

Multicultural education through halal bi halal activities in the merbau padangsari banyumanik semarang community

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how *Halal bi Halal* activities become a means of multicultural education in the Merbau Padangsari community, Banyumanik, Semarang. *Halal bi Halal* activities, which are an annual tradition after *Eid al-Fitr*, are seen not only as a means of friendship, but also as an effective medium in fostering values of tolerance, mutual respect, and harmony among residents who have diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with community leaders, and documentation of activities. The results of the study indicate that *Halal bi Halal* has a significant role in strengthening social harmony and expanding community understanding of the importance of multicultural values in community life. The hypothesis that this activity is a means of inclusive social and cultural learning is acceptable. These findings strengthen the argument that local traditions have the potential as instruments of character education and multiculturalism at the community level.

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Introduction

Indonesia as an archipelagic country with ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity has its own challenges in maintaining social harmony amidst the plurality of its society (Mariyono, D., 2024). In this context, multicultural education becomes very important as an approach that can foster an attitude of mutual respect, tolerance, and togetherness amidst differences (Arfaton, A., 2025). Multicultural education is ideally defined as a learning process that instills awareness of diversity and forms an inclusive attitude in social life (Baihaqi, M., 2021). James A. Banks (2006), one of the main figures in multicultural education, emphasizes that this education is not only about introducing other cultures, but also inviting students to understand the structure of injustice and encouraging the creation of a more just and egalitarian society.

However, in social reality, especially in urban communities experiencing rapid population growth and high heterogeneity such as Semarang City, social tensions often arise due to a lack of intercultural understanding (Giyarsih, S. R., & Marfai, M. A., 2017). Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Semarang City, Banyumanik District recorded an increase

in the number of immigrants by 12% in the last three years (Handayani, N. W., Hadibasyir, H. Z., & Sigit, A. A., 2023). This condition triggers the need for a social approach that is able to bridge diversity so that it does not develop into social conflict (Oberschall, A., 1978).

In this context, local traditions such as Halal bi Halal have a very strategic value. Halal bi Halal is not only a post-*Eid al-Fitr* ritual, but also a space for informal but meaningful social dialogue (Zahra, S. A. Z., Rusmana, D., & Sakinah, R. M. N., 2024). This tradition has long been rooted in Javanese society and has spread to various regions in Indonesia (Ali, M., 2011). According to research conducted by Syihabuddin, M., & Alfani, A. T. N. D. (2024), Halal bi Halal plays a role in maintaining values of togetherness, reducing social tensions, and strengthening solidarity between groups in a pluralistic society.

In the Merbau Padangsari, Banyumanik, Semarang, Halal bi Halal activities are held routinely every year and involve all elements of society, both young and old, across religions, and various cultural backgrounds. This phenomenon is interesting to study further, considering the involvement of cross-communities that reflect contextual multicultural education practices (Valdes, F., 1998). Although not labeled as "formal education", this activity contains a strong educational content in instilling multicultural values (Wax, M., & Wax, R., 1966).

The combination of multicultural education theory and Halal bi Halal social practice shows that learning does not only occur in the classroom, but also through social and cultural experiences in the community (Futaqi, S., & Yenuri, A. A., 2023). This is in line with the constructivist approach in education which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in building knowledge (Palincsar, A. S., 1998). Therefore, raising Halal bi Halal as a form of multicultural education based on local traditions is important to be studied further (Paraswati, R., Rosyid, M., & Saifuddin, S. S., 2024).

The solution offered in this study is the need to strengthen socio-cultural activities based on local values such as Halal bi Halal to be used as a medium for social learning, especially in forming an inclusive and tolerant society (Khasanah, S. U., 2022). In addition, the results of this study are expected to be a reference for the development of non-formal education models that are relevant to the context of multicultural Indonesian society (Fakhrudin, I. S., & Shofwan, I., 2019).

The urgency of this research lies in the need to explore and optimize the potential of local traditions in building social cohesion and strengthening character education in society (Fonseca, X., Lukosch, S., & Brazier, F., 2019). In the current social situation, where issues of intolerance and identity polarization are increasingly prominent, it is necessary to find approaches that are contextual, inexpensive, and familiar to the community (Jost, J. T., Baldassarri, D. S., & Druckman, J. N., 2022). Halal bi Halal, as an indigenous Indonesian culture, has great potential to become a medium for inclusive and sustainable social education (Anas, M., 2025).

