

National Integration With the Concept of Pluralism in the Campus Environment

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Abstract: Indonesia is a diverse country. To create a harmonious life and avoid conflict, national integration efforts are necessary. The campus environment serves as a model of Indonesian society, serving as a strategic space for implementing pluralist values to strengthen national integration. This study, which examines the campus environment, aims to describe forms of national integration, analyze the implementation of pluralism, identify the role of pluralism in strengthening national integration, and identify supporting and inhibiting factors. This study employed a qualitative, descriptive approach. Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation at Nusantara PGRI University, Kediri. The study involved students from Flores and local students. Data validity was tested using source and method triangulation. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of this study indicate that national integration on campus has been well-functioning, as evidenced by harmonious social interactions among students from diverse backgrounds. The implementation of pluralism plays a crucial role in creating an inclusive campus atmosphere, reflected in mutual respect and a willingness to learn and interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Supporting factors for national integration include student tolerance, student organizations, and inclusive campus policies. Inhibiting factors include a lack of awareness among some students about respecting differences and the negative influence of social media.

Keywords: National Integration; Pluralism; Diversity; Students.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a diverse country. This diversity is reflected in various aspects of social life, from ethnicity and language to religion and culture, to customs. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that Indonesia has more than 1,340 ethnic groups living side by side within a single nation. National integration is a crucial factor in ensuring that these differences can be united within a harmonious nation and state.

According to Saafroedin Bahar (1996), national integration is the process of uniting all elements of the nation, including social, cultural, religious, and territorial aspects, into a unified national identity. Various social conflicts based on ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA) that have occurred in Indonesia demonstrate that diversity can become a source of conflict if not managed properly (Ramadhan et al, 2020). Furthermore, the development of information technology and social media in the digital era presents new challenges in the form of the spread of hoaxes, hate speech, and intolerance, which have the potential to disrupt social cohesion, especially among the younger generation (Afrilia et al, 2024).

One approach considered capable of strengthening national integration is pluralism. Pluralism is a view that recognizes, values, and accepts diversity as a social reality. According to (Permana, 2023) and Jurdi (2018), pluralism provides equal space for every individual or group to maintain their identity without losing their cultural characteristics. Similarly, Nurcholish Madjid (in Tasrif, 2017) emphasizes that pluralism is not merely a recognition of diversity but also involves active participation in understanding, respecting, and coexisting harmoniously with different groups. In line with this, managing such diversity requires culturally contextual equality driven by dialogue and tolerance to ensure inclusive, fair, and harmonious opportunities for all elements of society (Ramadhan & Eiranda, 2025).

The university environment can be viewed as a miniature of Indonesian society, inhabited by individuals from diverse cultural, religious, ethnic, and regional backgrounds. Interactions occurring on

campus are an important means of building cross-cultural understanding and strengthening the values of unity. From a social interaction perspective, Georg Simmel explains that society is formed through ongoing relationships and interactions between individuals and groups. Therefore, campus life is a strategic space to observe how national integration is built through the practice of pluralism in students' daily activities.

Several previous studies have addressed the issue of diversity and tolerance in higher education. Satang et al. (2026) found that students' tolerant attitudes are reflected in social interactions that do not discriminate based on ethnicity, culture, or region of origin. Rudiyanto et al (2024) demonstrated that integrating character education and multicultural education can shape students who are more tolerant and open to diversity. Research by Zuhaeroh (2026) confirmed that multicultural education plays a role in strengthening empathy and appreciation for differences. Meanwhile, Nanlohy et al (2023) and Haq et al (2026) found that students have positive levels of tolerance and play a vital role in maintaining social harmony amidst diversity.

However, most previous research has focused on aspects of tolerance, multicultural education, character education, and students' role in maintaining social relationships. These studies have not specifically examined how pluralism is practiced in campus life as a means of strengthening national integration. Furthermore, some studies use a survey approach, thus failing to provide an in-depth empirical picture of students' direct experiences in dealing with diversity. Therefore, there remains a research gap that needs to be filled through studies on the implementation of pluralism in campus life and its contribution to strengthening national integration.

