A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY RECOGNITION AS A STRATEGY FOR BULLYING MITIGATION IN EDUCATION: THE CASE OF PEMATANGSIANTAR CITY

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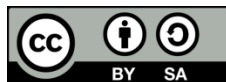
Article Info	ABSTRACT
  	The phenomenon of identity-based bullying in the multicultural educational environment of Pematangsiantar City reflects a complex issue that extends beyond individual behavior and is closely linked to the failure of educational institutions to substantively recognize student identity diversity. This study aims to explore how a philosophical approach to identity recognition can be applied as a more fundamental and sustainable bullying mitigation strategy. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and educational staff, complemented by participant observations and analysis of school policy documents. Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's techniques, which include data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability tests. The findings reveal that identity recognition remains primarily administrative, often neglecting psychosocial dimensions, thereby fostering identity-based bullying in the form of social exclusion, verbal bullying, and symbolic domination by majority groups. The limited integration of educational philosophy into learning processes further amplifies identity homogenization within classrooms. In conclusion, the philosophical approach to identity recognition offers a strategic contribution to strengthening inclusive education based on social justice, capable of sustainably mitigating bullying in multicultural educational settings. ***Keywords:*** *Identity Recognition; Bullying; Philosophy of Education; Inclusivity*

1. INTRODUCTION

Pematangsiantar, as a multicultural city, represents a complex diversity of ethnicities, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds within the educational

context. This diversity, which should ideally serve as a cultural and social asset, often leads to identity tensions that trigger discrimination and bullying within schools. Students belonging to minority identities are frequently subjected to marginalization, as they are perceived to deviate from the culturally constructed social norms of the educational community (Firnando, 2024; Suhendar & Halimi, 2023). This phenomenon illustrates how identity functions as a determinant factor in bullying practices, which not only impact victims' mental health but also disrupt the learning process and the overall educational climate (Dalimunthe et al., 2024). Therefore, bullying issues in Pematangsiantar are not merely individual behavioral problems but are closely linked to the social constructions of identity embedded in daily school interactions.

In the literature, numerous educational approaches have been developed to address bullying, including character education, psychological interventions, and the reinforcement of school policies. However, most of these approaches often fail to address the root cause of identity as a source of social tension in educational environments (Easterbrook & Hadden, 2021). The philosophical perspective, which situates identity recognition as the moral foundation for building relationships among students, remains underexplored within bullying mitigation strategies (Newstead et al., 2020; Акапова et al., 2024). In fact, identity recognition allows diversity to be embraced equally without negating the inherent differences within each individual (Dou & Cian, 2022; Veen & De La Croix, 2023). Consequently, the absence of a philosophical approach creates a conceptual gap that needs to be filled in efforts to mitigate identity-based bullying.

This study aims to explore the application of a philosophical approach to identity recognition as a strategy for bullying mitigation within educational institutions in Pematangsiantar. This approach is expected to foster awareness of the importance of accepting diverse identities and to promote the establishment of an inclusive and equitable educational climate. Thus, this research not only contributes to the development of educational philosophy theory but also offers practical solutions that can be implemented by educational institutions to sustainably address bullying.

The urgency of this study lies in the empirical reality of bullying that arises from the failure of educational institutions to manage student identity diversity in a fair and humane manner (Ozoegwu & Eberhard, 2022). A philosophical approach grounded in identity recognition is believed to complement the limitations of conventional approaches, which tend to be merely normative and procedural (Octavia & Ismail, 2025; Wiratama, 2024). Moreover, based on the objectives of this study, the findings are expected to enrich the discourse on multicultural education while providing a new theoretical foundation that is relevant to the socio-educational conditions in Pematangsiantar.

Identity Recognition

Identity recognition in the educational context is the process of acknowledging the existence of individuals based on their unique characteristics, socio-cultural backgrounds, and diverse identity preferences. From the perspective of Honneth's recognition theory, identity recognition requires respect for individual dignity; when neglected, it may lead to misrecognition or the denial of self-existence, resulting in diminished self-esteem and self-confidence among students (Kenny et al., 2023). Furthermore, in education, identity recognition does not solely refer to the formal acknowledgment of legal identity but also encompasses psychosocial aspects, where social recognition becomes central to the holistic formation of student identity (Boyadjieva et al., 2021). Therefore, identity recognition serves as a crucial foundation for creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment.

The manifestation of identity recognition within educational settings can be observed through various teaching practices, social interactions, and educational policy decisions that are sensitive to diversity. Recognition practices may occur through emotional acknowledgment, respect for individual human rights, and social solidarity within learning communities (PARAS, 2020). In higher education, identity recognition is also realized through the creation of dialogical spaces, where students from marginalized groups are provided opportunities to voice their identity experiences within transformative academic arenas (Boyadjieva et al., 2021). Additionally, identity recognition implies the responsibility of educational institutions to minimize social subordination that may harm students' self-worth (Ozoegwu & Eberhard, 2022).