Thus, this study not only contributes to the development of multicultural education discourse, but also provides a real picture of how these values can be instilled and brought to life through community cultural practices. This study is important to open up new space in viewing local traditions as a rich and relevant source of learning in building a peaceful and harmonious society amidst diversity.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method (Gammelgaard, B., 2017). This approach was chosen because it is able to describe in depth and holistically the social reality that occurs in Halal bi Halal activities in the Merbau Padangsari community,

Banyumanik, Semarang, especially in the context of learning multicultural values.

The subjects of the study were residents who were actively involved in Halal bi Halal activities, including community leaders, activity committees, religious leaders, and participants of various ages and backgrounds (Gilliat-Ray, S., & Bryant, M., 2011). The selection of informants was carried out purposively, considering the involvement and capacity of informants in providing information relevant to the focus of the study (Lokot, M., 2021).

Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Kang, E., & Hwang, H. J., 2021). Observations were carried out during the implementation of the Halal bi Halal activities, by recording social interactions, cultural symbols, and cross-group participation (Godsil, R. D., 2016). In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the meaning of the actors towards the activities and the values contained therein (Hamdanah, H., Muslimah, M., & Muslimah, H., 2023). Documentation in the form of photos, videos, and activity archives were used as supporting data (Borish, D., 2021).

Data analysis was carried out descriptively qualitatively using the interactive model from Miles and Huberman, which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Muthmainna, A., & Siroj, R. A., 2025). The validity of the data is tested through triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings (Bans-Akutey, A., & Tiimub, B. M., 2021). With this method, the research is expected to be able to capture the process of internalizing multicultural values in a real and contextual way through the cultural practices of the local community (Suri, D., & Chandra, D., 2021).

Result and Discussion

1. Results

This study produced a number of important findings that show how Halal Bi Halal activities can be an effective means of multicultural education in the Merbau Padangsari Banyumanik Semarang community. The main findings are as follows:

- a. **Inclusive Participation:** Halal Bi Halal activities involve residents from various ethnic, religious, and age backgrounds. This shows that this activity has succeeded in creating an open social space and encouraging cross-cultural interaction.
- b. **Internalization of Multicultural Values:** Values such as tolerance, mutual cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect were found to be embedded in the social practices of the community during and after the Halal Bi Halal activities.
- c. **Effective Non-formal Education:** Residents consider this activity as a form of non-formal education that teaches the importance of living in diversity, without having to go through formal learning or school curriculum.
- d. **Social Cohesion and Conflict Reduction:** Interviews with respondents showed that the frequency of social conflict between residents decreased after Halal Bi Halal activities were routinely carried out, accompanied by an increase in collective awareness of the importance of unity.
- e. **Support for Inclusive Policies:** Residents showed enthusiasm for the development of similar activities as part of social and educational policies. They considered that this local tradition-based approach was more effective in forming tolerant and inclusive attitudes than formal methods.
- f. **Positive Response Across Generations:** Although there were differences in perspectives between generations, the majority of respondents across ages supported the continuation of this activity as a means of strengthening social relationships and building intercultural understanding.

This study also relies on the following main theories as the basis for analysis:

- a. Multiculturalism Theory from Banks, 2006: Emphasizes the importance of recognizing cultural diversity in society, and the need to form social harmony through equal interaction between groups (Banks, 2006).
- b. Symbolic Interaction Theory from Blumer, 1969: Explains that social meaning is formed through social interaction, including symbols in traditional activities such as Halal Bi Halal (Blumer, H., 2012).
- c. Social Cohesion Theory from Durkheim, 1984: Describes the importance of collective activities in strengthening solidarity between residents (Pahl, R. E., 1991).

These three theories serve as a framework for examining how Halal Bi Halal activities function as a medium for multicultural education in the Merbau Padangsari community, which consists of residents with diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

Padangsari Village, especially the Merbau area, is an urban area inhabited by people with heterogeneous cultural and religious backgrounds. The majority of the population is Muslim, but there are also Christians, Catholics, and Hindus (Kaba, A. J., 2022). This condition makes social activities such as Halal Bi Halal have strong potential in building bridges between communities (Firdaus, D. H., Ma'arif, A. S., & Rouf, A., 2025).

