct self-identity, understand others, and establish patterns of interaction with their environment (Banks, 2019; Santrock, 2020).

Multicultural education in early childhood should extend beyond introducing cultural names, traditional attire, or festive celebrations. This approach encompasses how schools structure participation, respond to differences, select learning materials, and foster relationships among children, teachers, families, and the broader community. Consequently, multicultural practices can be examined at two interconnected levels: the representation of diversity within the curriculum and activities, and the interactive experiences that allow children to learn respect for differences. For instance, Kasmiati (2021) explored the planning of multicultural value learning in early childhood, while Nur et al. (2022) examined ECE teachers' perceptions of multicultural education.

The implementation of multicultural education in ECE institutions continues to face various obstacles. Not all institutions possess a structured curriculum framework that explicitly incorporates values of diversity. In many instances, teachers remain predominantly focused on completing academic material, while efforts to instill values are often executed in an unplanned and incidental manner. As a result, children's experiences in learning and internalizing diversity lack consistency and depth. Amidst these conditions, Green School Bali presents a compelling context for empirical investigation. The school is renowned for an educational paradigm that balances academic rigor, environmental stewardship, and human values development (Green School Bali, 2022). Its school community comprising individuals from various nations, cultures, languages, and religions serves as a natural learning laboratory for direct multicultural practices. Daily interactions within this environment create authentic opportunities for children to grasp differences through lived experience rather than abstract theoretical concepts. These dynamics make Green School Bali an ideal setting to observe how educational values are operationalized in school life and how they shape children's awareness of diversity.

Green School Bali was selected as a case because its institutional context synthesizes a culturally and linguistically diverse community, experiential learning, a commitment to sustainability, and the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*. This context provides a unique opportunity to examine how local values and global orientations manifest in daily educational practice. Specific activities analyzed in this study including Peace Day, Indonesian Assembly, the Ogoh-Ogoh Festival, gardening, and cultural arts offer empirical grounds to examine the implementation of multicultural values. However, the mere presence of programs does not automatically prove that all children have internalized specific values; conclusions regarding practices and their meanings must be substantiated by observational, interview, and documentary data.

Based on this context, this study aims to analyze the implementation of values-based multicultural education at Green School Bali's early childhood program. The research focus is formulated through two main questions: (1) How are school values and local wisdom integrated into learning activities and everyday interactions relevant to multicultural education? and (2) What strategies are employed by school community members to support this implementation, and what challenges do they encounter? This study does not aim to measure causal effects on child development or generalize findings to all ECE institutions. Its contribution lies in offering a contextualized case study on values-based multicultural practices in an international ECE community, bridging the *IRESPECT* framework and *Tri Hita Karana* as supported by empirical field data.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine in depth the implementation dynamics of multicultural learning at Green School Bali. The case study design was selected to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Green School Bali's unique context as an international school integrating sustainability, local wisdom, and cultural diversity. This design allows for a thorough exploration of the school's socio-cultural environment, including foundational values such as sustainability, respect for diversity, and openness in learning interactions. Through a qualitative lens, the study sought to capture how these values are not merely taught via the curriculum, but are embodied in daily behavior, social relationships, and the direct experiences of young children (Yasa, 2025). The qualitative approach emphasizes the subjective meanings constructed by participants within their natural setting, making it more suitable than quantitative approaches focused on numerical measurements (Herawati et al., 2022; Winandar et al., 2023).

Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure breath and depth. The primary participants included teachers, students, parents, and non-teaching staff directly involved in early childhood education at Green School Bali. Purposive sampling was used to select 20 ECE students aged 4–5 years originating from Asia (4 students), America (9 students), and Europe (7 students), alongside 5 teachers, 5 parent representatives, and 5 non-teaching staff members. Data collection was conducted during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, specifically from March 9–13, 2026, observing both indoor and outdoor activities during class sessions and play breaks. This multi-source approach captured diverse perspectives regarding multicultural value execution across the school ecosystem. Participant selection followed formal approval from the ECE Head of School, followed by verbal consent procedures with teachers and parents for interviews and student observations. To uphold ethical safeguarding policies, student names were anonymized, and no facial photographs were taken. Non-teaching staff were involved to provide insights into how multicultural education is integrated through their informal daily observations. Institutional profile data indicate that Green School Bali operates as a Cooperation Education Unit (*Satuan Pendidikan Kerjasama* / SPK), established in 2008 under the Kul-Kul Foundation, holding top-tier national accreditation and international WASC accreditation.