Definition of Bullying

Bullying in education is defined as a form of repeated aggression deliberately carried out by individuals or groups to dominate, harm, or demean others who are physically, psychologically, or socially weaker. Bullying is often closely associated with identity tensions, where victims are perceived as "others" who deviate from majority norms (Lenhart et al., 2022). Conceptually, bullying is also regarded as a complex social phenomenon, as it involves interactions among individual factors, family environment, school culture, and prevailing social norms within the educational community (Kargapolova et al., 2021; Suhendar et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding bullying requires not only an individual approach but also a comprehensive multidisciplinary perspective.

The manifestations of bullying in educational settings include various forms such as physical, verbal, relational bullying, and the increasingly prevalent cyberbullying in line with the advancement of information technology. In addition, bias-based bullying - identity-based bullying related to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability - is also frequently found in multicultural educational contexts (Chin & Levey, 2023). Research shows that identity-based bullying often

receives insufficient attention in school interventions, despite its significant impact on the psychosocial development of victims (Halim et al., 2023). Therefore, the development of bullying prevention strategies must incorporate the dimension of identity recognition to ensure more contextualized and effective interventions.

Philosophy of Education

The philosophy of education is a branch of philosophy that examines the nature of education, its objectives, and the values underlying educational practice. It serves to formulate ethical, moral, and epistemological frameworks for the teaching process and the character development of learners (Bonafede, 2020). The philosophical approach to education encourages critical reflection on how educational processes shape self-identity, social relationships, and justice within learning environments (Kinossalo et al., 2022). Thus, the philosophy of education is concerned not only with how knowledge is transmitted but also with how education functions as a holistic process of human formation.

The manifestation of educational philosophy in teaching practice can be seen in pedagogical models that integrate values of humanism, social justice, and the development of students' critical identities. Narrative, dialogical, and reflective learning models serve as concrete representations of the application of educational philosophy within the context of identity recognition (Ramirez et al., 2023). Furthermore, within multicultural settings, the philosophy of education promotes the fulfillment of each learner's right to receive an education that respects the uniqueness of their identity as a form of self-actualization within the learning process (Quew-Jones, 2024). In this way, education becomes both a means of liberation and a recognition of existential being for all learners.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study focuses on the phenomenon of bullying triggered by identity tensions within the multicultural educational environment of Pematangsiantar City. The city represents a diversity of ethnicities, religions, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds that create complex social interaction dynamics within educational institutions. The emerging bullying phenomenon is not merely a form of interpersonal aggression but rather a reflection of identity exclusion, where students from minority groups become targets of marginalization within the educational system (Khan, 2019). Therefore, the research is directed at gaining an in-depth understanding of how identity recognition dynamics can contribute to contextually mitigating bullying within multicultural educational settings (Sneed et al., 2021).

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to explore in depth the phenomenon of identity-based bullying in the educational context of Pematangsiantar City. Primary data were collected through in-depth

interviews with key informants directly involved in bullying incidents, including students, teachers, and school staff. Secondary data were obtained from recent scholarly literature relevant to the themes of identity recognition, bullying, philosophy of education, and inclusivity (Köhler et al., 2022). This approach enables the researcher to capture the social complexity underlying bullying in multicultural educational settings holistically (Viera, 2023).

The research participants included key informants from various elements within the educational institutions. The first group of informants consisted of students who were either victims or witnesses of identity-based bullying. The second group included teachers who directly interact within the classroom dynamics and students' social lives. The third group consisted of school staff involved in managing the school environment and overseeing disciplinary practices. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct experiences with the phenomenon under study. By involving participants from diverse perspectives, this study seeks to obtain a comprehensive understanding of identity recognition practices in bullying mitigation processes (Ibrahim & Victoria, 2022).

Data collection was conducted systematically through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation of school policies, bullying incident reports, and academic records. In-depth interviews allowed the researcher to explore participants' subjective experiences in detail, while observations provided a real-time picture of social interactions occurring within the school environment. Documentation was utilized to strengthen data validity by verifying information gathered from interviews and observations (Sitorus, 2021). These three techniques were implemented continuously to obtain rich, in-depth, and accurate data in accordance with the principles of qualitative case study research (Hercegovac et al., 2020).

Data analysis employed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Data reduction involved sorting relevant information from interviews, observations, and documentation. Data display was carried out by organizing thematic matrices to identify relational patterns among data. Conclusions were drawn gradually based on the established thematic categories, while verification was conducted through cross-validation of multiple data sources (triangulation) (Quintão et al., 2020). To ensure data trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability tests were performed continuously throughout the research process (Younas & Inayat, 2025). This case study analysis allowed the researcher to capture the richness of meaning within the phenomenon under investigation.

