

Navigating Cultural Bridges: Enhancing Intercultural Competence through Democratic Dialogue in Elementary Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the unique approach of utilizing democratic dialogue to enhance intercultural competence and cultural literacy among elementary school students in Merauke Regency, addressing a critical gap in the literature on effective methodologies for fostering these competencies in young learners. The research employs a pre-experimental design with pre-test and post-test measurements involving 20 purposively sampled students, using a 21-item questionnaire to assess empathy, inclusion, and tolerance. Findings reveal significant increases in these competencies, with inclusion showing the highest improvement (1.5 points), followed by empathy and tolerance (each 1.3 points). The results underscore the effectiveness of democratic dialogue in creating a more inclusive and empathetic classroom environment by promoting openness and acceptance among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, the study acknowledges limitations, including the small sample size and lack of a control group, suggesting that further research with larger and more diverse samples is necessary to validate these findings. The implications of this study extend beyond the immediate educational context, proposing democratic dialogue as a powerful tool for cultivating global citizenship and empathy, thereby contributing to the broader goal of fostering intercultural understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

1. Introduction

In the era of ever-growing globalization, challenges to cultural literacy are becoming increasingly significant (García Ochoa & McDonald, 2019). Today's world displays a complex richness where entities, values, traditions, and beliefs from various cultures coexist in everyday life. Considering the important role of schools as educational and socialization institutions, preparing students for multicultural competence and tolerance is essential.

The importance of cultural literacy in this global era cannot be denied. From influencing students' cognitive abilities to being a tool for harmonious living in a diverse world, cultural literacy is crucial (Garcia-Mila et al., 2021; Maunah, 2020). The home learning environment, including parental stimulation of literacy and numeracy skills and attitudes about learning, plays a key role (Cheung et al., 2021). However, the challenge lies in effectively applying cultural literacy, especially in elementary schools. Various factors influence cultural literacy, including age, education level, years of experience, and cross-cultural exposure (Herrero-Hahn et al., 2019). Effective teaching strategies must adapt to the demographic and professional characteristics of educators and the socio-

cultural context of the educational institution. Therefore, implementing culturally responsive pedagogical practices is necessary.

Despite these considerations, previous research shows that teachers often struggle with the challenges posed by cultural differences (Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017). This is compounded by their inadequate knowledge about students from diverse backgrounds (Kale et al., 2023). Intercultural competence is especially important with the increase in international migration since the beginning of this millennium (Suárez-Orozco, 2020). While teaching experience with new migrant students (NAMSs) can indicate a teacher's intercultural competence (Timošćuk et al., 2022), this experience cannot be generalized to Indonesia, where cultural differences arise naturally from regional diversity rather than migration.

Cultural awareness, according to Garcia-Mila (Garcia-Mila et al., 2021), involves attitudes such as inclusion, tolerance, and empathy, as well as skills like dialogical argumentation. Dialogic teaching can develop cultural literacy among children and youth, encouraging language development and creating a safe space for democratic dialogue (Cook et al., 2022).

It is important for teachers to be prepared to handle the diversity in schools with a dialogic teaching approach (Häbler & Spernes, 2023). Teachers will encounter culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse classrooms more frequently. Preparing teachers to manage this diversity will enhance teaching effectiveness and help create an inclusive and harmonious learning environment. Managing diversity is crucial for prioritizing cultural literacy, which facilitates intercultural dialogue with democratic potential (Maine et al., 2019).

Cultural literacy is also closely related to students' cognitive abilities (Cumming, 2013; Huettig et al., 2018). There is a correlation between literacy practices and global-cultural competence on students' cognitive abilities (Maunah, 2020). This opens opportunities for integrating multicultural education and tolerance into the curriculum, influencing national identity (Dryden-Peterson, 2020). Thus, teaching cultural literacy has high potential.

Additionally, cultural capital, as part of cultural literacy, is linked to academic performance. Research shows that cultural capital influences children's skills more than academic intelligence (Breinholt & Jaeger, 2020; Mikus et al., 2020). This indicates that investing in cultural literacy provides social, emotional, and academic benefits.

Pedagogical practices integrated with cultural literacy require educators skilled in developing intercultural competence. Democratic dialogue can contribute to increasing cultural literacy at the basic education level. It is more than a tool for persuasion; it includes strategies like persuasion, deliberation, and negotiation to reach an agreement (Castro, 2021). This approach builds harmonization among students, resulting in high levels of cultural literacy.

