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NATIONAL INTEGRATION EDUCATION PRACTICES IN POST-CONFLICT REGIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the practice of national integration education in post-conflict Aceh, focusing on the materials, approaches, and challenges faced in its implementation. The Aceh conflict (1975–2004) left deep social, economic, and psychological scars, necessitating educational interventions to foster unity and prevent disintegration. National integration education aims to cultivate values of tolerance, solidarity, and social justice among students, aligning with multicultural and peace education principles while emphasizing national cohesion. Using qualitative methods, including interviews and observations with selected teachers and students, this research explores how national integration education is taught in schools. Findings indicate that while the program has successfully raised students' conflict sensitivity and reinforced peace-building values, challenges remain in pedagogical approaches and institutional support. The study highlights the importance of experiential and contextually relevant learning both inside and outside the classroom to strengthen national integration.The study contributes to the discourse on post-conflict education by advocating for a more structured and inclusive approach to national integration education, ensuring it addresses historical divisions and promotes lasting social harmony. The study offers policy-relevant insights into how national integration can be embedded within school curricula in post-conflict settings and calls for a stronger institutional commitment to peace-oriented pedagogy.

Key Word: Education practice, multicultural education, national integration education, peace education, post-conflict society

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji praktik pendidikan integrasi bangsa di Aceh pascakonflik, dengan fokus pada materi, pendekatan, dan tantangan yang dihadapi dalam implementasinya. Konflik Aceh (1975–2004) meninggalkan luka sosial, ekonomi, dan psikologis yang dalam, sehingga memerlukan intervensi pendidikan untuk menumbuhkan persatuan dan mencegah disintegrasi. Pendidikan integrasi bangsa bertujuan untuk menumbuhkan nilai-nilai toleransi, solidaritas, dan keadilan sosial di kalangan siswa, yang sejalan dengan prinsip-prinsip pendidikan multikultural dan perdamaian sambil menekankan kohesi nasional. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif untuk ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana pendidikan integrasi bangsa diajarkan di sekolah. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun program tersebut telah berhasil meningkatkan kepekaan siswa terhadap konflik dan memperkuat nilai-nilai pembangunan perdamaian, tantangan tetap ada dalam pendekatan pedagogis dan dukungan kelembagaan. Kajian ini menyoroti pentingnya pembelajaran berdasarkan pengalaman dan konteks yang relevan baik di dalam maupun di luar kelas untuk memperkuat integrasi bangsa. Studi ini berkontribusi pada wacana tentang pendidikan pascakonflik dengan mengadvokasi pendekatan yang lebih terstruktur dan inklusif terhadap pendidikan integrasi bangsa serta memastikan pendekatan tersebut mengatasi perpecahan historis dan mendorong keharmonisan sosial yang berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Praktik pendidikan, pendidikan multikultural, pendidikan integrasi nasional, pendidikan perdamaian, masyarakat pascakonflik

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PENDAHULUAN

This article departs from the need for post-conflict social reconstruction in Aceh through education, especially national integration education. The main focus is on the practices of social studies teachers in multicultural societies and the challenges they face. The Aceh conflict which lasted from 1975 to 2004 negatively affected social structures and capital. Also, this contributed to the destruction of life, economy, society, and ethics because people's thoughts and behavior in conflict areas are drastically affected. Even in post-conflict, there are still issues of trauma (Abdullah, 2018; Drexler, 2007; Grayman & Bronnimann, 2018) and disintegration (Wahyudi, 2018) that require resolution.

Post-conflict situations created learning challenges and opportunities, however, education is considered a vital tool for change (Rubin & Cervinkova, 2020). Therefore, schools as educational arenas are essential for intercultural interaction and learning

(Komatsu, 2019). This is fundamental to the development of a peaceful, tolerant, and democratic civic identity including being the key to social reconstruction in making a better future. To change people's mindsets and behavior, schools must collaborate and act in ways that significantly contribute to the peace-building process to prevent the reoccurrence of conflict.