The Halal Bi Halal activity in Merbau Padangsari not only involved Muslim residents, but was also attended by community leaders from various religions, RT/RW, and representatives of youth from various communities. This shows the openness of space for dialogue between cultures and religions.

Table 1. Number of Halal Bi Halal Participants Based on Religious Background (2023)

| Religion | Number of Participants | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Islam | 134 | 70% |
| Christianity | 28 | 14.7% |
| Catholicism | 19 | 9.9% |
| Hinduism | 10 | 5.2% |
| Total | 191 | 100% |

Through observation and interviews, it was found that Halal Bi Halal became a space for:

- Conveying the value of tolerance
- Recognition of differences
- Strengthening social solidarity

Table 2. Multicultural Education Values Found in Activities

| No. | Main Value | Frequency of Appearance in Interviews | Sample Respondent Statements |
|-----|------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
|-----|------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-----|--|
| 1 | Tolerance | 87% | "We still maintain friendship even though we are different." |
| 2 | Equality | 75% | "All residents are invited, regardless of ethnicity." |
| 3 | Solidarity | 68% | "Helping each other makes us feel closer." |
| 4 | Respect for differences | 62% | "Even Hindus are invited, we are happy." |

Most residents view this activity as an effective form of social education, even more impactful than formal training.

The findings show that Halal Bi Halal has an impact on increasing the intensity of communication between residents of different religions and ethnicities, as well as decreasing social conflict in the last five years (based on sub-district data).

Table 3. Frequency of Reported Social Conflicts (2018–2023)

| Year | Number of Social Conflict Cases |
|------|---------------------------------|
| 2018 | 5 |
| 2019 | 4 |
| 2020 | 2 |
| 2021 | 1 |
| 2022 | 1 |
| 2023 | 0 |

From the data above, it can be concluded that Halal Bi Halal activities function as effective multicultural education tools. Values such as tolerance, respect for differences, and social solidarity are not only conveyed symbolically, but also internalized in the daily lives of residents.

2. Discussion

a. Halal Bi Halal as a Multicultural Social Space

Halal Bi Halal activities in the Merbau Padangsari Banyumanik Semarang community show that this tradition is more than just a religious ceremony. It has developed into an inclusive social space, where people from various cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds can interact harmoniously (Hutabarat, F., 2023). In practice, Halal Bi Halal in this area involves the participation of residents from various groups, showing that the social and family values built in this activity are able to bridge existing differences. This phenomenon is real evidence that Halal Bi Halal functions as an informal multicultural learning medium

(Katni, K., Sumarni, S., & Muslim, A., 2022).

The research findings show that Halal Bi Halal activities are able to present an inclusive and open social space for all elements of society, regardless of religious and cultural backgrounds. This strengthens Banks' Multiculturalism theory (2006), which emphasizes the importance of social activities as a means to build awareness of diversity. The fact that more than 29% of the participants in the activity came from non-Muslims shows that Halal Bi Halal in Merbau Padangsari is not just a religious activity, but has evolved into a space for cultural dialogue.

b. Relevance of Multicultural Values Found

This study found that in the Halal Bi Halal activity, a number of multicultural values were internalized, such as tolerance, respect for differences, solidarity, and equality. These values do not only appear symbolically, but are also reflected in communication patterns, mutual respect, and collective involvement in making the event a success (Sulaeman, S., 2022). Active participation of residents shows the internalization of multicultural values that are integrated with local wisdom (Husna, A. A., & Hamid, A. R. N. A., 2024). This is an important basis for building an inclusive and democratic society (Bell, K., & Reed, M., 2022).

Based on interviews and observations, values such as tolerance, equality, and respect for differences often appear explicitly in the speeches of community leaders and social practices of residents (Table 2 results). This proves that multicultural education does not only occur in formal spaces, but also in communal spaces (Jørgensen, M., 2022).

This finding is in line with Suyanto's research (2019) which examined multicultural practices in the Grebeg Sudiro celebration in Solo, where the involvement of various ethnicities in one celebration created a cross-cultural experience that shaped a tolerant attitude.

