

## Multicultural Education and Social Resilience in Finland's Diverse Society

Gunvor Hallström<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland  
Correspondence; [hallstrm.gum@helsinki.fi](mailto:hallstrm.gum@helsinki.fi)

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### Abstract

Multicultural education has become increasingly important in contemporary societies characterized by growing cultural diversity, migration, and globalization. Finland, traditionally perceived as a relatively homogeneous society, has experienced significant demographic changes that have transformed its educational and social landscape. This study examines the role of multicultural education in strengthening social resilience within Finland's diverse society. Using a systematic literature review approach, the study synthesizes contemporary research on multicultural education, social resilience, intercultural competence, and inclusive education. The findings indicate that multicultural education contributes significantly to social resilience by promoting cultural understanding, social cohesion, inclusivity, and adaptive capacities among individuals and communities. Furthermore, multicultural educational practices encourage empathy, democratic participation, and intercultural dialogue, which are essential for addressing social challenges arising from increasing diversity. The study proposes a conceptual framework illustrating how multicultural education enhances social resilience through the development of intercultural competence and inclusive participation. The findings provide theoretical and practical insights for policymakers, educators, and institutions seeking to foster resilient and inclusive societies capable of adapting to social change while maintaining cohesion and collective well-being.

### Keywords

Multicultural Education, Social Resilience, Intercultural Competence, Social Cohesion, Inclusive Education, Finland



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## INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has witnessed profound social, cultural, economic, and technological transformations that have reshaped societies across the globe. Globalization, international migration, technological advancement, and increasing

human mobility have contributed to unprecedented levels of cultural diversity within nations. Educational systems are increasingly required to respond to these changes by preparing individuals to participate effectively in multicultural environments while promoting social cohesion and inclusive development. Consequently, multicultural education has emerged as a critical educational approach for addressing the opportunities and challenges associated with cultural diversity. Beyond fostering intercultural understanding, multicultural education has become increasingly relevant to the development of social resilience, a concept that emphasizes the capacity of individuals and communities to adapt positively to social change, uncertainty, and complexity.

Social resilience has gained significant attention in contemporary social and educational research because societies are increasingly confronted with challenges such as migration, social polarization, economic inequality, cultural tensions, and global crises. Social resilience refers to the ability of communities, institutions, and individuals to respond effectively to disruptions, maintain social cohesion, and adapt constructively to changing circumstances. According to Hall and Lamont (2013), socially resilient societies possess strong social relationships, trust, inclusion, and collective capacities that enable them to withstand and recover from social challenges. Educational institutions play an important role in fostering these capacities because schools and universities serve as key sites where individuals develop knowledge, values, skills, and social relationships that influence broader societal outcomes.

Multicultural education provides an important foundation for strengthening social resilience because it promotes inclusive learning environments that recognize, respect, and value cultural diversity. Banks (2019) defines multicultural education as an educational reform movement aimed at creating equitable learning opportunities for all students while promoting democratic values, cultural understanding, and social justice. Rather than treating diversity as a challenge to be managed, multicultural education views cultural differences as valuable resources that enrich learning and strengthen communities. Through exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences, students develop intercultural competencies that support constructive engagement with diversity and contribute to social cohesion.

Finland offers a particularly significant context for examining the relationship between multicultural education and social resilience. Historically characterized by relatively low levels of cultural diversity, Finland has experienced notable demographic changes over recent decades due to international migration, refugee

resettlement, labor mobility, and globalization. According to Statistics Finland and the Finnish National Agency for Education, the proportion of residents with foreign backgrounds has increased steadily, contributing to greater linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity within educational institutions and communities. These demographic shifts have created new opportunities for intercultural exchange while simultaneously generating challenges related to inclusion, integration, and social cohesion.

The Finnish educational system has long been recognized internationally for its commitment to educational equity, quality, and social inclusion. Educational policies emphasize equal opportunities, learner well-being, democratic participation, and support for diverse learners. Sahlberg (2021) argues that Finland's educational success is closely linked to its commitment to equity and social justice principles. As cultural diversity increases, these principles have become increasingly important in guiding educational responses to multiculturalism. Finnish schools are expected not only to support academic achievement but also to foster inclusive learning environments that encourage mutual respect, intercultural understanding, and social participation among students from diverse backgrounds.

Research suggests that multicultural education contributes significantly to social cohesion, one of the key dimensions of social resilience. Social cohesion refers to the strength of social relationships, trust, and solidarity within communities. OECD (2023) emphasizes that socially cohesive societies are characterized by high levels of inclusion, participation, and mutual trust among diverse groups. Educational institutions contribute to social cohesion by creating opportunities for positive interactions among students from different cultural backgrounds. Through collaborative learning, intercultural dialogue, and inclusive pedagogical practices, multicultural education helps reduce prejudice, challenge stereotypes, and strengthen social relationships. These outcomes are particularly important in diverse societies where cultural differences may otherwise contribute to social fragmentation or exclusion.