National integration education aims to provide a sense of unity in diversity in students and this concept refers to the national integration presented by experts. According to Birch national integration is "the process of combining historical communities which had a fairly clear sense of separate identity in the past but have been brought together by various economic, social and political developments that takes place at the national level" (H.Birch, 1989). Furthermore, Drake defines national integration as the way people in different parts of a country or of different ethnic, socio-cultural, and economic backgrounds unite and function as one nation and identity (Drake, 2019). According to Hardstone, national integration is "the process of combining culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit and the establishment of a national identity" (Hardstone, 1976).

From the expert explanations on national integration, several important points must be supported by various aspects such as rationalization of social justice to establish a strong national unity (Siregar, 2014), the existence of a unified language (Bazzi, Gaduh, Rothenberg, & Wong, 2019; Brata, 2010), having the spirit of unity and integrity (Drake, 2019), a culture of mutual assistance (Effendi, 2016), and having a spirit of solidarity and tolerance (Rahman, Arsal, & Amalia, 2022). Students will be equipped with various competencies in national integration education, such as realizing social justice, using the language of unity, fostering the spirit of unity and integrity as well as a culture of mutual assistance, and campaigning for the spirit of solidarity and tolerance. The attitude of tolerance which is intended to not only respect diversity but also to care for and maintain it becomes knowledge that must be possessed by every individual (Utomo & Wasino, 2020).

National integration education has the same slices as multicultural education in terms of providing equality competencies. Multicultural education is education in freedom, both in the sense of being free from ethnocentric prejudice and bias and freedom to explore and learn from other cultures and perspectives (Parekh, 2012). Multicultural

education emerges as a binder, liaison, safeguard, and guarantor for the continuity of pluralism. The barriers of difference are a necessity in pluralism. Meanwhile, eliminating barriers of difference is not taken for granted but must be pursued through a multiculturalistic education process, namely education for all, and education that pays serious attention to the development of tolerant attitudes, respect for ethnic, cultural and religious differences, and provides civil rights belong to minority groups (Miftah, 2016; Rosyada, 2014). In multicultural education, it is taught about: respect for individual rights and collective rights, individual and cultural freedoms, justice and minority rights, and tolerance and its boundaries (Kymlicka, 2000).

From the explanation about multicultural education and national integration education, there are differences in character. Multicultural education is oriented towards preparing individuals to live in a globalized world that requires good understanding and communication from individuals to individuals with diverse cultures (Kibui, 2015; Salako, E. T., 2019). Meanwhile, national integration education aims to re-strengthen the unity of different communities caused by conflicts that impact polarization to the disintegration of the nation (Rahman, Ibrahim, Prasetyo, Usman, & Riyani, 2024).

Character development policies in Indonesia are contained in the functions and objectives of national education in Act Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. National education serves to develop and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in educating the nation's life. This is aimed at developing the potential of students to become people that obedient to God Almighty, have a noble character, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, democratic, and responsible. Furthermore, national integration education is part of character education and is included in character education integrated with all subjects in social studies learning. This is explicitly taught in junior-high-school level schools and at the junior high school level, this is taught through integrated social studies lessons for class VIII with the topic of conflict and social integration. Additionally, this is learned partially in class XI sociology subjects with the topic of integration and class X Civics.

Post-conflict situations offer opportunities for better reconstruction by introducing conflict-sensitive and peace-building educational practices. Unfortunately, the post-conflict agenda in Aceh has placed less emphasis on education as a peacemaker (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2014). The Aceh government is more concerned with

implementing Islamic-based education under national standards and has not considered normative and sociological opportunities to develop policies that regulate the implementation of peace education in schools (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2014). Based on the study conducted by Zainal, integrating peace education into subjects is very effective in increasing students' understanding (Zainal, Yunus, & Jalil, 2020).

Education can influence the emergence of conflict because of its interaction with various dimensions. Therefore, this can be used for inclusion-exclusion and recognizing minority cultures, languages, and practices (Barakat et al., 2013). Post-conflict education requires a dialogical and humane approach because it is lacking this pedagogy (Gill & Niens, 2014). Therefore education is an important place to start in promoting a humanizing and transformative agenda. In post-conflict areas, this plays a role in providing cognitive rewards and changing students' values, hence enabling humanization (Taka, 2020).

