

# Implementation of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika Values in the Lives of the Bajo Ethnic Community: Strengthening Nationalism through Multicultural Education

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural, religious, and traditional diversity often has the potential to generate social friction if not properly managed. However, the Bajo community in Langara Laut Village has transformed this diversity into a source of harmony through the implementation of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika values. This study aims to explore the community's understanding and application of diversity values, examine intergenerational differences in interpreting these values, and analyze the role of the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)* in sustaining these principles as a foundation for strengthening nationalism. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing observation, interviews, and documentation involving traditional leaders, teachers, and community members across different generations. The findings reveal that diversity values are internalized through mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), interreligious tolerance, and cross-ethnic participation in traditional ceremonies. The older generation emphasizes the preservation of cultural traditions, while the younger generation demonstrates greater openness to globalization without abandoning their Bajo cultural identity. Furthermore, the *P5* program has proven effective in enhancing the younger generation's understanding by integrating local wisdom with national identity. Therefore, multicultural education grounded in local wisdom can serve as an effective strategy to foster nationalism and maintain unity within diversity.

**Keywords:** Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, Bajo Ethnic Community, Nationalism, Multicultural Education, *P5* (*Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project*)

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## INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity is a fundamental characteristic of Indonesia. With more than three hundred ethnic groups spread across thousands of islands, Indonesia is recognized as one of the most pluralistic countries in the world (Ekoriano et al., 2025). This richness is reflected not only in the hundreds of local languages but also in diverse customs, artistic expressions, and belief systems. Such diversity renders Indonesia a cultural mosaic, where each element possesses its own distinct color yet collectively forms a unified national identity (Fatmawati, 2021; Ramadhoni et al., 2024). However, this vast potential is accompanied by significant challenges in maintaining unity. Historically and in contemporary contexts, horizontal conflicts, discrimination, and intolerance frequently emerge when differences are not managed wisely.

In this context, the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* holds a strategic position. Inscribed on the national emblem, Garuda Pancasila, this principle is not merely rhetorical, but rather a philosophical affirmation that, despite Indonesia's ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, all differences are bound together by a shared national consciousness (Hariyanti, 2020; Lukito et al., 2022; Sudirta et al., 2025; Yuniarto et al., 2024). It serves as a moral foundation, emphasizing that diversity is not a threat but a collective strength to be preserved. Nevertheless, a persistent challenge lies in how this principle can be internalized and actualized in everyday life, particularly within local communities that directly experience multicultural realities.

One such community that offers valuable insight into the practice of diversity is the Bajo ethnic group. As a maritime society, their traditions are deeply rooted in the sea, encompassing seafaring skills, safety rituals, and a cosmology that positions the ocean as the center of social and spiritual life (Artanto, 2017; Chanifah et al., 2024; Maulidyna et al., 2021; Prasetyo & Ronaboyd, 2022). The sea functions not only as an economic resource but also as a defining element of cultural identity (Taum et al., 2024; Taum & Baryadi, 2024; Thornton & Hartmann, 2025). This uniqueness endows the Bajo community with distinctive local wisdom while fostering openness in interacting with other groups. In Langara Laut Village, Konawe Kepulauan Regency, for instance, the Bajo people coexist with the Tolaki, Buton, Mori, and other ethnic communities. Such interethnic and interreligious interactions create complex social dynamics. While the potential for conflict exists, practices of mutual cooperation, interreligious tolerance, and collective participation in traditional rituals demonstrate that the values of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* are genuinely embodied in daily life.

The multicultural life of the Bajo community cannot be separated from the role of traditional leaders and educational institutions. Traditional leaders function as custodians of cultural heritage and mediators in resolving social conflicts, ensuring that diversity is managed peacefully (Yaro & Longi, 2022). Meanwhile, the implementation of the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) under the theme of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* provides a formal platform for younger generations to internalize the values of unity (Suryanto & Widyatama, 2025). Through P5, students do not merely learn about diversity as a theoretical concept, but actively experience it through collaborative practices involving teachers, traditional leaders, and the wider community. This synergy illustrates how local wisdom and formal education can complement each other in instilling values of diversity across generations.

Based on this context, this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how the Bajo community in Langara Laut Village interprets and implements the values of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* in their daily lives. Furthermore, the study seeks to examine intergenerational differences in perceiving diversity, identify challenges in maintaining social harmony, explore the role of traditional leaders in strengthening communal values, and analyze the contribution of the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) in fostering nationalism through multicultural education.

## METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the implementation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* values within the Bajo community in Langara Laut Village, Konawe Kepulauan Regency, Southeast Sulawesi (Miles & Gilbert, 2005; Yuniar & Olivia, 2025). This location was selected due to its unique socio-cultural dynamics, where the Bajo people coexist with various other ethnic groups and practice diverse religious beliefs.

The research subjects consist of three main groups: the older generation, who firmly uphold ancestral traditions; the younger generation, who are more open to the influences of globalization; and traditional leaders, who play a crucial role in preserving and sustaining communal values. Through this selection of participants, the study captures diverse perspectives on how the values of diversity are understood and practiced across generations. The informants in this study consisted of 12 participants, including 3 traditional leaders, 4 elderly community members, and 5 younger individuals. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with criteria based on their active involvement in social and cultural activities and their understanding of community diversity. The field research was conducted over a period of two months (June–July 2025), allowing sufficient time for in-depth observation and interaction with the community.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, elderly community members, and younger individuals to explore their perspectives on diversity. In addition, participatory observation was conducted to examine social and cultural activities within the village, providing insight into the practical application of these values in everyday life. Documentation, including field notes, photographs, and archival materials, was also utilized as supporting data sources. To complement the findings, a simple questionnaire was administered to community members as an additional instrument.

All collected data were analyzed through a systematic process involving data reduction, categorization into thematic groups, in-depth interpretation, and verification through triangulation of techniques, as well as member checking with informants. Data validity was ensured through method triangulation by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries to selected informants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Any discrepancies were discussed and revised to ensure that the findings accurately reflected participants' perspectives. These procedures ensure the validity and reliability of the data, enabling the study to present an accurate and comprehensive account of how *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* principles are practiced within the Bajo community.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Understanding and Implementation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*

The findings reveal that the Bajo community in Langara Laut Village does not perceive *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* merely as a symbolic national motto, but rather as a guiding principle embodied in their daily lives. In various social activities, differences in ethnicity, religion, and traditions are not viewed as divisive factors, but instead as sources of strength that reinforce communal solidarity. Practices such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) involving all residents regardless of background, cross-ethnic participation in traditional ceremonies, and interreligious respect serve as concrete evidence that the values of diversity are deeply rooted in the life of the Bajo community. This finding is supported by statements from community members. One traditional leader explained: “We do not see differences as barriers. In our village, everyone helps each other, regardless of religion or ethnicity.” (Informant TL-1)

In everyday life, these values are reflected in the ways community members interact and collaborate. For instance, during communal work activities such as building public facilities or

repairing houses, participation is open to all groups without discrimination. Similarly, in the organization of weddings and other traditional ceremonies, the Bajo community demonstrates adaptability by accommodating elements that are inclusive and acceptable to diverse participants. These practices indicate a collective awareness that diversity is not an obstacle, as evidenced by the consistent involvement of multi-ethnic residents in communal activities such as house construction and village clean-up programs observed during fieldwork.

The values of diversity are also evident in the sphere of religious life, as observed in community participation during different religious celebrations, where members attend and respect each other's events without conflict. Although the majority of the Bajo community adheres to Islam, there are also smaller groups of Christians and followers of local belief systems. Interreligious interactions are characterized by mutual respect, such as attending one another's religious celebrations or adjusting activities to avoid disrupting others. This practice underscores that tolerance is not merely a conceptual ideal, but is actively realized in social relations.

These findings are consistent with Bazzi et al. (2019), who argue that diversity can function as social capital to strengthen national unity when properly managed. In the context of the Bajo community, diversity is not only a normative principle passed down through generations, but also manifests as a moral disposition that emphasizes togetherness. In other words, the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* extends beyond symbolic representation and has been internalized as part of the community's collective identity.

Furthermore, the implementation of these values reflects the Bajo community's ability to reinterpret the national motto within their local context. The principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is localized through maritime experiences, customary practices, and distinctive forms of mutual cooperation. This process of localization demonstrates that the strengthening of nationalism does not always need to be imposed from a top-down approach, but can also emerge organically from grassroots community life. This makes the Bajo community an important example of how Pancasila values can be actualized in social practices at the local level.

Thus, the understanding and implementation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* in Langara Laut Village demonstrates that diversity can be transformed into a unifying force when supported by customary values, mutual respect, and collective practices that foster a sense of togetherness. These practices have direct implications for multicultural education: the lived experiences of the Bajo community can serve as a concrete model for instilling diversity values in younger generations, both through formal education, such as the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)*, and through informal education within families and the broader community.