3. **RESULT AND ANALYSIS**

Identity Recognition as a Philosophical Foundation for Inclusive Education

This study finds that identity recognition plays a fundamental role in creating a just and inclusive multicultural educational environment in Pematangsiantar City. However, student identity recognition has largely been limited to administrative aspects such as names, class assignments, and academic achievements, while the cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of students' identities have not been adequately accommodated (PARAS, 2020). Teachers reported that their understanding of students tends to be formal, often neglecting the uniqueness of personal identities beyond the classroom setting (Boyadjieva et al., 2021). The researcher's observations revealed that students from minority ethnic backgrounds, such as Chinese or Batak minorities, often restrain themselves from openly expressing their cultural identities to avoid potential discrimination. This reality reflects a failure of identity recognition, as described by the theory of misrecognition within the framework of the philosophy of recognition (Veen & De La Croix, 2023).

> *"We recognize students based on formal data such as their names, class, and academic grades. We rarely explore how students perceive who they are beyond those attributes." (Teacher A, Senior High School Teacher in Pematangsiantar, 2025).*

The absence of comprehensive identity recognition contributes to the psychosocial discomfort experienced by minority students. They tend to adapt themselves to the dominant norms at school in order to be accepted within a socially homogeneous environment (Ozoegwu & Eberhard, 2022). Interview findings reveal that minority students often suppress the expression of their cultural identities to avoid the risk of being mocked or treated differently by their peers. Observations show that differences in accents, clothing styles, or certain cultural practices are frequently used as subjects of jokes and ridicule within the classroom setting (Акапова et al., 2024). This situation indicates that when students' personal identities are not properly recognized, the school's social space indirectly reinforces identity-based social exclusion (Boyadjieva et al., 2021).

> *"I often pretend to follow my friends' habits, like the way they talk or the food they eat, so I won't be excluded. Sometimes, even a slight difference gets laughed at." (Informant 1, Senior High School Student in Pematangsiantar, 2025).*

Manifestations of Identity-Based Bullying in Multicultural Educational Settings

The research findings indicate that bullying in schools across Pematangsiantar City generally manifests as identity-based bullying, occurring in verbal, physical, and social forms. Such bullying is often rooted in ethnic stereotypes, cultural differences, or religious beliefs associated with minority students (Kargapolova et al., 2021). Classroom observations revealed instances of social exclusion toward students perceived as culturally different. School report documentation also showed an increase in reported bullying incidents following initial diversity management training, suggesting that previously hidden cases were beginning to surface (Chin & Levey, 2023). This phenomenon demonstrates that bullying is not merely an individual behavior but reflects underlying identity tensions within social relations in the school environment.

> *"Some students are often called by ethnic nicknames, like 'the Batak' or 'the Chinese'. Sometimes they even get mocked about their food or religious practices. Over time, they become quiet in class." (Informant 2, Senior High School Teacher in Pematangsiantar, 2025).*

Identity-based bullying does not always appear in the form of physical violence but often manifests as symbolic bullying and social exclusion, which are more difficult for teachers and school authorities to detect (Halim et al., 2023). Students from minority backgrounds are often excluded from study groups, not involved in school social activities, and perceived as inferior simply because of their cultural identities or lifestyles (Lenhart et al., 2022). School report documentation also shows that the majority of bullying complaints come from students who experience verbal or symbolic bullying, which has a significant impact on victims' psychological well-being. This situation reflects how the absence of identity recognition creates opportunities for the systematic social subordination of students within multicultural educational environments.

> *"I was once excluded during a group assignment. They said my way of speaking was different, so I didn't fit in. It felt like I wasn't part of the class." (Informant 1, Senior High School Student in Pematangsiantar, 2025).*

The research findings reveal a strong correlation between the failure of identity recognition and the rise of identity-based bullying within educational environments. When schools fail to provide a safe space for identity affirmation, students from minority groups become vulnerable to social domination by the majority group (Octavia & Ismail, 2025). Homogeneous educational environments foster dominant social norms that suppress individual identity uniqueness, causing identity differences to be perceived as deviations deserving marginalization (Firnando, 2024). In such circumstances, bullying is no longer merely an individual deviant behavior but rather a reflection of systematic social recognition inequalities in multicultural schools.

"Many students eventually choose not to express their identities, fearing they'll be treated differently by their peers. In the end, they stay quiet just to feel safe." (Informant 1, Senior High School Student in Pematangsiantar, 2025).