In post-conflict areas such as Aceh, students' integration education to overcome the unfinished integration problem is very important. Moreover, during the conflict period, the occurrence of social polarization of society based on ethnicity was impacted by a reality building about ethnonationalism (Gayatri, 2016; Schulze, 2006; Sutrisno, 2018). Ethnocentrism increases the perception of threat in ethnic groups, making an individuals' identity very prominence and this will lead to viewing the world as "us" (ethnic within the group) versus "them" (ethnic outgroup), which in turn creates solid ethnocentric norms, that hinders learning about each other (Bizumić, 2012). From experience of conflict in the past, once not addressed immediately, ethnocentrism will contribute greatly to disintegration (Petrović & Pavićević, 2018).

National integration education is required to prevent conflicts and national disintegration by teaching students integration values. Therefore, teachers play an essential role in national integration learning by instilling fundamental values such as respect, respect, tolerance, and togetherness. Additionally, these values are not given theoretically and philosophically and are negotiated in educational practice. Hence, these values must be taught empirically and critically in the practice of social studies learners in schools. This study aims to learn the practice of national integration education by social studies teachers in a post-conflict Aceh multicultural society and answers the following questions:

1. What materials and approaches do social studies teachers use in teaching national integration education?
2. What obstacles were discovered in the practice of learning?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to examine the practices of national integration education in post-conflict Aceh, specifically focusing on teachers' implementation strategies and challenges (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research was conducted as a case study in Langsa, Aceh Province, an area that remained relatively stable during the 1975-2004 conflict period, making it an ideal location to study post-conflict educational practices. Data collection spanned one year (September 2019-2020) and involved 57 participants, including teachers and students aged 12 to 55 years from diverse ethnic and professional backgrounds in Junior and Senior High in Langsa. The study utilized in-depth interviews with social studies teachers to explore their knowledge and teaching approaches, complemented by participatory classroom and community observations to examine real-world implementation of national integration concepts. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, involving data reduction, systematic presentation, and conclusion drawing. This methodological approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how national integration education is practiced in multicultural school environments within a post-conflict setting, while acknowledging the context-specific nature of the findings that limit their generalizability to other regions. The study's design particularly emphasized capturing local dynamics and pedagogical challenges in implementing national integration education after prolonged conflict.

RESULTS

Findings From Teacher Interviews

In this section, the result obtained from teachers in learning national integration education was presented. Figure 1 shows the findings from the teacher's experience in teaching national integration education.