### **Intergenerational Differences in Interpreting *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika***

The findings reveal significant differences between the older and younger generations of the Bajo community in interpreting and implementing the values of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. The older generation tends to adhere strongly to ancestral traditions and customary values passed down through generations. They perceive diversity as something that must be preserved through established customary mechanisms and time-tested social practices, such as sea rituals, traditional ceremonies, and the role of customary leaders as guardians of social harmony. For the older generation, maintaining diversity means ensuring the continuity of traditions and customs as the foundation of unity. An elderly informant emphasized: "Our traditions must be maintained because they are the foundation of unity in our community." (Informant EL-1)

In contrast, the younger generation demonstrates greater openness to external cultural influences, as reflected in their active use of social media and participation in school-based multicultural programs observed during the study. This perspective is reflected in the statement of a younger informant: "We still respect our traditions, but we also learn from outside cultures through social media and education." (Informant YG-2). Their perspective on diversity is more

flexible and often framed within a national context. They tend to interpret diversity as a form of universal tolerance that transcends local boundaries, while simultaneously linking it to their identity as Indonesian citizens. Nevertheless, this openness does not entirely diminish their local identity as members of the Bajo ethnic group. On the contrary, many young Bajo individuals strive to strike a balance between preserving ancestral cultural values and embracing modern influences.

These differing perspectives highlight complex intergenerational dynamics. The older generation views diversity through the lens of tradition and customary practices, whereas the younger generation interprets it through the lenses of modernity, education, and broader multicultural experiences. This condition presents both opportunities and challenges, as indicated by differences in participation levels between older and younger generations in traditional ceremonies documented during field observation. On the one hand, the younger generation has the potential to extend the values of diversity into wider spaces, including digital and global contexts, thereby enhancing their relevance beyond the local level to national and even international spheres. On the other hand, without effective intergenerational communication, there is a risk of a gap in understanding that may weaken the continuity of local traditions.

This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Ayika et al. (2018), which emphasizes that multicultural dynamics within a society are shaped not only by cross-cultural interactions but also significantly by intergenerational relationships within the community itself. If the older generation fails to transmit diversity values in forms that are accessible and meaningful to the younger generation, these values risk losing their practical significance in everyday life. Conversely, if the younger generation does not integrate traditional values into their openness to external influences, there is a risk of disconnecting from local wisdom, ultimately undermining cultural integrity.

Therefore, the establishment of intergenerational dialogue is essential as a bridge between traditional values and modern realities. Such dialogue may take the form of cross-generational activities, customary forums involving youth participation, or the integration of traditional leaders into formal educational programs such as the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5). Through these efforts, the values of diversity can not only be transmitted but also adapted to remain relevant in the face of contemporary challenges. The sustainability of diversity within the Bajo community ultimately depends on the ability of both generations to understand, respect, and collaborate in shaping a shared identity that is rooted in tradition while remaining open to change.

### **Challenges in Maintaining Social Harmony**

Although the Bajo community in Langara Laut Village has demonstrated a strong understanding and implementation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* in their daily lives, this study also identifies several challenges that may threaten the sustainability of these diversity values. These challenges arise from evolving social, economic, and cultural dynamics, particularly influenced by globalization, religious diversity, and shifts in the community's economic structure. This concern was expressed by one elderly participant: "Young people today are less involved in traditional rituals compared to previous generations." (Informant EL-2)

First, globalization emerges as a major factor challenging social cohesion, as evidenced by the declining participation of youth in traditional rituals and their increasing preference for modern activities observed during the research period. The rapid flow of information through social media and television introduces new values that may sometimes conflict with local traditions. The younger generation, being the most exposed to global influences, tends to adopt a more critical stance toward customary practices that are perceived as outdated or irrelevant.

As a result, some traditional rituals are increasingly viewed as mere symbolic acts without deeper meaning, leading to reduced youth participation in cultural activities. This phenomenon indicates a potential erosion of traditional values if globalization is not accompanied by efforts to strengthen diversity awareness grounded in local wisdom.

Second, religious diversity also presents its own challenges, as reflected in minor disagreements regarding the implementation of certain traditional rituals influenced by religious interpretations, as reported by informants. Although interreligious relations in the village are generally harmonious, there remains potential for tension arising from differing religious interpretations or ritual practices. For instance, variations in how certain traditional ceremonies associated with religious beliefs are conducted can occasionally lead to minor disagreements at the community level. A community member noted: “Sometimes differences in religious practices create misunderstandings, but we usually resolve them through discussion.” (Informant CM-1). This suggests that the principle of diversity still requires active efforts to manage differences, ensuring that diversity continues to serve as a source of harmony rather than conflict.