Limited Application of Educational Philosophy in Bullying Mitigation

The limited application of educational philosophy in learning management has become a significant factor that reinforces identity homogenization and increases the potential for bullying in multicultural schools across Pematangsiantar City. Philosophically, education should humanize learners as whole persons not merely as objects of cognitive instruction, but as subjects who have the right to have their identities recognized socially and culturally (Kinossalo et al., 2022). However, in practice, teachers tend to focus more on delivering curriculum content and academic assessments, while ethical dimensions, social justice, and intercultural dialogue are often marginalized in daily classroom activities (Quew-Jones, 2024). As a result, students are not accustomed to viewing diversity as a social strength but instead become trapped within narrow standards of homogeneity.

"We mostly focus on delivering the curriculum material. Topics like cultural differences or how students express their identities are rarely discussed in class." (Informant 3, School Staff, Senior High School Pematangsiantar, 2025)

The lack of internalization of educational philosophy oriented toward identity recognition results in the absence of critical reflection spaces within the learning process. Consequently, students have limited social awareness to understand, respect, and accept differences among themselves (Ramirez et al., 2023)**.** In essence, the philosophy of education emphasizes that learning is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but a process of moral identity formation that allows students to develop an awareness of social diversity (Quew-Jones, 2024). Without the systematic reinforcement of multicultural values in the classroom, majority identity dominance will continue to sustain social inequalities, ultimately leading to bullying.

"We do have some activities that highlight diversity, but they only take place during certain occasions, such as national or religious holidays. Other than that, the focus remains on general academic subjects." (Informant 2, Senior High School Teacher in Pematangsiantar, 2025).

Philosophical Strengthening of Identity Recognition as a Bullying Mitigation Strategy

Philosophically, identity recognition serves as a fundamental foundation for establishing social justice in education. In line with Charles Taylor's recognition theory, individual identity is not formed in isolation but is always shaped through recognition received from one's social community. The failure to recognize (misrecognition of) student identities within the school environment creates injustice that leads to social alienation, including bullying (Boyadjieva et al., 2021). When schools fail to fully affirm students' identities, they indirectly reinforce social exclusion, providing fertile ground for the emergence of identity-based bullying (Ozoegwu & Eberhard, 2022).

> *"Many students eventually choose not to express their identities, fearing they might be treated differently by their peers. In the end, they stay quiet just to feel safe." (Informant 1, Senior High School Student in Pematangsiantar, 2025)*

The findings of this study contribute to the development of educational theory by emphasizing the importance of integrating a philosophical approach based on identity recognition as a long-term bullying prevention strategy. Strengthening the dimension of identity recognition broadens the meaning of education, not merely as a process of knowledge transfer, but also as a process of social character formation grounded in relational justice among individuals (Bonafede, 2020). By fostering social sensitivity, empathy, and appreciation for identity diversity, multicultural education can create a safer, more equitable, and inclusive learning environment for all students (Veen & De La Croix, 2023).

> *"If from the beginning students were taught that everyone is allowed to have their own culture, I believe it would be easier for them to respect one another and not mock others." (Informant 2, Senior High School Teacher in Pematangsiantar, 2025).*

The findings of this study provide important practical implications for managing multicultural education in Pematangsiantar City. Systematic efforts are needed from schools to incorporate the principles of identity recognition into the learning curriculum, institutional policies, and the overall school culture (Octavia & Ismail, 2025). Teachers and school staff must be equipped with multicultural competency training and strengthened dialogical ethics to manage identity diversity fairly in daily teaching practices. The philosophical approach of identity recognition is believed to offer a strategic framework for the long-term prevention of identity-based bullying, as it addresses the root causes of hidden power relations that often emerge in the dynamics of school life (Firnando, 2024).

4. **CONCLUSION**

This study emphasizes that the issue of bullying within the multicultural educational environment of Pematangsiantar City cannot be separated from the issue of identity recognition. The inability of educational institutions to affirm the diversity of student identities has created social spaces that foster marginalization and exclusion. Students from minority backgrounds often suppress the expression of their identities in order to avoid discrimination, which ultimately leads to psychological discomfort and distances them from optimal learning processes.

The findings also show that identity-based bullying is not merely an issue of individual behavior but rather a reflection of power relations embedded in the school's social dynamics. The limited application of educational philosophy in learning management amplifies the dominance of majority norms, causing students' cultural diversity to be perceived as deviation. Therefore, the failure to fully recognize identities within educational spaces becomes a key factor that increases the potential for bullying.

Strengthening a philosophical approach based on identity recognition offers a more fundamental and sustainable bullying mitigation strategy. By placing identity recognition as a core principle in educational practice, institutions can create dialogical spaces that are fair, safe, and respectful of students' identity plurality. The implementation of inclusive educational philosophy is expected to foster student character development that not only excels academically but also possesses a strong social awareness in appreciating diversity.

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