

# CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: A CRITICAL STUDY BASED ON REPRESENTATION THEORY STUART HALL

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## **Abstract**

*Education in the era of globalization demands a new understanding of how culture and identity are represented in learning spaces. This study aims to analyze cultural communication in education through Stuart Hall's theory, particularly the theory of representation and the encoding/decoding model. The research employs a qualitative method based on a literature review of Hall's works and multicultural education literature. The findings reveal that education functions as a symbolic space where ideologies and identities are constructed. The Indonesian education system still tends to be biased towards the dominant culture and often overlooks minority groups. Therefore, an inclusive and adaptive communication model in education is needed to create culturally equitable learning practices.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Communication; Multicultural Education; Stuart Hall Representation; Educational Transformation.

## **Abstrak**

*Pendidikan di era globalisasi menuntut pemahaman baru terkait bagaimana budaya dan identitas direpresentasikan di ruang belajar. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis komunikasi budaya dalam pendidikan menggunakan teori Stuart Hall, khususnya teori representasi dan model encoding/decoding. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi pustaka, yang menganalisis karya-karya Hall dan literatur terkait pendidikan multikultural. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan berfungsi sebagai ruang simbolik tempat ideologi dan identitas dikonstruksi. Sistem pendidikan Indonesia masih cenderung bias terhadap budaya dominan dan sering kali mengabaikan kelompok minoritas. Oleh karena itu, dibutuhkan model komunikasi pendidikan yang inklusif dan adaptif guna menciptakan praktik pembelajaran yang adil secara kultural.*

**Kata kunci:** Komunikasi Budaya; Pendidikan Multikultural; Representasi Stuart Hall; Transformasi Pendidikan.

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of globalization has brought about major transformations in education systems around the world, including Indonesia. Globalization has not only altered economic and political structures but also created new dynamics in the construction of society's cultural identity. In the educational context, this is evident in the shifting communication paradigm and cultural values conveyed through the teaching and learning process. The role of teachers and educational institutions is no longer merely as agents of knowledge transfer, but rather as key actors in shaping students' cultural awareness. This transformation aligns with the increasing flow of information and digital media, which are reconstructing how students understand themselves and their environment. A study by Jokhanan Kristiyono shows that communication in education today requires a cross-cultural approach that adapts to rapidly changing social contexts (Kristiyono, 2022). Therefore, education needs to be reconsidered from a cultural communication perspective to meet the challenges of the times.

National education faces challenges such as cultural fragmentation, marginalization of localities, and penetration of foreign cultures through the media. This phenomenon creates a dilemma between preserving local cultural values and the demands of global adaptation. The formal education system often fails to accommodate local cultural richness as part of the learning process, creating cultural alienation among students. Hidayat explained that the success of the Sunda Wiwitan indigenous community's education in maintaining its cultural identity is inseparable from a contextual cultural communication approach (Anggraeni & Hidayat, 2020). This demonstrates that education cannot be separated from the cultural representations that exist within society. Open, dialogic, and contextual communication are key to the process of inclusive and sustainable educational transformation. Therefore, communication strategies in education need to be reformulated to take local cultural dynamics into account.

Stuart Hall's approach to cultural communication offers a relevant theoretical framework for addressing educational issues in the global era. Hall's

concept of encoding/decoding provides a framework for examining how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and reproduced in educational contexts. According to Dhona, the communication process in education is not one-way, but rather dialogic and contextual, according to the sociocultural position of each actor (Dhona, 2018). This creates opportunities to strengthen local cultural identities within formal educational spaces. However, this approach has not been systematically applied in Indonesian educational studies, particularly in examining experiences of cultural transformation in schools. The weakness of the predominantly positivistic literature narrows the scope for exploring students' subjective meanings and experiences. Therefore, Stuart Hall's approach is crucial for reformulating the structure of educational communication within a cultural context.