Third, socio-economic transformations significantly impact the practice of diversity. The shift in livelihoods from maritime activities to other sectors, such as trade or agriculture, has altered the social structure of the Bajo community. Traditional ways of life that once heavily depended on the sea are gradually diminishing, along with the cultural rituals closely tied to maritime existence. These changes not only affect patterns of work and social interaction but also weaken cultural bonds that previously served as the foundation of community unity. As participation in maritime life declines, new challenges emerge in preserving the distinct cultural identity of the Bajo people.

Collectively, these three factors—globalization, religious diversity, and economic transformation—create pressures on the values of diversity. If not properly managed, such pressures may lead to intergenerational gaps, weaken local cultural identity, and reduce the community’s capacity to maintain social harmony. However, these challenges can also be viewed as opportunities to reinforce the commitment to diversity through educational innovation, intergenerational dialogue, and the revitalization of local traditions to ensure their continued relevance in a changing world.

These findings are consistent with Galinsky et al. (2015), who argue that diversity in multicultural societies requires continuous adaptive mechanisms. In other words, diversity is not a static value, but one that must be constantly strengthened through ongoing processes of social adaptation involving all elements of society. For the Bajo community, the challenges they currently face can serve as a momentum to develop new strategies that bridge ancestral traditions with modern needs, ensuring that *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* remains alive and relevant in the face of societal change.

### **The Role of Traditional Leaders in Strengthening *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika***

The findings indicate that traditional leaders play a highly central role, as evidenced by their direct involvement in mediating community disputes and leading traditional ceremonies observed during fieldwork. In the Bajo social structure, traditional leaders function not only as symbolic figures but also as authoritative individuals who possess moral and cultural legitimacy. This role is highlighted in the statement of a customary leader: “We are responsible for ensuring that harmony is maintained among all community members.” (Informant TL-2). They are regarded as custodians of ancestral heritage as well as mediators capable of resolving social conflicts through culturally grounded approaches.

The primary role of the customary chief can be observed across several domains of community life. First, in the preservation of traditions, traditional leaders ensure that customary rituals are carried out in accordance with their original meanings, while allowing a degree of

flexibility to remain relevant amid social change. For example, in wedding ceremonies and sea rituals, the customary chief ensures that values of togetherness and respect for diversity remain central to each process. Through these rituals, the community is continually reminded of the importance of maintaining harmony despite diverse backgrounds.

Second, in conflict resolution, traditional leaders act as trusted mediators for all parties involved. When disputes arise—whether related to customary issues, land boundaries, or differing religious interpretations—the customary chief serves as a neutral figure who prioritizes deliberation (*musyawarah*) to reach consensus. This mediating function not only resolves practical disputes but also serves as a mechanism for internalizing diversity values, positioning differences not as threats but as opportunities to strengthen social cohesion.

Third, in the domain of value education, traditional leaders serve as informal educators for the younger generation. Through folklore, advice delivered in village forums, and direct guidance during youth participation in customary rituals, the values of diversity are transmitted across generations. This process positions traditional leaders not merely as guardians of the past, but as active agents ensuring the continuity of identity and shared values into the future.

Fourth, in relation to formal institutional integration, the role of traditional leaders has gained increasing recognition through their involvement in the implementation of the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) in schools. Their presence enriches formal education by incorporating tangible elements of local wisdom. In this way, traditional leaders function as a bridge between formal education, which is oriented toward national policy, and cultural education, which is rooted in local traditions.

This strategic role reinforces the findings of Basri et al. (2017), which highlights that traditional leaders in Southeast Sulawesi serve as key agents in strengthening unity within multicultural societies. Their involvement not only maintains social stability but also ensures that diversity values remain alive and relevant despite the ongoing challenges of globalization and modernization.

Therefore, traditional leaders can be regarded as fundamental pillars in preserving the social and cultural integrity of the Bajo community. However, this role requires more systematic support from village authorities and educational institutions, so that customary leaders are not merely symbolic figures but active partners in strengthening multicultural education. Involving them in the development of local curricula, interreligious dialogue forums, and cross-generational activities can further expand their influence. Through such efforts, diversity is not only sustained at the level of discourse but also enacted through concrete practices supported by moral authority recognized by the entire community.

### **The Influence of the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) on Understanding Diversity**

This program has had a significant impact, as evidenced by students' increased participation in collaborative multicultural activities and their ability to articulate diversity values during interviews. Implemented in schools in Langara Laut Village, as a formal mechanism to reinforce diversity values that were previously acquired through community experiences and informal teachings from traditional leaders. A student participant stated: "Through P5 activities, we learn to respect differences and work together with friends from different backgrounds." (Informant ST-1).