Based on this description, this research was conducted in a campus environment, which serves as a space for the character formation of the younger generation to become agents of national unity in the future. This research aims to describe the forms of national integration, analyze the implementation of pluralism, identify the role of pluralism in strengthening national integration, and identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in achieving national integration. Based on these objectives, this study seeks to answer the questions of what forms of national integration occur on campus, how pluralism is implemented in student life, what role pluralism plays in strengthening national integration, and what factors support and hinder the process of national integration in higher education.

METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research aimed to deeply understand the phenomena of national integration and pluralism. This approach enabled researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the meanings, attitudes, and behaviors that emerge within the context of diverse cultures, religions, ethnicities, and regions of origin of students. Meanwhile, descriptive methods were used to systematically describe the social conditions and dynamics occurring on campus without manipulating the research subjects.

The research was conducted at Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri, with observations focused on the cafeteria area and student interaction spaces. This location was chosen purposively because it serves as a meeting point for students from diverse study programs and backgrounds, thus representing the practices of pluralism and national integration in everyday campus life. Data collection took place between April and May 2026, encompassing field observations and interviews with research informants.

The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct observation and interviews with informants selected using purposive sampling. This study involved a total of two informants, who were divided into two categories: (1) one key informant, namely a student from Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, who had direct experience adapting from a relatively homogeneous social environment to a heterogeneous university environment; and (2) one supporting informant, namely a local Javanese student who actively interacts with students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

The criteria for selecting the informants through purposive sampling were as follows: (a) being an active student at Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri; (b) having direct experience interacting with students from different ethnic, religious, or regional backgrounds; and (c) being willing to participate in

an in-depth interview regarding such experiences. Secondary data were obtained from supporting documents, including field notes, interview transcripts, documentation of research activities, and university documents related to diversity and inclusivity policies.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observations were conducted to observe student interaction patterns, forms of cooperation between individuals and groups, and situations reflecting the application of pluralism and national integration values. Interviews were conducted semi-structured to allow informants to share their experiences and perspectives more openly, while also allowing the researcher to gather information relevant to the research focus. Documentation was used to supplement the observation and interview data through the collection of activity photos, interview transcripts, field notes, and other supporting documents.

To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from various informants to determine the consistency of the data provided. Meanwhile, method triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. If the information obtained from various sources and methods demonstrates consistency, the data is considered valid and can be used as a basis for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods, following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers selected and focused on data relevant to the theme of national integration and pluralism. Next, the reduced data was presented in a descriptive narrative structured according to the research focus, facilitating interpretation. The final stage was drawing conclusions by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the analyzed data. The conclusions obtained were then confirmed through a triangulation process to ensure the validity and credibility of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results were obtained through direct observation at Nusantara PGRI University Kediri and interviews with students from diverse cultural and regional backgrounds. The findings indicate that national integration and pluralistic practices have flourished in campus life, although several obstacles remain that require attention.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings

Research Aspects	Key Findings
Forms of National Integration	Social interactions take place harmoniously without segregation based on ethnicity, religion, or region of origin.
Implementation of Pluralism	Realized through mutual respect, openness, and cross-cultural and inter-religious discussions.
The Role of Pluralism	Increase tolerance, broaden horizons, and strengthen students' sense of unity
Supporting Factors	Tolerance, character education, cultural openness, student organizations, and inclusive campus policies
Inhibiting Factors	Lack of awareness of respecting differences, cultural misunderstandings, and the negative influence of social media

Forms of National Integration on Campus

Observations on the campus of Nusantara PGRI University in Kediri indicate that national integration is reflected in the natural and inclusive patterns of student social interaction. In the campus cafeteria, students from various cultural, religious, and regional backgrounds are seen sitting together, discussing, and working on group assignments without any exclusive identity-based categorization. Conversations are conducted in Indonesian with occasional regional language interspersed, demonstrating an acceptance of cultural diversity in everyday interactions.