Previous literature studies have focused more on educational transformation from the perspectives of policy, technology, and curriculum, but have not explored the cultural communication aspect in depth. Studies such as those by Sulistyowati & Widaningsih, for example, discuss teacher-parent communication in WhatsApp groups during the pandemic, but have not elaborated on the cultural representations and identity positions formed in these interactions (Sulistyowati et al., 2024). Yet, the digital space is currently a new arena in the process of shaping students' cultural identities. Virtual spaces present new codes that require cultural literacy to avoid gaps in understanding. This gap reinforces the urgency of developing research that emphasizes the dimensions of meaning, symbols, and representation in the educational process. A qualitative approach based on Stuart Hall's theory is a relevant analytical tool to address this need.

Educational transformation needs to be understood as a dynamic, multi-layered, and contextual cultural process. Education can no longer be separated from the process of representation and the production of meaning in a multicultural society. In this context, education becomes an arena for the production of symbols and narratives that shape collective and individual identities. Sholichah & Putri's research shows how cultural carnivals are an effective medium for cultural

education in shaping local identity awareness (Sholichah et al., 2023). This evidence demonstrates that cultural communication in education can transform learning experiences into more meaningful ones. However, for education to truly become an arena for transformation, educators need critical awareness in understanding the role of cultural symbols and representations. Education is not only an academic process, but also a cultural act with ideological consequences.

The main objective of this study is to analyze educational transformation from a cultural communication perspective based on Stuart Hall's approach. The study focuses on how meaning, identity, and social position are constructed through communication practices in educational institutions. This research also seeks to explore the subjective experiences of students and educators in understanding and responding to cultural narratives present in the teaching and learning process. With a qualitative approach, this study is expected to enrich the understanding of education as a symbolic process involving the negotiation of meaning between actors. Furthermore, this study also aims to formulate an inclusive and adaptive educational communication model for cultural diversity. The results of this study are expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of educational communication studies in Indonesia.

The practical contribution of this research lies in strategic recommendations for the development of curricula and learning methods based on cultural communication. The research findings can be used as a reference by educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers to design educational systems that are sensitive to local cultural contexts. This is crucial in building a democratic, equitable learning environment that respects the diversity of student identities. This study also opens up space for exploring relevant communication methods in multicultural and multiethnic education. Cultural engagement in education is not only about content, but also about methods and relationships. Therefore, Stuart Hall's approach paves the way for reformulating education as a reflective and critical sociocultural practice.

The theoretical implications of this research lie in the development of an analytical framework for educational communication based on the theory of representation and decoding of meaning. Stuart Hall's approach provides an understanding that education is not a neutral entity, but rather an ideological arena where the struggle for meaning occurs between the sender and receiver of messages. Cultural representations in the curriculum and teaching methods need to be examined as forms of discourse that shape collective consciousness. This study places education within a complex cultural landscape, which requires sensitivity to social dynamics and power relations. Thus, this research contributes to the development of a critical educational paradigm that strengthens the position of students as active subjects in the process of social transformation.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with library research as the primary design. This approach was chosen because the study aims to analyze and interpret Stuart Hall's thinking in relation to educational transformation through a cultural communication perspective. Library research is highly appropriate for theoretical and reflective studies that emphasize the interpretation of meaning, symbolic representation, and the formation of cultural identity in education (Ashari & Shahhoseini, 2023). This study not only explores the content of academic texts but also unpacks the discourse and ideology contained within them through critical and contextual reading. The primary sources for this research include Stuart Hall's books, Scopus- and SINTA-indexed scientific journals relevant to cultural communication and education issues, and national education policy documents as contextual material. This method selection allows the researcher to develop an in-depth theoretical understanding while simultaneously constructing a new conceptual framework that is more contextual to the realities of education in Indonesia.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic study of written sources such as academic journal articles, theoretical books, and dissertations that

discuss representation theory, encoding/decoding theory, and communication transformation in education. To maintain the validity and credibility of the data, source triangulation techniques were used, namely by comparing findings between sources and peer review of the analytical construct being developed. Validation was also carried out by referring to Stuart Hall's analytical model that has been tested in various previous studies, such as research by Mato who applied Hall's representation framework to analyze cultural narratives in Latin American education (Mato, 2016). The data analysis process was carried out through a content analysis approach by highlighting categories of meaning, symbolic codes, and narrative structures that shape educational discourse. The steps included data reduction, thematic categorization, and conceptual synthesis that were developed iteratively to build a comprehensive understanding.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Relevance of Stuart Hall's Approach in the Transformation of Multicultural Education*

Stuart Hall's approach to representation theory positions education as a crucial arena for the formation of cultural identity through the process of symbolic representation. Representation in education is not a passive reflection of reality, but rather an active construction of meaning by educational institutions through curricula, teacher-student interactions, and cultural symbols in the classroom (Hall, 1997). In Indonesia's multicultural context, this is relevant because education often reproduces the dominance of the majority culture and leaves insufficient room for local or minority cultural narratives (Howarth, 2011).