Through various P5 activities, students are introduced to the concept of diversity not merely as a national slogan, but as a principle that must be embodied in everyday life. Project-based activities encourage students to engage in dialogue, collaborate across diverse backgrounds, and reflect on their lived experiences within the framework of Pancasila values. This process provides space for the younger generation to recognize that diversity is not only a local reality but also an integral part of national identity that must be collectively preserved.

One of the key impacts of P5 is the expansion of perspectives on diversity among the younger generation. Previously, their understanding was largely confined to interactions within the village community; however, after participating in P5, they began to relate diversity to broader contexts, including interregional and national relations. They come to realize that the diversity practices they experience daily as members of the Bajo community represent a microcosm of Indonesia's unity. In this sense, P5 effectively bridges local values with the broader national framework.

Moreover, the P5 program strengthens intergenerational engagement. In its implementation, schools in Langara Laut Village involve traditional leaders and parents as educational partners. This allows students to receive diversity values not only from teachers and formal curricula but also from figures who possess moral and cultural authority within the community. Such collaboration enriches students' learning experiences while reinforcing the legitimacy of diversity values as both culturally rooted and contemporarily relevant.

Another identified impact is the increased confidence of the younger generation in expressing their cultural identity within broader public spaces. Through P5, they are provided with opportunities to showcase Bajo arts, traditions, and local wisdom as part of Indonesia's diversity. This demonstrates that participatory multicultural education can serve not only as a means of cultural revitalization but also as a mechanism for strengthening nationalism.

These findings are consistent with Hasriani et al. (2024), who assert that P5 is an effective medium for instilling diversity values among the younger generation. The program not only enhances awareness but also fosters positive attitudes toward differences, positioning diversity as a collective strength that can be internalized across generations. Furthermore, the involvement of traditional leaders in P5 supports the argument of Amin et al. (2024) regarding the strategic role of customary leaders in strengthening unity within multicultural societies.

In conclusion, P5 functions as a vital instrument in enhancing the understanding of diversity among the younger generation of the Bajo community. It successfully integrates local and national values, ensures intergenerational continuity, and reinforces the role of education as a central pillar in fostering nationalism rooted in diversity. However, to sustain its effectiveness, P5 must continue to be contextualized within local settings, ensuring that the values taught remain not merely theoretical but genuinely relevant to the daily lives of the community.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Bajo community in Langara Laut Village has embraced *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* not merely as a slogan, but as a lived principle embedded in everyday social interactions. The values of diversity are reflected in practices such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), cross-ethnic participation in traditional ceremonies, and interreligious respect. These findings indicate that diversity can be managed as a form of social capital that strengthens community cohesion, rather than as a source of division.

Nevertheless, notable intergenerational dynamics emerge. The older generation emphasizes the preservation of ancestral traditions as a means of maintaining unity, while the younger generation exhibits greater openness to globalization and formal education. This divergence does not inherently weaken diversity values; however, it underscores the need for intergenerational dialogue to ensure that traditions are transmitted without losing their relevance in a modern context.

The study also highlights several challenges faced by the Bajo community, including the influence of globalization that may erode local values, religious diversity that occasionally gives rise to differing interpretations, and socio-economic transformations that shift the community away from its maritime foundations. In this context, traditional leaders play a crucial role as

custodians of tradition, mediators of conflict, and transmitters of communal values across generations. Their presence ensures that diversity remains a living moral principle deeply internalized within the community.

Furthermore, the implementation of the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) in local schools has had a positive impact on the younger generation. The program broadens their understanding of diversity from a local context to a national identity, while also providing opportunities to express Bajo cultural identity as part of Indonesia's pluralism. The collaboration between schools, traditional leaders, and families enhances the contextual relevance of multicultural education, grounding it in the lived realities of coastal communities.

The implications of these findings are clear. Multicultural education in Indonesia can be strengthened by integrating local wisdom, such as that practiced by the Bajo community, into formal curricula. Policy support for traditional leaders is also essential to ensure that their roles are not merely symbolic but strategic in maintaining social harmony. More broadly, the experience of the Bajo community demonstrates that nationalism can be sustainably cultivated through the practice of diversity at the local level, which is then reinforced through education and social adaptation.

In conclusion, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is proven to be not an abstract concept, but a living principle that can be actualized through the synergy of tradition, education, and modernization. The experience of the Bajo community offers a valuable lesson: when managed wisely, diversity can serve as a strong foundation for unity in the midst of an ever-evolving global landscape.

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