Currently, students are often reluctant to discuss important aspects of someone's background due to perceived sensitivity or taboos (Fu et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2020). This hesitancy highlights a significant gap in fostering environments that encourage cultural and intercultural dialogues.

Recognizing the crucial role of intercultural competence and cultural literacy in learning, it is apparent that existing studies have largely overlooked effective methodologies for teaching these competencies in classrooms. This research aims to address this gap by investigating the implementation of democratic dialogue in schools, evaluating its effectiveness in increasing students' cultural literacy and intercultural competence. Democratic dialogue fosters open discussions that significantly enhance students' empathy, inclusion, and tolerance towards diverse cultures. This study seeks to contribute to education by offering practical insights and strategies for creating inclusive and culturally aware learning environments. The implications extend beyond the educational setting, proposing a model for intercultural

engagement adaptable to various contexts to foster global citizenship and empathy.

This research introduces a novel approach by specifying mechanisms for integrating democratic dialogue into the curriculum to foster cultural literacy and intercultural competence among elementary students. Unlike traditional methods, democratic dialogue combines structured, inclusive conversations focusing on empathy, inclusion, and tolerance, making it more effective in fostering deep intercultural understanding. This study delves into the operationalization of democratic dialogue as a tangible pedagogical tool (Nelson & Luetz, 2020; Widiati, 2023), examining how structured engagements can help students navigate cultural differences, providing a concrete methodology for educators.

Furthermore, the study focuses on elementary education in the diverse cultural landscape of Merauke Regency. Known for its ethnic diversity with numerous indigenous tribes and migrants, Merauke Regency faces unique educational challenges, such as integrating diverse cultural backgrounds, addressing language barriers, and promoting mutual respect among students. This strategic choice aims to illuminate the potential of democratic dialogue in fostering early appreciation for cultural diversity. By concentrating on young learners, the research fills a gap in the literature and posits that early introduction of democratic dialogue can lay a foundation for lifelong intercultural competence and cultural literacy. This pioneering focus on elementary education underscores the study's novelty and contributes to understanding how intercultural competencies can be developed from an early age within specific cultural contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Literacy in Education

In the increasingly complex context of globalization, cultural literacy is an urgent and vital concept to understand and apply in education and social life. Cultural literacy—the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact effectively with individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds—is a key aspect of intercultural competence (Desyandri, 2018; Pratiwi & Asyarotin, 2019). Embedding cultural literacy in the education curriculum is crucial, especially in diverse classroom settings.

Integrating cultural literacy into classroom learning enables students to understand diverse perspectives, respond effectively to cultural differences, and engage in constructive dialogue (Nurasiah et al., 2022; Susanti & Permana, 2017). Additionally, cultural literacy is often enhanced through literary media in learning and social interaction processes (Amandangi et al., 2020; Susanti & Permana, 2017). In promoting inclusiveness and social justice in schools and communities, cultural literacy plays an important role by elaborating on Pancasila values (Octaviona et al., 2020).

One effective method to improve cultural literacy is through democratic dialogue. In a world of increasing scientific and technological complexity, there is a need for a democratic citizenry skilled in discussing and making informed choices shaped by individual and collective values (Kollmann et al., 2013). Through dialogue, individuals can explore and reflect on their own and others' cultural values, beliefs, and norms. Democratic dialogue offers a safe space to question and critique cultural constructs, fostering intercultural understanding and empathy. This study found that democratic dialogue not only enriches cultural literacy but also facilitates the formation of inclusive identities and social justice among learners.

2.2 Intercultural Competence in Elementary School

Intercultural competence is essential, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. In education, it includes skills and knowledge for effective interaction, communication, and collaboration with diverse cultural backgrounds. Key factors for supporting intercultural competence include the motivation and cognition dimensions of cultural intelligence, making them prime targets for training and best practices (Schelfhout et al., 2022). Empathy, which involves understanding and sharing others' feelings, is seen as a learnable skill essential for professionalism (Asih, 2012; Hudnall & Kopecky, 2020). This research posits that democratic dialogue enhances empathy by encouraging deep listening and understanding of different perspectives.