Hall's encoding/decoding model explains that the communication process is not linear, but rather a negotiation of meaning between the sender (in this case, the institution, the teacher) and the recipient (in this case, the student) (Hall, 1997). In education, the curriculum "encoded" by the state or educational institution carries dominant ideological values, which are then "decoded" in various ways by students according to their cultural backgrounds (Yuting Xie, 2022). This means that education becomes an interactive space that includes resistance, acceptance,

and negotiation of cultural identity.

In many cases, students from cultural minority groups demonstrate oppositional decoding of dominant narratives in education (Yousman, 2013). This indicates a tension between hegemonic representations and students' authentic experiences. Blanchett's study found that students frequently engage in critical decoding of representations of their culture in teaching materials, demonstrating the importance of engaging students in critical discussions of educational narratives (Blanchett et al., 2023).

Interactions between teachers and students reflect complex cultural communication practices. Stuart Hall emphasized that representation is not neutral, but rather power-laden—teachers, as agents of symbolic domination, can unconsciously reproduce cultural stereotypes in the learning process (Campbell, 2016). Therefore, an understanding of encoding and decoding needs to be a foundation for teacher training so they can anticipate decoding responses from students from diverse backgrounds.

The curriculum in Indonesian multicultural education can be understood as a text containing ideological meanings encoded by the state and interpreted differently by the educational community. Texts such as textbooks do not have fixed meanings; their meanings are generated through processes of interpretation within specific social contexts. In education, students from Papua or East Nusa Tenggara, for example, may interpret the meaning of the national curriculum differently from students in Java (Wildt et al., 2024).

A critical approach inspired by Hall allows education to create space for deconstructing dominant representations. Using the lens of representation theory, educators can identify which narratives alienate or marginalize certain groups and design more inclusive learning. For example, in history lessons, narratives of national struggles can be presented from the perspectives of indigenous peoples or women.

Educational transformation is not just structural or curricular change, but also a shift in how education produces cultural meaning. Hall states that every form of communication is an ideological process, including education. Therefore, multicultural education reform must take into account the symbolic and representational dimensions of educational policy and practice (Fornäs, 2024).

In Indonesian society, which comprises hundreds of ethnicities and languages, Stuart Hall's approach provides a critical analytical tool for understanding how cultural meanings are negotiated in educational spaces. Hall not only helps map the dynamics of cultural dominance but also provides a conceptual framework for understanding students' agency in shaping their meanings and identities (Thoman Kuhn, 2022).

The use of encoding/decoding theory in educational practice requires a paradigm shift from information transfer to meaningful dialogue. Teachers must be sensitive to the possibility of different and even oppositional decoding. This means that multicultural education must be based on two-way communication that respects students' cultural interpretations. This approach supports the creation of a democratic and diversity-responsive classroom.

Thus, Stuart Hall's approach to multicultural education leads to a commitment to cultural emancipation—namely, the recognition of diverse representations as a form of resistance to cultural hegemony. Education is not simply a neutral institution, but rather an ideological terrain fraught with conflicting meanings. Educational transformation can only occur if a cultural communication approach like Hall's becomes an integral part of educational policy and pedagogy in Indonesia (Lin, 2022).

### ***The Problem of Cultural Representation in the Indonesian Education System***

Local cultural diversity in Indonesia often doesn't get the proper place in the formulation of the national curriculum. Stuart Hall, through his theory of cultural representation, states that identity is formed through discursive practices and sign systems that apply in society (Hall et al., 2024). Within this framework,



the curriculum is not only an educational instrument but also an ideological space where representations of students' cultural identities are constructed or even dismissed. When the curriculum approach is centralized and based on cognitive-positivistic logic, local values that grow and thrive within communities are often neglected or subordinated.