Data collection involved three main techniques. First, observations were conducted to document learning activities and social interactions, focusing on how teachers facilitated cooperation, responded to diversity, and connected activities to core school values. Classroom observations were carried out three times, each lasting two lesson periods (2 x 35 minutes), conducted in English as the official language of instruction due to the diverse background of the students. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with adult participants (teachers, staff, and parents) to explore program objectives, implementation strategies, family involvement, and operational challenges. Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour per session, with responses recorded directly in field notebooks without researcher interruption. A set of 10 standard general questions was prepared. Third, document analysis was conducted on curriculum overviews, teaching frameworks, and two lesson plans dated March 9–13, 2026, selected in accordance with research objectives and formal safeguarding consent agreements.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis with an inductive approach. Through repeated reading of interview transcripts, field notes, and curriculum documents, data were coded based on emerging patterns and meanings without fitting them into predefined rigid categories. Codes sharing conceptual similarities were grouped into categories and developed into main themes explaining the implementation patterns. Data credibility was maintained through data triangulation, systematically comparing findings across observations, interviews, and document analysis. Discrepancies between sources were re-examined within their respective contexts to capture the nuances of the phenomenon under study.

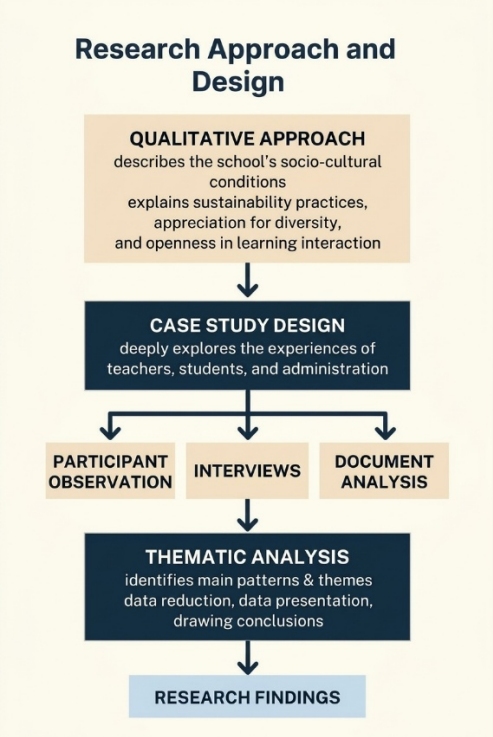


Figure 1. Research Approach and Design

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Implementation of Multicultural Values in Early Childhood Education at Green School Bali

The findings indicate that multicultural values at Green School Bali are embedded within the institutional culture and daily educational activities. This aligns with Banks' multicultural education framework, which emphasizes experiential learning in constructing cultural understanding. According to Banks, multicultural education should not be confined to content integration alone, but must transform the school culture so that students experience diversity in their daily lives. School initiatives such as Peace Day, the Indonesian Assembly, and the Ogoh-Ogoh Festival offer authentic opportunities for young learners to engage directly with varied cultural identities. These findings support Nur et al. (2022), who demonstrated that early exposure to diverse social interactions fosters tolerance and appreciation for difference. Core values such as sustainability, mutual respect, and cross-cultural collaboration are actively translated into daily practices.

Learning at Green School Bali is structured around experiential learning. Teachers facilitate contextual learning through activities like organic gardening, waste management, and collaborative cross-cultural projects. During Peace Day, the entire school community demonstrates commitment to peace through parades regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion. In every activity, children are guided to understand social responsibility, respect peer roles, and maintain harmony with their environment. The Indonesian Assembly and Ogoh-Ogoh Festival serve as cultural platforms for international students and parents to appreciate Balinese and broader Indonesian traditions. Through these experiences, children view diversity as a natural and enriching aspect of life, cultivating empathy and living values.

Field observations during the study provided concrete evidence of how these practices manifest. On March 11, 2026, during an environmental learning session, children worked in mixed-nationality groups to build small compost bins, negotiating roles and sharing tools despite minor language differences. Document analysis of the ECE curriculum framework

confirmed that multicultural events are explicitly mapped to foster global awareness alongside local appreciation. Alignment between written plans and actual execution was observed during the Ogoh-Ogoh Festival preparation, where children collaboratively assembled recycled-material sculptures while learning the cultural narratives behind the tradition.

Local cultural activities like the Ogoh-Ogoh Festival and Indonesian Assembly serve as rich contexts for children to encounter diverse traditions. Their multicultural value depends on how they are facilitated: allowing children to ask questions, share perspectives, participate voluntarily, and respect individual choices. Rather than treating programs as self-evident proof of success, they are analyzed through the quality of social interactions and observational evidence.