However, unlike Suyanto's study which emphasized the cultural elements of the Chinese-Javanese ethnic group, the Halal Bi Halal activity has a religious background, but is still able to embrace all parties. This shows that religion-based multiculturalism is also very possible to be developed in the context of urban society (Chaniago, M. F., & Arifin, M. K., 2024).

c. Perception and Effectiveness of Non-formal Education

Most respondents viewed Halal Bi Halal activities as a form of non-formal education that is effective in instilling the values of togetherness and diversity. Without an official curriculum format, the community still gains a deep understanding of the importance of peaceful coexistence (Ruslan, I., & Irham, M. A., 2022). This effectiveness is supported by a participatory approach and interpersonal communication that is established in a family atmosphere. This process has a stronger impact than formal education in terms of forming social attitudes and cross-cultural empathy (Syakhrani, A. W., & Aslan, A., 2024).

Most residents view this activity as a means of social learning that is easier to accept and more directly felt than formal education. Summary Results:

- 68% of community leaders considered Halal Bi Halal more effective.
- 59% of parents agreed that social interaction was more meaningful than formal lectures.
- 41% of young people still consider school as the main source.

These findings reinforce Freire's (1970) idea of liberating education, where concrete

social experiences play an important role in shaping critical awareness and values.

d. Reduction of Social Conflict as an Indicator of Cohesion

One strong indicator of the success of multicultural education through Halal Bi Halal is a significant decrease in the potential for social conflict in the area. This activity creates a space for dialogue and reconciliation that strengthens social cohesion (Orazani, S. N., Reynolds, K. J., & Osborne, H., 2023). Respondents admitted that after routinely holding Halal Bi Halal, tensions between residents became less frequent, and the spirit of mutual cooperation increased. This shows that this kind of informal process has a strategic role in maintaining social stability.

The reduction in social conflict (Table 3 results) over the past 5 years shows the long-term implications of Halal Bi Halal activities on social cohesion. Although it cannot be claimed as the only factor, Halal Bi Halal has a significant contribution as a means of communication and social reconciliation.

Table 1. Supporting Factors for the Reduction of Social Conflict in Merbau Padangsari

| Factor | Percentage of Respondents (%) |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Social gathering activities between residents | 72% |
| Interfaith dialogue | 63% |
| Routine RW/RT deliberations | 51% |
| Formal tolerance training | 19% |

Analysis: Non-formal factors, such as social activities based on culture and religion, are more dominant than formal training. This shows the importance of community-based education as an approach to social education.

e. Implications for Policy Development

The results of this study have important implications for policy formulation, especially in the fields of education and community development (Schiff, D., 2022). The government and stakeholders are advised to integrate cultural approaches such as Halal Bi Halal into character building and multicultural education programs. Recognition of local wisdom as a source of social learning can strengthen the effectiveness of social inclusion policies and strengthening tolerance between religions.

The results of this study contain several practical implications, including:

- Kelurahan/RT/RW policies can encourage the expansion of Halal Bi Halal activities into annual cross-faith programs, not just religious ceremonies.
- Educational institutions can make Halal Bi Halal an example of best practice in character and tolerance education, through collaboration with local communities.
- The Semarang City Government can adopt this activity as part of a strategy to

strengthen civic engagement in a pluralistic society.

f. Limitations and Challenges

This study has several limitations, including the coverage area which is still limited to one community, so that generalization of the results must be done carefully (Durlak, J. A., Mahoney, J. L., & Boyle, A. E., 2022). Another challenge is the sustainability of multicultural values amidst social change and globalization that can affect local practices. In addition, differences in perception between generations are also a challenge in maintaining the consistency of the meaning of Halal Bi Halal activities as a means of multicultural education.

This study also found challenges in organizing cross-cultural activities, such as:

- There are a handful of residents who still view Halal Bi Halal as an exclusive Muslim event.
- Lack of formal documentation and evaluation of the activity, which makes it difficult to measure the impact quantitatively.

However, these findings open up opportunities for further exploration in other areas with different socio-cultural characteristics, in order to enrich understanding of the role of local traditions in multicultural education.

Conclusion

Halal Bi Halal activities in Merbau Padangsari Banyumanik Semarang have proven to be an effective means of building and strengthening community-based multicultural education. This tradition not only represents religious values, but also acts as an inclusive social space that fosters tolerance, solidarity, and togetherness. Through active community participation and a cultural non-formal approach, Halal Bi Halal makes a real contribution to the formation of social cohesion and reducing conflict in the community. These findings emphasize the importance of recognizing local wisdom in designing educational policies and social development that are responsive to cultural diversity. For further development, it is recommended that similar activities be raised to a broader policy level as a model of community-based multicultural education.

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