Inclusion, another pillar of intercultural competence, involves valuing and respecting diversity, allowing individuals to be themselves while contributing to the collective (Ferdman, 2017). It means developing a shared language and adaptable spaces for all learners, challenging traditional classroom experiences. Tolerance, related to freedom, involves societal discipline toward humanity and practicality (Fu-min, 2006), but often implies tolerating minority groups against cultural standards and privilege (Shufutinsky & Shufutinsky, 2019). High levels of empathy, inclusion, and tolerance in society foster personal attitudes reflecting modern values (Kolosova et al., 2022). This research found that democratic dialogue hones these pillars, allowing students to engage deeply, reducing prejudice and discrimination. Thus, embedding intercultural competence in education through empathy, inclusion, and tolerance prepares individuals to navigate the complex challenges of a diverse society.

2.3 Pedagogical Approach to Cultural Literacy

In addressing cultural literacy within educational settings, various pedagogical approaches have been explored to foster an inclusive and comprehensive understanding of diverse cultures among students. Traditional methods often focus on transmitting factual knowledge about different cultures, which, while

informative, may not sufficiently engage students in critical reflection and active dialogue (Desyandri, 2018; Pratiwi & Asyarotin, 2019).

In contrast, contemporary approaches emphasize interactive and dialogic teaching strategies that encourage students to engage directly with cultural differences through discussion, collaboration, and experiential learning (Kale et al., 2023). One such approach is democratic dialogue, which has proven effective in promoting cultural literacy. This method creates a structured yet open environment where students can explore and reflect on their own and others' cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Democratic dialogue enhances students' cognitive understanding of cultural diversity and fosters empathy, inclusion, and tolerance, which are essential for intercultural competence (García Ochoa & McDonald, 2019; Maine et al., 2019). By facilitating meaningful conversations about cultural differences, democratic dialogue helps students build a more nuanced and empathetic perspective, contributing to a more harmonious and culturally literate classroom environment.

2.4 The Role of Democratic Dialogue on Education

Democratic dialogue plays a crucial role in education by providing a framework for inclusive and participatory learning experiences. This pedagogical approach emphasizes open, respectful communication, allowing students to share their perspectives and listen to others in a structured environment. Research shows that democratic dialogue significantly enhances students' cultural literacy, fostering understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural backgrounds (Kollmann et al., 2013). Engaging in democratic dialogue helps students develop critical thinking skills and approach cultural differences with empathy and openness, essential for a harmonious and inclusive classroom (Maine et al., 2019). Moreover, this approach helps break down cultural stereotypes and prejudices, as students are encouraged to question and reflect on their own beliefs and those of others, leading to greater mutual understanding and respect (Castro, 2021).

Additionally, democratic dialogue enhances students' intercultural competence, the ability to interact effectively and respectfully with individuals from different cultural backgrounds—a skill increasingly vital in our globalized world (Schelfhout et al., 2022). Through exposure to diverse viewpoints and experiences, democratic dialogue helps students build empathy, inclusion, and tolerance necessary for successful intercultural interactions (Hudnall & Kopecky, 2020). Studies show that students who participate in democratic dialogue exhibit higher levels of empathy and are better equipped to handle conflicts from cultural misunderstandings (Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017). Furthermore, democratic dialogue

fosters a sense of community and collective responsibility, as students learn to navigate and appreciate cultural diversity together. This collaborative learning environment prepares students for multicultural interactions and instills democratic values crucial for their roles as active, engaged citizens in a diverse society (Lyons et al., 2016).

3. Method

This study employs a quantitative methodological approach, specifically utilizing a pre-experimental design with pre-test and post-test measurements, to evaluate the impact of democratic dialogue on students' cultural literacy, empathy, inclusion, and tolerance. The research was conducted from August to September.

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. The research team selected several schools to receive the democratic dialogue treatment aimed at enhancing empathy, inclusion, tolerance, and intercultural competence. Twenty elementary school students, representing a mix of superior, state, and private schools, were chosen to participate in the study.

The selected students were grouped into a single class and exposed to democratic dialogue as a treatment. To measure the outcomes, questionnaires were administered to the students. The questionnaires, designed to be easily understood at the elementary school level, contained 21 items divided equally among the three aspects: tolerance, inclusion, and empathy (7 items each).

The data collected from the pre-test and post-test questionnaires were analyzed using simple mean analysis to identify differences in students' conditions before and after the treatment. This analysis allowed for a clear assessment of the effectiveness of democratic dialogue in improving cultural literacy, empathy, inclusion, and tolerance among the students.

By highlighting the essentials of a good method section, data collection and data analysis, this study provides a robust framework for understanding the impact of democratic dialogue on elementary school students' intercultural competence.