Intercultural competence represents another important mechanism through which multicultural education supports social resilience. Deardorff (2020) defines intercultural competence as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural boundaries while demonstrating respect, empathy, openness, and adaptability. Intercultural competence enables individuals to navigate cultural differences constructively and participate meaningfully within diverse social environments. In educational contexts, the development of intercultural competence

encourages learners to appreciate multiple perspectives, engage in critical reflection, and collaborate effectively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. These capacities strengthen both individual adaptability and collective resilience in multicultural societies.

The increasing importance of social resilience has also been highlighted by recent global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions, migration crises, and growing social polarization. Such challenges have demonstrated that resilient societies depend not only on economic resources or institutional capacity but also on strong social relationships and inclusive communities. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes that education plays a critical role in fostering resilience by equipping individuals with the skills and values necessary to adapt to uncertainty, cooperate with others, and contribute positively to society. Multicultural education aligns closely with these objectives because it promotes empathy, collaboration, critical thinking, and democratic participation.

Within the Finnish context, multicultural education is increasingly connected to broader discussions concerning citizenship, democracy, and social inclusion. Educational curricula emphasize participation, equality, human rights, and cultural diversity as fundamental principles guiding teaching and learning. These priorities reflect recognition that educational institutions have responsibilities extending beyond academic instruction. Schools and universities are expected to prepare learners for active participation in diverse democratic societies while supporting social integration and collective well-being. Consequently, multicultural education functions not only as an educational strategy but also as a mechanism for strengthening societal resilience and fostering inclusive communities.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of multicultural education and social resilience, existing research often examines these concepts separately. Many studies focus on multicultural education as a means of promoting diversity and inclusion, while others investigate social resilience in relation to community development, public policy, or crisis response. Relatively limited research has explored how multicultural educational practices contribute specifically to the development of social resilience within increasingly diverse societies. This gap is particularly evident within the Finnish context, where rapid demographic changes have generated new educational challenges and opportunities. Understanding the relationship between multicultural education and social resilience is therefore important for both theoretical development and educational practice.

Furthermore, the mechanisms through which multicultural education contributes to social resilience remain insufficiently conceptualized. While previous research has identified outcomes such as intercultural competence, social cohesion, and inclusion, less attention has been given to explaining how these outcomes interact to strengthen resilience at both individual and societal levels. A more comprehensive understanding of these relationships can inform educational policy and support the development of effective strategies for responding to contemporary social challenges.

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the role of multicultural education in strengthening social resilience within Finland's diverse society. Through a systematic review of contemporary literature, the study explores how multicultural educational practices contribute to intercultural competence, social cohesion, inclusion, and adaptive capacity. The research further proposes a conceptual framework explaining the pathways through which multicultural education enhances social resilience. By integrating insights from multicultural education, intercultural competence, and resilience literature, the study contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the role of education in fostering inclusive, adaptive, and resilient societies in an era of increasing diversity and social change.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative research design using a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to investigate the relationship between multicultural education and social resilience within Finland's increasingly diverse society. The systematic literature review method was selected because it provides a rigorous and transparent process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing scholarly knowledge. According to Snyder (2019), systematic literature reviews enable researchers to generate comprehensive conceptual understandings while minimizing subjectivity through clearly defined procedures. Given the conceptual nature of this study and its objective of developing a theoretical framework, the SLR approach was considered particularly appropriate.

The study was guided by an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that social phenomena are constructed through human experiences, interactions, and meanings. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that interpretivist research seeks to understand how individuals and institutions interpret social realities within specific cultural and contextual environments. Within this perspective, multicultural education and social resilience were understood as interconnected social constructs shaped by educational practices, cultural interactions, institutional structures, and community experiences.

The interpretivist approach enabled a deeper exploration of how educational processes contribute to resilience-building within culturally diverse societies.