Figure 1. Student Interaction Activities in the Campus Canteen

The interview findings also indicate that the process of adapting to diversity can take place in a positive manner. The student from Flores who served as the key informant explained that although they initially experienced culture shock upon entering a heterogeneous campus environment, they were nevertheless able to adapt through open and mutually respectful social interactions. These findings demonstrate the presence of national integration in the behavioral and value dimensions, as proposed by Myron Weiner. Integration is reflected not only in the recognition of diversity but also in concrete actions, including cooperation, communication, and harmonious social relationships among students. These findings are consistent with the study by Satang et al. (2026), which found that student tolerance is reflected in social interactions that do not discriminate based on ethnicity, culture, or region of origin. Thus, the university environment functions as a social space that supports the development of national integration through everyday experiences of interaction. It should be noted that the findings presented in this section are largely based on the experience of a single key informant; therefore, they are illustrative and may not necessarily represent the experiences of all students from outside the local area in general.



Figure 2. Interview with Sources and Flores, NTT

Implementing Pluralism in Campus Life

The implementation of pluralism on campus is evident in students' attitudes of respecting and accepting differences as part of communal life. Researchers did not find any acts of social exclusion or overt discrimination during the observations. Students appeared comfortable interacting with anyone without considering their particular identity background.

These findings indicate that pluralism on campus is not merely normative but is manifested in everyday social practices. This condition aligns with (Heggart et al., 2018) view, which states that pluralism is the recognition and appreciation of diversity manifested through inclusive living. Furthermore, these findings support Nurcholish Madjid's thinking, which emphasizes that pluralism requires active involvement in understanding and respecting different groups.

These research findings also reinforce the findings of Rudiyanto et al (2024) and Zuhaeroh (2026), which show that respect for diversity and multicultural values contributes to the development of students who are more open, tolerant, and able to live together harmoniously.

The Role of Pluralism in Strengthening National Integration

Based on interviews and observations, pluralism plays a crucial role in strengthening national integration on campus. An open attitude toward differences allows students to build broader social relationships and reduce intergroup prejudice. Pluralism also serves as a means of social learning. Through cross-cultural interactions, students gain a better understanding of the diversity of Indonesian society. This process ultimately strengthens their sense of unity and identity as part of the Indonesian nation.

The interviewee emphasized that the younger generation has a significant responsibility in maintaining national integration through mutual respect and the judicious use of social media. He argued that social media can be a means to spread the values of tolerance and appreciation for diversity when used positively.

These findings indicate that pluralism contributes to strengthening national integration by fostering tolerance, social empathy, and national awareness. These findings align with research by Haq et al., (2026), which concluded that students play a strategic role in fostering tolerance and strengthening social relationships amidst the nation's cultural diversity.

According to the supporting informant, a female student from Java, an environment that appears harmonious is not necessarily fully inclusive. Mockery of an accent can be regarded as a form of subtle discrimination when such jokes are related to regional identity and have psychological or social effects on the targeted individual. This issue demonstrates that respect for diversity should encompass ways of speaking, accents, and language practices, rather than focusing solely on religion or ethnicity.

This experience also illustrates that national integration cannot be measured solely by the absence of overt conflict. A truly inclusive environment should provide students with a sense of safety to speak openly and express their identities. Therefore, jokes concerning accents or regional identities should be addressed within a framework of communication awareness so that they do not develop into habitual practices that normalize discriminatory behavior.



Figure 2. Interview with local student from Java

Factors Supporting and Inhibiting National Integration on Campus

The research results indicate that several factors support the realization of national integration on campus. These factors include an attitude of tolerance that has developed naturally in student interactions, civics and character education that instill values of diversity, students' openness to other cultures, student organization activities involving various student groups, and inclusive and non-discriminatory campus policies.