Figure 2. Ogoh-Ogoh Festival



Figure 3. Peace Day Celebration

3.2 Teacher Roles and the Implementation of the IRESPECT Values

Teachers play a pivotal role in implementing multicultural education at Green School Bali. Observational and interview data reveal that teachers act as facilitators, mediators, and role models for the core **IRESPECT** values. Rather than acting as sole authoritative figures, teachers create participatory and reflective spaces where children construct meaning through experience. Pedagogical strategies include small-group discussions, role-playing, and cross-cultural storytelling designed to cultivate empathy and equity.

When divergent viewpoints arise among students, teachers mediate dialogically rather than issuing immediate reprimands. For example, during a classroom observation on March 10, 2026, students discussed the concept of "responsibility". One student remarked that tidying

up toys was the housekeeper's duty at home, whereas another asserted that it was the responsibility of whoever played with them. Recognizing the differing domestic parenting styles, the teacher guided the discussion constructively, explaining that while others may assist, tidying up after oneself builds personal independence.

This communicative approach fosters early social skills and perspective-taking. Teachers also embody inclusive education principles, offering every child equal opportunities to participate regardless of language, ethnicity, or faith. The teacher's role as a facilitator aligns with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which views learning as a process built through social interaction. Teachers create dialogic spaces that enable children to construct understanding across different perspectives, corroborating Kasmiati's (2021) finding on the essential role of teachers in creating inclusive ECE environments.

Table 1. IRESPECT Values

Values	Meanings	Observation notes
I Integrity	Being honest and ethical in thoughts and actions.	A student promptly reported to the teacher upon finding a misplaced pencil on the floor.
R Responsibility	Being accountable for thoughts, actions, and deeds.	Students voluntarily tidied up stationery and learning materials after completing an activity.
E Empathy	Understanding and caring for the feelings of others.	A student fell down during play; another student immediately reported to the teacher to ask for help.
S Sustainability	Ensuring personal well-being and environmental care.	Children routinely turned off water faucets after washing their hands without prompting.
P Peace	Contributing to a state of harmony.	Students from different countries played together harmoniously, communicating via gestures despite language barriers.
E Equality	Respecting everyone as an individual and valuing fairness.	A teacher accommodated individual dietary needs during lunch, offering extra support to a child struggling to eat independently.
C Community	Being part of a group seeking common goals and mutual support.	All international students learned basic Bahasa Indonesia as a gesture of honoring local culture.
T Trust	Building and maintaining strong relationships.	A teacher encouraged a hesitant student to attempt a difficult task, demonstrating belief in the child's capability.

The *IRESPECT* values form the bedrock of Green School Bali's inclusive culture. **Integrity** establishes honesty and ethical habits early on. **Responsibility** is practiced through environmental care and task completion. **Empathy** drives multicultural education by encouraging children to understand peer emotions. **Sustainability** connects ecological awareness with social responsibility. **Peace** promotes peaceful conflict resolution. **Equity** guarantees fair treatment and equal participation. **Community** bridges school, families, and

local society. **Trust** creates a safe emotional space for exploration. As articulated in the school's curriculum overview, these values guide daily dialogue and behavioral modeling.

Green School IRESPECT Values

At Green School we subscribe to a set of values - IRESPECT. These are the values of Integrity, Responsibility, Equity, Sustainability, Peace, Empathy, Community, and Trust. At all times we are teaching and modeling these values and supporting our students in doing the same. We encourage all teachers to honour and recognize theses values in our students at all times with ongoing dialogue, discussions, and reinforcement.

There is a large emphasis in our Early Years programme on instilling values of kindness, love and mutual respect for each other and our planet.

Integrity – being honest and ethical with thoughts and actions.
Responsibility – being accountable for thoughts, actions and deeds.
Empathy – understanding and caring for the feelings of others.
Sustainability – ensuring that your own body and surroundings are cared for so they are clean and healthy for as long as possible.
Peace – contributing to a state of harmony.
Equity - respecting everyone as an individual and valuing fairness.
Community – being part of a group seeking common goals and taking care of each other.
Trust - building and maintaining strong relationships with each other, the school and the environment.

Figure 4. Curriculum Overview of Early Childhood Education

3.3 The Integration of Tri Hita Karana dan Global Perspectives

Green School Bali's curriculum demonstrates a synthesis between Balinese local wisdom and global educational perspectives. The Balinese philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* which emphasizes harmony among humans (*Pawongan*), nature (*Palemahan*), and the Divine (*Parahyangan*) serves as an underlying framework. Combining *Tri Hita Karana* with global values like environmental sustainability and equity illustrates educational glocalism. This finding aligns with Yasa (2025), who argued that *Tri Hita Karana* offers a robust character foundation suitable for global citizenship.