The literature search was conducted using internationally recognized academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they provide extensive coverage of educational research, social resilience studies, multicultural education, and intercultural competence literature. To ensure relevance and currency, the review focused primarily on publications published between 2015 and 2025. Search terms included combinations of keywords such as “multicultural education,” “social resilience,” “intercultural competence,” “social cohesion,” “inclusive education,” “cultural diversity,” “community resilience,” “educational inclusion,” and “Finland.” Multiple search combinations were employed to maximize coverage and reduce the likelihood of excluding relevant studies (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The inclusion criteria required that publications be peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, book chapters, conference proceedings, or policy reports addressing multicultural education, social resilience, intercultural competence, inclusion, or related themes. Priority was given to studies indexed in Scopus and other reputable databases. Publications unrelated to the study objectives, duplicate records, editorials, opinion articles, and non-academic sources were excluded. This selection process ensured the academic rigor and credibility of the reviewed literature (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2021). Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). The selected literature was read repeatedly to identify recurring concepts, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings. Relevant information was coded and organized into thematic categories associated with multicultural educational practices, intercultural competence, social inclusion, community engagement, adaptive capacity, and social resilience. Through iterative analysis, broader conceptual themes emerged that explained how multicultural education contributes to resilience-building within diverse societies.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was employed by integrating evidence from theoretical literature, empirical studies, and international policy documents. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize that triangulation strengthens qualitative research by enabling validation across multiple sources and perspectives. The analysis was further informed by established theoretical frameworks, including Banks' Multicultural Education Theory,

Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Model, UNESCO's Inclusive Education Framework, and resilience theories proposed by Hall and Lamont. These frameworks provided conceptual guidance for interpreting relationships among multicultural education, intercultural competence, and social resilience.

The final stage involved synthesizing the identified themes into a conceptual model termed the Multicultural Education–Social Resilience Integration Framework (MESRIF). The framework proposes that multicultural education enhances intercultural competence, inclusive participation, and social cohesion, which subsequently strengthen adaptive capacity and social resilience. Through this synthesis, the study offers a comprehensive theoretical explanation of how educational institutions in Finland can contribute to building resilient and inclusive societies capable of responding effectively to social diversity and contemporary challenges.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicate that multicultural education plays a fundamental role in strengthening social resilience within Finland's increasingly diverse society. The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that multicultural education extends beyond the promotion of cultural awareness and serves as an essential mechanism for fostering social cohesion, inclusion, adaptability, and collective well-being. As Finland continues to experience demographic transformation driven by migration, globalization, and international mobility, educational institutions have become central spaces where individuals learn to navigate cultural diversity and develop the competencies necessary for maintaining resilient communities. The analysis suggests that multicultural education contributes to resilience by equipping learners with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to respond constructively to social change while preserving social harmony and democratic values.

One of the most significant findings is that multicultural education strengthens social cohesion, which represents a core component of social resilience. Social cohesion refers to the quality of relationships, trust, solidarity, and cooperation among members of society. According to Banks (2019), multicultural education promotes inclusive educational environments where cultural differences are recognized as assets rather than obstacles. The reviewed studies indicate that when students engage with diverse cultural perspectives and experiences, they become more capable of understanding and respecting individuals from different backgrounds. This process contributes to the development of mutual trust and

positive social relationships, which are essential foundations of resilient communities. In Finland, where schools increasingly serve culturally diverse student populations, multicultural educational practices facilitate interactions that strengthen social bonds and reduce the risk of social fragmentation.

The findings further reveal that multicultural education promotes social inclusion by ensuring that learners from diverse cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds experience equal opportunities for participation and recognition. Inclusion is a crucial element of social resilience because marginalized individuals and groups often face greater vulnerability during periods of social change or crisis. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes that inclusive education contributes to societal resilience by reducing inequalities and enhancing participation among diverse populations. The literature reviewed demonstrates that multicultural educational policies and practices encourage equitable access to learning opportunities while fostering a sense of belonging among students. In the Finnish educational context, inclusive approaches that recognize cultural diversity and support diverse learning needs contribute significantly to creating environments where all learners feel valued and respected. This sense of belonging enhances students' social engagement and strengthens their commitment to collective well-being.

Another important finding concerns the role of multicultural education in fostering intercultural competence. Intercultural competence emerged as a critical mechanism through which multicultural education contributes to social resilience. Deardorff (2020) defines intercultural competence as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural differences while demonstrating empathy, respect, openness, and adaptability. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that multicultural educational experiences encourage learners to develop these competencies through exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, collaborative learning activities, and intercultural dialogue. In Finland's increasingly multicultural environment, intercultural competence enables individuals to navigate diversity constructively and respond positively to social challenges arising from cultural differences. Consequently, multicultural education contributes to resilience by preparing individuals to engage productively within diverse communities.

The findings also suggest that multicultural education plays an important role in reducing prejudice, discrimination, and social exclusion. Diverse societies may experience tensions resulting from cultural misunderstandings, stereotypes, or unequal access to social resources. According to Pettigrew and Tropp (2011), positive intercultural interactions can significantly reduce prejudice and improve intergroup



relations. The literature reviewed indicates that multicultural educational practices create opportunities for meaningful contact among students from different cultural backgrounds. Through collaborative learning, intercultural discussions, and shared educational experiences, students develop greater empathy and understanding of others' perspectives. These outcomes reduce the likelihood of social divisions and contribute to the development of more inclusive and cohesive communities. Such capacities are particularly valuable in promoting resilience because societies characterized by strong intergroup relationships are generally better equipped to address collective challenges.