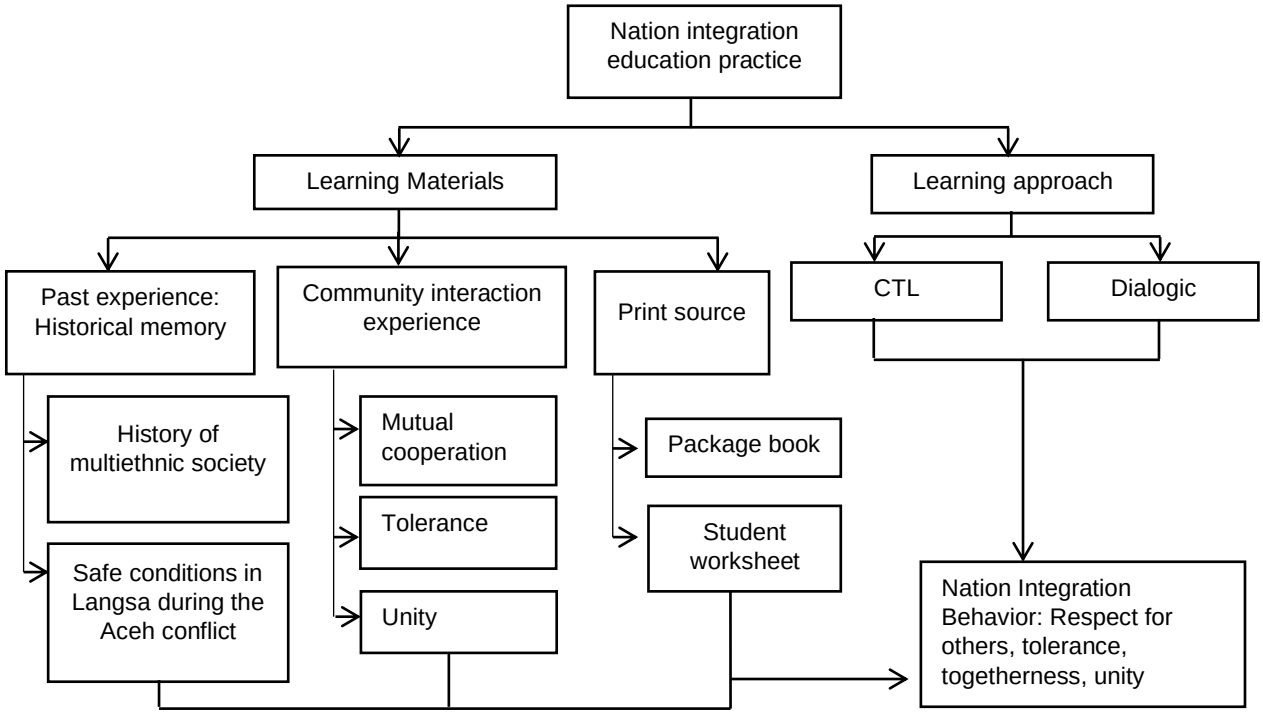

Figure 1. Learning practice of national integration education

Learning Materials for National Integration Education

1. **Past Experience**

The current generation is provided lessons from events in the past (Curnow, 2015; Sternberg, Robert J., Linda Jarvin, 2008). Furthermore, past experiences in Aceh, especially in Langsa, have relevant stories about national integration. Langsa is a city with multicultural and multi-ethnic characteristics, and seven ethnic groups are currently living together peacefully. The seven ethnic groups are Aceh, Javanese, Batak, Minangkabau, Mandailing, Batak, Malay, and Chinese (BPS Kota Langsa, 2019).

According to the interviews, at least two historical events in the surrounding environment can be used as learning resources for national integration education. The first is the historical event of the multicultural society in Langsa in which ethnic groups interact. Langsa had long inter-ethnic relations and migrants began entering in the early 20th century during Dutch colonialism that was followed by the development of infrastructure, transportation, and industrialization of plantations. The Dutch colonialists brought in workers from other regions, such as China and Java, to build ports, railways,

and plantation companies. Workers from the Javanese ethnicity were imported from the island of Java, by ship for months. The long journey bonded the workers, giving rise to the term brother-in-arms or dulur sekapal. Dulur sekapal have a stronger sense of solidarity than siblings because they share the same social ties. After the contract was completed, some of the workers settled around the plantations resulting in the formation of new settlements emerged. Alue Dua, Merbo, Bakaran Batu, Sidodadi, Sidorejo, Karangrejo, and Bukaan or Karang Anyar are some of the new villages that emerged. The mingling of these immigrants led to inter-ethnic relations, both socially and culturally.

Second, the Aceh conflict served as a valuable lesson in learning about national integration in the classroom. Aceh previously experienced a civil war from 1976 to 2005 and the conflict as a whole has resulted in material losses including the loss of many lives. The impact of the Aceh conflict in Langsa was not as significant in other regions, however, it still created trauma for the community. Furthermore, the conflict which lasted from 1976-2005 destroyed social capital and created ethnic polarization in the community, significantly affecting social relations among ethnic groups.

One of the reasons the Aceh conflict had little impact was due to the multiethnic Langsa. For a long time, a multi-ethnic society has established social relations to create a caring relationship. The story of a multi-ethnic society that remained harmonious during the Aceh Conflict should be used as a lesson to maintain peaceful conditions and avoid a similar occurrence.

A learning approach based on local history will challenge students to learn about their place in the structure of society while also encouraging critical thinking and cross-cultural communication (Rubin, 2016). Experience of the Aceh Conflict can provide a sociocultural perspective on learning about national integration in a post-conflict multicultural society. Furthermore, students are taught past experiences that have strengthened integration in Langsa from the perspective of national integration education. The nation's learning integration in the classroom is closely related to the conditions of the surrounding social environment therefore students are enthusiastic in the learning process. Also, the Aceh conflict experience can provide students with a clear picture of a state of conflict and peace.