4. Findings

In this section, The implementation and student responses to the approach, referred to as Democratic Dialogue, are described herein. In the initial stage, the research team gathered all students who were unfamiliar with each other, so this supported the conditions when they were in an unfamiliar environment. This conditioning is the most important part to see how they or students in this case, interact and use their intercultural competence skills in interacting with each other. From the conditioning carried out, it can be seen the difference between pre- and post-use of democratic dialogue through the following diagram

In the initial conditions without the democratic dialogue approach being implemented, there were still many things that often happened in multicultural classes. First, class conditions that tend to form friendship patterns based on ethnicity are still visible here. This can be seen from the groupings that tend to appear when students work in groups. Democratic dialogue provides space for students to further develop existing inter-ethnic interactions so as to reduce the gaps that arise in class interactions.

Second is the strong tribal stereotypes that exist in the class. Each student has their own way of viewing their classmates who come from different ethnicities in the class. Because this is a class formed from children who come from various ethnicities, there is a tendency to develop prejudice at the beginning towards things that are identical to them. In our observations in this initial condition, it is identified a tendency for students to start interactions based on ethnic similarities first and were reluctant to build interactions with those who came from different ethnicities, especially students who had developed prejudices first.

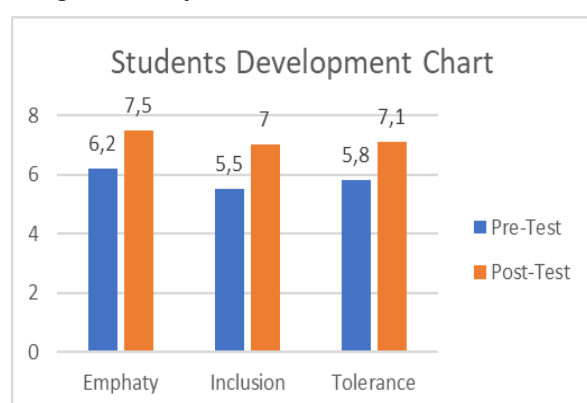
This becomes very crucial when faced with conditions in Papua, which is a society with a high level of diversity. In one class at a school there are bound to be students who represent different ethnicities. Both native Papuans and those who come from various regions throughout Indonesia.

Under these conditions, democratic dialogue becomes exclusive in its implementation. At first all students thought that dialogue was a common and normal thing to do. they think about going to talk about class assignments, the learning process and other academic things. However, they were a little surprised when they were told that this was a dialogue that would build openness. Previously, the intercultural competencies was introduced first. After that, they started talking about things that would be possible in a multicultural society. They discuss their ethnic background, culture, traditional beliefs openly with each other. At their age where curiosity is a big drive that must be fulfilled, they actively continue to seek information from their peers regarding various matters regarding their ethnic background, culture, beliefs, customs. This flows by itself.

Some of the things that are most highlighted in the implementation of this dialogue about culture are; Firstly, students most often ask what their friends think most about those who come from different ethnicities or backgrounds. Second, they tend to ask about what routines their friends who come from different backgrounds follow. This difference in perception is what other students most want to know and recognize. They initially asked "why do you think we are considered by many people to always speak in a high and loud tone?". This question serves as a stimulus assumed to be related to the perceptions of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The approach is

considered exclusive because, in its application at this phase, Democratic Dialogue effectively facilitates students in broadening their understanding of each other's perceptions.

To ascertain the changes occurring during the implementation of the approach referred to as Democratic Dialogue, students are provided with questionnaires to independently assess the shifts they perceive throughout the implementation. The results documented by the students were notably intriguing, indicating an enhancement across all dimensions of Intercultural Competencies that were of interest in this research. The following is a diagram of the results of the questionnaire that was distributed and analyzed using mean analysis.



The chart illustrates the comparative results of a pre-test and post-test designed to measure the levels of empathy, inclusion, and tolerance among elementary school students participating in this study. The vertical axis of the chart indicates the score range on a scale of 1 to 8, with the horizontal axis categorizing the three measured competencies.

In the pre-test phase, the bar representing empathy shows a score of 6.2, suggesting that students began the study with a moderately high level of empathetic understanding. The inclusion metric starts at a notably lower point of 5.5, indicating that students' initial capability to embrace and integrate diverse individuals into their social milieu was less developed compared to their empathy levels. Tolerance, at a score of 5.8, was marginally higher than inclusion but still suggested room for growth in students' ability to respect and accept others who come from differing backgrounds and perspectives.