The push for globalization, which demands uniform standards and adjustments to global competencies, has led national education to follow a neoliberal paradigm. This is evident in the use of instruments such as standardized testing as a benchmark for quality. However, the implication is a fragmentation of student identity, uprooted from their cultural roots. Hall emphasized that cultural identity is fluid and constantly undergoing negotiation. Therefore, the absence of local cultural representation in the curriculum leads to students experiencing cultural dislocation a state of alienation from their cultural realities (Said, 2012).

Education that focuses too much on a positivistic approach, where learning outcomes are reduced to numbers and statistics, has excluded narrative, contextual, and traditional forms of knowledge. As Freire highlighted, this approach creates an epistemological imbalance, where local knowledge is considered inferior or even disowned. This is exacerbated by the limited representation of local content in teaching materials and national assessments, which tend to standardize standards (Freire, 2000).

In Hall's view, representation is not a passive process that simply reflects reality, but a construction of meaning that influences how individuals understand themselves and their environment. Therefore, the inclusion of local culture in the curriculum plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging and respect for one's own community. Education should be a democratic cultural space, not simply a vehicle for conveying universal information that claims to be neutral and objective.

The currents of globalization, which bring the dominance of Western languages, values, and knowledge, have the potential to homogenize cultures through education. Nevertheless, educational institutions in Indonesia must be

able to bridge global demands while maintaining local diversity. A critical multicultural approach is needed so that the curriculum can accommodate diverse identities and promote representational justice in educational practices.

Education based on local culture can increase student engagement and strengthen their social understanding. Integrating local culture into the learning process increases the relevance of the material and deepens students' connection to their socio-cultural context. This aligns with the pedagogical approach of cultural relevance developed by Ladson-Billings, which emphasizes the importance of incorporating students' cultural experiences into the learning process (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The absence of cultural values in the education system is not simply a loss of aesthetic elements, but rather a systematic process of alienating students from their own cultural roots. This phenomenon of cultural alienation has the potential to have long-term impacts, such as weakening social ties and the erosion of the collective memory that underpins the existence of cultural communities.

In the context of a pluralistic society like Indonesia, representative education is a crucial instrument for building an inclusive and cohesive collective identity. Through narratives, symbols, and learning practices that reflect local cultural values, students will feel valued and actively engaged in the educational process. Fair representation not only creates a sense of belonging but also strengthens their capacity to critically participate in the currents of globalization.

Efforts to build education grounded in cultural representation cannot be achieved simply by superficially adding local elements. Fundamental changes are needed in the epistemological paradigms that underlie educational practices themselves. As Hall and Freire emphasized, education must be a reflective, dialogical, and liberating arena, where students can explore and interpret their identities autonomously and contextually.

Thus, transforming education toward cultural justice is an urgent agenda in addressing global dynamics. Education must produce a generation that is not only

globally competent but also deeply rooted in its local identity. Only in this way can education become a means of true empowerment—not simply a tool for reproducing hegemonic knowledge that marginalizes the nation's cultural diversity.

### ***Formulation of Inclusive and Adaptive Educational Communication Models***

Education is not a value-free space, but rather a cultural field where the continuous construction and deconstruction of meaning and identity takes place. Within this framework, Stuart Hall's thinking on representation offers a critical lens through which to see that the learning process is not only concerned with knowledge, but also with symbolic practices that create social reality (Hall, 1980). Representation, according to Hall, is not a passive reflection of the world, but rather part of the mechanisms that shape it. Therefore, education that fails to address this process risks reinforcing hegemony and excluding diversity (Hall et al., 2024).

Hall's important contribution to communication theory was the encoding/decoding model, which rejected the one-way view of communication. He proposed a dialogic communicative approach, allowing meaning to be negotiated by the recipient of the message (Hall, 1980). In the educational context, this requires redefining the relationship between teacher and student—the teacher is not the sole authority of knowledge, and the student is not a passive receptacle. The pedagogical relationship must be open to multiple interpretations: dominant, negotiated, or even oppositional.