2. Experience of Social Interaction in Multiethnic Society

The social environment is a rich source of learning for social studies education (Aulia Rahman, Wasino, 2020; Rahman, Riyani, Sahudra, & Akob, 2023). When teachers utilize the potential of the surrounding environment, students gain direct access to various real examples in the learning process. In Langsa, interethnic interactions that include cross-cultural communication, multi-ethnic cooperation, and tolerance practices become very valuable life learning materials for national integration education.

The use of Indonesian as a unifying language among multi-ethnic students is a real example of national integration. Observations show that although Indonesian is dominant in daily interactions, students continue to learn other ethnic languages through cross-cultural friendships. Acehnese students learn Javanese, Chinese students are fluent in Acehnese, while Minang and Mandailing students master Javanese and Acehnese. This multilingual ability strengthens social ties and is proof that language diversity can actually strengthen social relations.

The rewang tradition originating from Javanese culture is a concrete example of social integration. Initially brought by Javanese transmigrants from the Dutch colonial era in the 1910s, this community service tradition has now been adopted by all ethnic groups. This activity not only involves adults, but also children who are invited to learn directly the values of cooperation regardless of ethnic differences. Through rewang, the younger generation inherits the competence of collaboration and the spirit of mutual cooperation as the foundation of national integration.

On the other hand, the typical Acehnese khanduri traditions such as khanduri laot (sea), khanduri blang (rice fields), and khanduri maulid (birth of the Prophet) are also effective media for integration. This thanksgiving ritual teaches togetherness, friendship, mutual assistance, and conflict prevention - core values of national integration.

The practice of tolerance in Langsa further strengthens integration, such as the involvement of priests in the construction of mosques or the distribution of sacrificial meat to non-Muslims during Eid al-Adha. These real examples provide authentic experiences for students about the meaning of unity in diversity, as well as being the most valuable learning materials for national integration education in their social environment.

3. Print Learning Resources

In national integration learning, printed learning resources are an important component used by teachers. The results of interviews and observations show that textbooks and student worksheets (LKS) are the two main forms of printed learning resources utilized. Textbooks function as primary sources because they contain all the basic competencies listed in the national education curriculum. Meanwhile, LKS act as supporting teaching materials that contain more focused learning materials, summaries of important concepts, and instructions for implementing learning tasks that students must complete. These two types of learning resources are designed in an integrated manner, where LKS refers to the basic competencies contained in textbooks, thus creating a complementary learning system. The use of a combination of textbooks and LKS allows the national integration learning process to take place in a more structured and directed manner, while making it easier for students to achieve the set competency targets.

Learning Approach in National Integration Education

Teachers play a crucial role in instilling the character of national integration, which encompasses values such as unity, solidarity, cooperation, and tolerance. They design various strategies to foster these character values so that students develop attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors that support national integration, manifesting in everyday life. Based on the observations and interviews, it was found that students first receive an explanation from teachers about the importance of unity, solidarity, cooperation, and tolerance in maintaining national integration. This is the foundation for classroom learning, particularly because these values are essential for sustaining peace in post-conflict areas like Aceh.

Teachers employ a socio-cultural approach in preparing national integration learning materials. Learning begins by exploring past experiences of integration and disintegration, followed by identifying forms of inter-ethnic interaction within society relevant to national integration. These values are conveyed through the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach, which connects academic content to students' real-life experiences, encouraging them to analyze and synthesize new knowledge based on what they already know (Hudson & Whisler, 2007).

Teachers adapt learning strategies to their students' social environment and characteristics. They foster national integration by facilitating interactive discussions and presenting historical narratives, such as the experience of integration through the history of Langsa—a multi-ethnic and multicultural city that continues to thrive—or the negative impacts of disintegration, including material losses, casualties, psychological trauma, and weakened social cohesion due to the Aceh conflict. This socio-cultural approach brings students closer to the learning material by utilizing their immediate social context as a teaching resource.

After delivering the values of national integration, teachers assess students' understanding by forming working groups comprising members from various ethnic backgrounds. Students demonstrate enthusiasm during discussions, articulate their opinions in Indonesian, and learn to appreciate diversity, practice social responsibility, and foster group cooperation. Through this approach, students are taught the concept of national integration theoretically. They are trained to apply these values in everyday interactions—an essential step in reinforcing peace and reconciliation in post-conflict Aceh.