Learning strategies rely heavily on project-based learning and experiential learning. In organic gardening projects (*Palemahan*), children learn ecological concepts while collaborating in multicultural teams. Cultural arts festivals, such as *Bamboo Palooza*, allow children to share their heritage (*Pawongan*).

School curriculum documents explicitly state a "Local to Global" orientation. Teachers maintain pedagogical flexibility in integrating *Tri Hita Karana*. For example, lesson plans feature the *Mapinton* ceremony, a Balinese welcome blessing held at the beginning of the academic year as an expression of *Parahyangan.*



Figure 5. Fullmoon Ceremony



Figure 6. Gardening

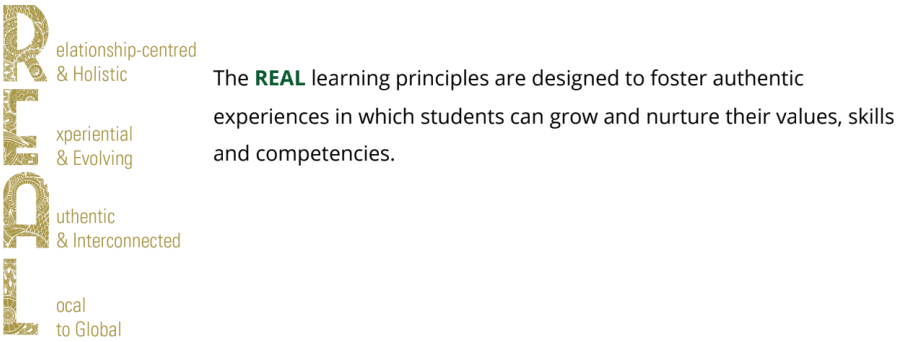


Figure 7. Teaching and Learning Principles



Figure 8. The Tri Hita Karana's Implementation in Our Curriculum

3.4 The Indications of Social-Emotional Development

Field observations indicate positive indicators of prosocial behavior among young learners. Children interacted openly, demonstrated empathy, and collaborated across

multinational groups with shared responsibility. They expressed ideas confidently and resolved simple peer conflicts peacefully.

When asked why he enjoyed attending Green School, one student remarked, *"Because at Green School there is no studying, only playing. We are free to choose."* This reflection illustrates that children absorb complex social and ecological values through play-based choices structured by teachers.

These developmental outcomes align with Bandura's social learning theory, which states that behaviors develop through observation, modeling, and social interaction. During an interview, an ECE teacher noted: *"Our students love learning through nature exploration, such as observing ant colonies directly in their natural habitat."*

A key observational record on March 12, 2026, at 10:00 AM further highlights this development. A child fell off a swing and cried. A classmate immediately ran over, helped the child up, and asked, *"Are you okay?"* A teacher approached and gently guided them: *"Let's sit and take some deep breaths."* This moment demonstrates early empathetic response and prosocial skill application.

3.5 Challenges and Strategic Responses

Despite successful implementation, the study identified operational challenges through interviews with teachers and parents. Linguistic and cultural diversity presents initial communication barriers, particularly for newly enrolled international children. Teacher A noted during an interview on March 10, 2026: *"Our main challenge as teachers in an international school like this is the diverse language and cultural backgrounds of students and parents. Some arrive with zero English proficiency."* Additionally, differing family values sometimes lead to contrasting interpretations of school policies. Some parents hold conservative views regarding children's involvement in environmental tasks or cultural activities.

To address these challenges, the school employs adaptive strategies. These include language support, introductory Bahasa Indonesia sessions for parents (*The Bridge*), parent involvement in classroom activities, and monthly communication forums called *"Coffee Talks"* across all grade levels. A parent interviewed on March 13, 2026, shared: *"The school holds regular monthly meetings to explain programs so we can understand better. They also offer Indonesian language classes at The Bridge so we can learn basic phrases."*. These findings reflect Nasution's (2023) assertion that parental involvement and ongoing communication are vital to navigating cultural diversity in early childhood education.

CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative case study examined the implementation of values-based multicultural education at Green School Bali's early childhood program. Findings show that institutional events (Peace Day, Indonesian Assembly, Ogoh-Ogoh Festival) and environmental learning provide authentic opportunities for young children to engage with cultural diversity. The *IRESPECT* principles and *Tri Hita Karana* framework offer valuable structure for character building and glocal awareness. Language barriers and background differences were effectively addressed through transparent school-parent communication and inclusive classroom facilitation. The contribution of this study is contextual, offering empirical insights into multicultural early childhood education within an international community. **Practical Implications:** ECE institutions can evaluate how core values are translated into daily social interactions, participation opportunities, and teacher mediation. **Limitations & Future Research:** Limited to a single case and a brief observation timeframe. Future studies should compare diverse ECE settings using longitudinal observation designs.

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