This communication model offers a theoretical foundation for developing a culturally inclusive pedagogical approach. Education must accommodate the diverse social, cultural, and identity backgrounds that students bring into the classroom. As Fuchs emphasizes, each student's learning experience is inextricably linked to identity factors such as social class, ethnicity, language, and gender (Fuchs, 2023). Therefore, contextualized education must be able to sensitively interpret the dynamics of these representations.

Rather than emphasizing forced integration or assimilation into the dominant culture, education should be designed in a spirit of intercultural dialogue. Hall's critique of mainstream communication models highlights how structures of domination often exclude minority voices (Hall et al., 2024). Within this framework, a critical multicultural approach is crucial, as it not only accepts differences as fact but also seeks to challenge structural inequalities that discriminate against certain groups (Jacks & Wottrich, 2016).

The implementation of Hall's representation theory in learning encourages educators to recognize their position within the power structure of knowledge. The classroom is no longer a place for the unilateral distribution of material, but rather a field of articulation where students' voices are given space. Dicks emphasized that learning will be more meaningful when connected to students' lived experiences and reflections on their identities (Dicks, 2000).

The concept of decoding opposition in education enables students to develop a critical attitude toward learning content. They are no longer directed to accept learning content as neutral, but instead are invited to examine and deconstruct dominant narratives in textbooks, history, or science that claim to be "universal." This approach aligns with Paulo Freire's view of education as a practice of freedom, where critical consciousness is developed through equal dialogue (Platonov, 2024).

In the context of increasingly digital education, the relevance of Hall's approach is increasingly evident. Online learning materials—whether text, images, or videos—always carry specific ideologies in their representations. Therefore, teachers and students must collaboratively critically analyze digital content, recognizing that decoding can yield new, contextual and liberating meanings (Ni, 2024).

Practically, Hall's thinking requires educators to develop communication strategies that are responsive to cultural diversity. Teaching should avoid single narratives and allow for alternative interpretations. The use of methods such as intercultural case studies, experiential learning, and open discussions are examples

of implementing a participatory and reflective curriculum that addresses the social context of students.

In Hall's view, education is not a closed system determined by one party, but rather a democratic arena where all educational actors have the authority to shape meaning. Teachers are not the sole producers of truth, but rather facilitators of dialogue between the various social narratives that exist within students. Through this approach, students not only acquire cognitive knowledge but also develop a critical awareness of their position and role in society (Hall, 1996).

By adopting Stuart Hall's cultural communication perspective, education can move toward a more equitable, contextual, and transformative model. Representation is no longer understood statically, but rather as an open space for symbolic resistance and the creation of new meanings. Such education not only adapts to global cultural diversity but also empowers learners as active agents in the construction of a more inclusive and meaningful social reality.

## CONCLUSION

This study finds that the Indonesian education system still faces challenges related to cultural representation, where the dominance of majority cultural narratives in the curriculum and teaching materials often overlooks the experiences of local and minority cultures. As a result, students from diverse cultural backgrounds frequently feel alienated during the learning process. The study emphasizes the need for a more inclusive and adaptive education system that recognizes diversity and provides space for the autonomous expression of students' experiences and identities.

Theoretically, this research enriches the field of multicultural education by integrating theories of representation, symbolic communication, and decoding analysis. Education not only serves as a space for knowledge transfer but also plays a role in shaping ideologies and social identities. From a practical perspective, an inclusive educational communication model can be applied in teacher training,

contextual curriculum development, and culturally responsive learning practices that accommodate students' diverse cultural backgrounds. Educational policies should also support decentralized curricula that are based on local wisdom and include diverse cultural representations.

The study suggests further empirical research, such as case studies in local contexts, to enrich the literature on representation in education. Additionally, educators and curriculum developers must design learning processes that respect the symbolic diversity of students and create spaces for dialogue that encourage the articulation of meanings from various cultural perspectives. Education policies should promote a flexible curriculum that accommodates local cultural diversity without undermining national integration.

By integrating theories of representation and symbolic communication, Indonesia can achieve an education system that is not only socially inclusive but also culturally transformative, aligned with the principles of democracy, equality, and diversity in a global society.

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