Challenges in National Integration Learning

The process of learning national integration faces several significant obstacles, especially related to the cognitive and psychological development of students who are still in the development stage. Cognitively, students often have difficulty in understanding the abstract concept of national integration, although they are able to recognize its practical characteristics such as attitudes of helping each other, cooperation, making friends without distinguishing backgrounds, and tolerance.

On the psychological side, emotional instability typical of children's age sometimes triggers interpersonal conflicts, such as teasing each other or small fights in the school environment. However, these conflicts generally do not develop into more serious problems. Teachers play an important role in overcoming these challenges with a wise approach that focuses on the values of national integration. They consistently monitor and guide the development of students' attitudes and skills in actualizing the character of national integration, both in daily interactions and in various activities in the school environment.

This active supervision and continuous guidance approach is considered effective in turning learning challenges into opportunities to strengthen the understanding and practice of national integration values among students.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underline the complexity and potential of national integration education in the post-conflict context of Aceh. One of the main findings is the effectiveness of the contextual approach in learning. The use of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach and the dialogic model in teaching national integration has proven effective because it is based on students' social realities. However, the conceptual challenges faced by students indicate the need to develop more innovative learning methods. The application of a project-based learning model that involves students in direct cross-ethnic activities, for example, can be an alternative to strengthen the understanding of integration values.

In addition, the use of collective memory and local history as teaching materials is a powerful but also risky learning strategy. On the one hand, the use of conflict history encourages reflective learning that is important for building critical awareness. On the other hand, without sensitive management, this approach has the potential to reawaken trauma. Therefore, it is necessary to develop special guidelines for teachers in delivering conflict history material in an appropriate and empathetic manner.

This study also emphasizes the importance of integrating formal and non-formal education in building inclusive nationalism. Learning outside of school, through collaboration with community organizations, religious figures, and former combatants, can be an effective strategy. The student exchange program between regions in Aceh, for example, can be a concrete solution to expand the space for interaction and strengthen solidarity between groups.

At the micro level, the implementation challenges faced by teachers in teaching the concept of national integration reflect the complex reality on the ground. Therefore, teacher capacity development needs to be carried out systematically, including special training on conflict pedagogy and multicultural classroom management to strengthen their readiness in facing existing social dynamics.

Finally, these findings also raise the tension between global and local values in the national integration education curriculum. This raises an important question: how to build a strong national identity without ignoring respect for local cultural diversity? This issue is a strategic discussion material for education policy makers in Aceh in designing more responsive and sustainable policies.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that national integration education in post-conflict Aceh plays a crucial role in building peace and social reconciliation. Learning approaches based on real experiences and inter-ethnic dialogue have proven effective in instilling national integration values, although there are still gaps in conceptual understanding among students. This condition indicates the need for innovation in more creative and participatory learning methods. In addition, the use of historical memory of the conflict as learning material provides mixed results; on the one hand, it can build critical awareness, but on the other hand, it requires a sensitive approach to avoid retraumatization, so that it is necessary to develop special guidelines for teachers in delivering such sensitive material.

National integration education must also be expanded beyond formal classrooms through collaboration with various community stakeholders. An integrated approach involving schools, families, and communities has proven more effective in creating natural interaction spaces between groups. However, implementing this education still faces various challenges, ranging from limited teacher capacity, a lack of contextual teaching materials, and subtle resistance from some parties. These challenges require comprehensive solutions through sustainable teacher capacity development programs and strengthening education support systems.

In the future, national integration education in Aceh needs to develop a curriculum model that can balance global and local values and is equipped with a comprehensive evaluation system. Further in-depth and longitudinal research is also needed to continue monitoring this program's development and effectiveness. Overall, national integration education in post-conflict Aceh must be seen as a long-term investment in sustainable peace-building. This process requires a strong commitment from all stakeholders, a holistic and contextual approach, and patience in undergoing a complex process of social

transformation. The findings of this study are expected to be an empirical basis for developing more effective education policies and practices in the future.

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