Post-test scores reveal a significant increase across all three competencies, underscoring the effectiveness of the intervention – in this case, democratic dialogue – employed during the research. Empathy saw a modest increase to 7.5, highlighting a meaningful enhancement in students' ability to understand and share the feelings of others. The most striking improvement is seen in the realm of inclusion, which leaps to a score of 7, suggesting that post-treatment, students were considerably more willing and capable of including diverse peers in their activities and social circles.

Tolerance also improved to a score of 7.1, showing that students developed a greater acceptance of diversity and differing viewpoints following the intervention.

In this conditioning, it can be seen that students at the initial stage already have abilities that are at an intermediate level. Students at the secondary level already know and understand the existence of differences, they are a group that has been able to identify that there are differences in background between themselves and other individuals. However, this specifically cannot answer how to map the three aspects of Empathy, Inclusion and Tolerance.

During the time this research was conducted, we saw a large impact that emerged in multicultural classroom conditions. Empathy, inclusion and tolerance are some of the many aspects considered in diversity. However, these three are the most dominant aspects in building harmonization in a class. In the end, we see that the implementation of Democratic dialogue is able to build students' awareness of diversity, thus fostering sensitivity for a good balance of interaction between differences.

5. Discussion

It was found that the limited circumstances faced by students significantly impact their understanding, including multicultural education. Encounters with diverse situations outside the classroom are common; however, the lack of learning tools, unappealing media, and inadequate school facilities contribute to this limited understanding. In educational contexts with diverse backgrounds, gaps in mental well-being in teaching practices are evident (Anggara, 2023). The democratic dialogue approach can help bridge these gaps, particularly in empathy, inclusion, and tolerance.

Empathy, inclusion, and tolerance were prominently observed during the implementation of democratic dialogue (Maine & Cermakova, 2021; Morrell, 2010; Rapanta et al., 2020). Students learned in various ways and played crucial roles in bridging differences, unconsciously becoming actors in building a harmonious society.

5.1 Empathy Through Being a Good Listener

The findings highlights the differences between initial conditions and post-treatment with democratic dialogue. Initially, the average empathy level among students was 6.2, as measured by a pre-treatment questionnaire. After the treatment, there was an increase of 1.3 points. Although this was not the most significant increase compared to other aspects, it indicates an improvement in students' empathy.

The enhancement in empathy after the democratic dialogue treatment is characterized by students becoming better listeners (Andolina & Conklin, 2021; Burkholder, 2006). Democratic dialogue fosters good listening skills by providing space for students to express their feelings and opinions and to listen

actively. This dual role in communication is a key component driving the increase in empathy.

Empathy in elementary students involves self-conditioning, self-control, and expressing empathy, which helps integrate children with special needs into the educational process (Widianti et al., 2018). Conversely, low empathy can lead to bullying, aggression, and various forms of harassment. Elementary students, with their high responsiveness and curiosity (Asrial et al., 2023; Peterson, 2020), are naturally inclined to explore social phenomena. However, the research found that students' responsiveness in the empathy component did not significantly change, remaining relatively stagnant compared to their listening skills.

Students treated with democratic dialogue still showed vulnerability in empathy, particularly in reading body language. This may be due to the method's emphasis on verbal skills, leaving non-verbal communication underdeveloped. Additionally, elementary students have not yet fully mastered language skills, both verbal and non-verbal (Aucejo & James, 2021; Candela-Santos & Reyes-Meza, 2022), requiring further maturation to interpret body language effectively.

Overall, empathy showed the highest initial levels before treatment, indicating a higher difficulty in further improving this aspect. Nonetheless, a 1.3-point increase after democratic dialogue demonstrates its effectiveness in enhancing empathy among students in a multicultural setting.

5.2 Big Burden of Inclusion

Inclusion was the most highlighted component in this research, as it showed the lowest pre-test scores among the three aspects. Low inclusion in educational systems can create barriers for learners due to established norms and ways of thinking. Indonesian society is pluralistic (Nurman et al., 2022; Ridwan & Fauzi, 2021; Setiawan & Stevanus, 2023), with inherent differences influencing social interactions. Inclusion plays a crucial role in fostering acceptance and openness to diverse groups.

Societies with low inclusion tend to reject what is "foreign" (Allan & Persson, 2020; Calderón-Milán et al., 2020). Initially, students were "foreigners" to each other, contributing to low pre-test scores. Social norms, often rigid and binding, made students reluctant to initiate communication due to feelings of embarrassment or fear. This norm discriminates between those who know each other and those who do not, hindering interaction with different groups.