On the other hand, this study also identified several experiences that contrast with the narrative of harmonious interaction described in the previous section. One significant finding was the experience of a student from outside the local area who was laughed at by his classmates because of his accent while delivering a presentation in class. Although such behavior is often perceived as a harmless joke, its impact is far from simple: the student reported becoming more cautious and even reluctant to speak actively in academic forums due to concerns about being ridiculed again.

This experience demonstrates that an apparently inclusive campus atmosphere in public spaces, such as the cafeteria, does not necessarily reflect students' experiences in other settings, such as

classrooms or presentation forums, where subtle forms of discrimination (microaggressions) may emerge. This finding reinforces the argument that social harmony within the university environment is neither uniform nor experienced equally by all students; rather, it is layered. Seemingly fluid interactions in everyday friendships may coexist with more subtle forms of judgment and ridicule based on regional identity.

This condition is consistent with the concept of microaggressions, which emphasizes that discrimination does not always take the form of overt or intentional actions but may also emerge through seemingly harmless comments or jokes that have cumulative effects on the self-confidence and sense of belonging of minority groups within the university environment.

It should be acknowledged that the emphasis on the narrative of harmony in the initial findings of this study was partly influenced by the limitations of the data, which initially relied on a single key informant. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher specifically explored the experiences of supporting and additional informants from different regional backgrounds, namely the key informant from Flores, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), and the supporting informant from Kediri, East Java.

This exploration indicates that experiences of diversity are not always uniform: some informants reported a relatively smooth adaptation process, while others experienced less favorable treatment related to their regional identities. A clear difference emerged between the two informants. The key informant from Flores, NTT, experienced adaptation challenges in the form of subtle discrimination (microaggressions), such as being ridiculed for their accent, which affected their self-confidence. In contrast, the supporting informant, who is a native of Kediri, East Java, reported a very smooth adaptation process without experiencing social difficulties or discriminatory treatment, as they were situated within a majority environment that shared similar cultural characteristics.

By incorporating these more diverse perspectives, this study seeks to provide a more balanced account of both positive and contradictory experiences, rather than focusing solely on narratives of harmony.

Furthermore, differences in culture and communication styles have the potential to lead to misunderstandings if not balanced with mutual understanding. Another factor considered influential is the unwise use of social media, especially when used to spread information containing prejudice or hate speech.

These findings support the opinion of Wahyuni and Basri (2021), who emphasized the importance of an inclusive campus culture in preventing subtle discrimination in the educational environment. Therefore, national integration cannot be built solely through formal policies; it also requires changes in individual attitudes and behaviors in everyday life.

Overall, the research results indicate that national integration on the Nusantara PGRI Kediri campus has been well-functioning through pluralistic practices manifested in student social interactions. However, ongoing efforts are needed to raise awareness of the importance of respecting differences so that every student feels accepted and has equal opportunities to thrive in an inclusive academic environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of observations and interviews, national integration within the Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri environment has generally been functioning well. Diversity in ethnicity, religion, culture, and regional background does not prevent students from interacting harmoniously. Pluralism plays an important role in strengthening integration through mutual respect, openness to differences, and social interaction. However, certain challenges remain, particularly subtle forms of discrimination, such as mocking differences in accents or ways of speaking. Therefore, awareness of the importance of respecting diversity needs to be continuously strengthened within campus life. These findings confirm that national integration in the university environment is dynamic and requires continuous reinforcement rather than being regarded as an already-achieved condition. Based on these findings, this study recommends several concrete programs that could be implemented by the university to support more inclusive interactions, including: (1) a cultural buddy system that pairs new students from outside the local area with senior students to facilitate their social adaptation; (2) cultural sensitivity training for

students and lecturers to increase awareness of subtle forms of discrimination, including mockery based on regional accents or ways of speaking; (3) regular cultural forums or festivals that provide equal opportunities for students to introduce the languages, traditions, and arts of their respective regions; (4) a safe and accessible reporting mechanism for students who experience discriminatory treatment, including microaggressions, both in classrooms and public campus spaces; and (5) strengthening multicultural education and civic education to foster respect for diversity, social awareness, and national integration among students.

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