Despite significant improvements, inclusion did not surpass the other two aspects after the post-test results. Democratic dialogue facilitated increased inclusiveness through several mechanisms: (1) It compelled participants to communicate and recognize

each other, building necessary communication; (2) It provided equal opportunities for expression, teaching students the importance of equal opportunities in a pluralistic society; (3) It maintained unity by fostering ties through dialogue, crucial in a multicultural context.

Inclusion still requires serious attention to build harmony within a multicultural society (Kipnis et al., 2021; Obiakor, 2021; Teo, 2021). Successful inclusive practices in elementary schools involve collective agency, ongoing planning, teaching, reflecting, sharing knowledge, and attending to relationships (Lyons et al., 2016). Ensuring equality and effective communication helps maintain unity and address various social phenomena.

Further research is needed to explore these three aspects comprehensively. Inclusion remains a complex aspect compared to empathy and tolerance, consistently showing lower scores. This complexity suggests that inclusion requires more nuanced approaches to improve.

5.3 Does Identity Affect the Tolerance?

Divisions often occur and are linked to the lack of tolerance in society (Jamshaid, 2022; Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2020). However, tolerance is not as simple as condoning or allowing something that is beyond belief. This can be seen from how Indonesian society still tolerates the exclusivity of a few groups or groups. Departing from this exclusivity, identity becomes one of the most highlighted. Those who come from the majority will feel very benefited by the large numbers they have in this condition of democratic government.

Societies with a low level of tolerance tend to provide exclusivity to groups or individuals with certain identities (Budnyk et al., 2022; Damanik, 2020; Genicot, 2022; Komisarof & Leong, 2020). Therefore, identity is something that is truly crucial. In the initial conditions, students are not those who care enough about identity, as long as they are able to find pleasure, then they will live it. This can be seen from the initial conditions which show a level of tolerance that is above the inclusion aspect. There are two conditions that cause the phenomenon of tolerance in the initial state before this treatment is given. First, students at this level are not those who really complexly construct prejudice from the start. They still seem innocent enough to accept other people around them, but not open enough to initiate communication. Second, students are not the ones who really act based on the identity background they have, so there is no tendency to maintain or act based on the coercion of applicable norms.

In the treatment given, it was seen that students experienced a relative increase similar to empathy, but the final results were not the same as empathy or were still lower than empathy. From the results of research on this aspect, it can be seen that two things appear most dominantly in this Tolerance aspect. (1)

Democratic dialogue based on dialogue is able to encourage students' freedom in discussing and understanding each other. This discussion in terms of equalizing perceptions really supports the creation of an atmosphere of tolerance in the community. The students who received the treatment after undergoing this discussion were more able to accept differences and express a more tolerant attitude towards other students. (2) Democratic dialogue is felt to be able to become a bridge in efforts to eliminate negative prejudices that become stereotypes in society. In this case, students are actors who always try to find something new in their knowledge of multicultural society. They will continue to find out through their dialogue with other students in an effort to validate their perceptions of a social phenomenon that exists in society.

Students who have gone through this treatment do not predominantly show changes in attitudes in the aspect of tolerance. Elementary school students reflect tolerance in a superficial form through the process of forming their personality (Ackroyd, 2023; Rugiye, 2021; Zvolensky et al., 2020), which cultivates a sense of national identity, pride, honor, and dignity. However, the increase that occurs in the tolerance aspect includes changes that occur in how students view an identity held by other students. In the initial condition, they were not a group that saw identity. After treatment, we found that students became more sensitive to various gaps caused by exclusivity towards certain groups.

6. Conclusions

Tolerance, inclusion, and empathy are crucial for fostering harmony in a multicultural society, which is inherently vulnerable to division. This study found significant improvements in these areas among students exposed to democratic dialogue, leading to enhanced understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, greater acceptance and integration of peers, and increased respect for differing viewpoints. The key findings indicate that democratic dialogue effectively increases awareness and interaction among students, with inclusion showing the most notable improvement. This is attributed to the dialogue's ability to promote openness and acceptance, providing equal opportunities without pressure from existing differences.

The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating the tangible benefits of democratic dialogue in enhancing intercultural competencies among elementary school students. However, the study's limitations, such as a small sample size and lack of a control group, may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples and incorporate control groups to validate and extend these results. Additionally, further studies could explore the long-term effects of democratic dialogue on intercultural competence and its application in different educational contexts..

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