The analysis further demonstrates that multicultural education enhances adaptive capacity, another key dimension of social resilience. Adaptive capacity refers to the ability of individuals and communities to adjust effectively to changing social, cultural, and environmental conditions. Hall and Lamont (2013) argue that resilience depends not only on resistance to challenges but also on the capacity to learn, adapt, and transform in response to change. The reviewed literature suggests that multicultural education encourages flexibility, critical thinking, and openness to new perspectives. By engaging with diverse worldviews and experiences, learners develop the cognitive and social skills necessary for adapting to unfamiliar situations and responding constructively to complexity. In Finland, where social and cultural diversity continues to increase, these adaptive capacities are essential for maintaining social stability and collective well-being.

The findings also highlight the importance of democratic participation as a pathway through which multicultural education strengthens resilience. Democratic participation involves active engagement in social, civic, and community activities that contribute to collective decision-making and problem-solving. According to Veugelers (2019), multicultural education supports democratic citizenship by encouraging learners to respect diversity, engage in dialogue, and participate responsibly in society. The literature indicates that multicultural educational environments provide opportunities for students to practice democratic values through collaboration, discussion, and shared responsibility. These experiences foster civic engagement and strengthen social networks, both of which contribute to resilience by enhancing communities' capacity to respond collectively to challenges and opportunities.

A particularly significant finding of this study is the identification of the Inclusive Resilience Development Process (IRDP) as a novel conceptual mechanism linking multicultural education and social resilience. The reviewed literature

suggests that multicultural education does not influence resilience directly. Instead, educational experiences first foster intercultural competence, inclusive participation, empathy, and collaborative engagement. Through these processes, individuals develop social capacities that enable them to contribute positively to diverse communities. The Inclusive Resilience Development Process therefore explains how educational practices are transformed into broader societal outcomes. This conceptual contribution extends existing research by providing a clearer understanding of the mechanisms through which multicultural education enhances resilience in diverse societies.

The analysis further reveals that educational institutions play a strategic role in facilitating resilience development. Schools and universities serve as social environments where learners acquire not only academic knowledge but also social competencies, values, and relationships. Sahlberg (2021) argues that Finland's educational success is closely associated with its commitment to equity, trust, and learner well-being. The reviewed studies indicate that institutions implementing inclusive policies, culturally responsive pedagogy, and diversity-supportive practices are better positioned to promote resilience among students and communities. Educational leadership, teacher competence, and supportive institutional cultures therefore represent important factors influencing the effectiveness of multicultural education.

The findings additionally suggest that community engagement strengthens the relationship between multicultural education and social resilience. Educational institutions that collaborate with families, local organizations, and community stakeholders create broader networks of support that reinforce inclusive values and social participation. Such partnerships provide learners with opportunities to apply intercultural competencies in real-world settings and contribute to community development. These experiences strengthen social capital and collective efficacy, both of which are widely recognized as important components of resilience.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges remain. The literature identifies ongoing concerns related to educational inequalities, social polarization, discrimination, and disparities in access to resources. Furthermore, increasing cultural diversity may generate tensions if educational systems fail to provide adequate support for inclusion and intercultural learning. Scholars emphasize the importance of sustained policy commitment, teacher professional development, and institutional innovation to ensure that multicultural education effectively contributes

to resilience-building. Without comprehensive support structures, the potential benefits of multicultural education may not be fully realized.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that multicultural education functions as a powerful driver of social resilience in Finland's diverse society. Through the promotion of inclusion, intercultural competence, social cohesion, democratic participation, and adaptive capacity, multicultural education strengthens the ability of individuals and communities to respond positively to social change. The proposed Inclusive Resilience Development Process offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how educational experiences contribute to resilience and provides a foundation for future research and policy development.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the contribution of multicultural education to the development of social resilience within Finland's increasingly diverse society. The findings demonstrate that multicultural education plays a significant role in fostering inclusive, cohesive, and adaptive communities capable of responding effectively to contemporary social challenges. As demographic diversity continues to expand due to migration, globalization, and international mobility, educational institutions have become essential spaces for cultivating the competencies and values necessary for sustaining resilient societies. The study found that multicultural education contributes to social resilience by promoting social cohesion, inclusion, intercultural competence, democratic participation, and adaptive capacity. Through exposure to diverse cultural perspectives and inclusive educational practices, learners develop greater understanding, empathy, and respect for others. These outcomes strengthen interpersonal relationships and foster trust among diverse groups, which are fundamental components of resilient communities. Furthermore, multicultural education enhances learners' ability to navigate cultural differences constructively, thereby reducing prejudice and supporting positive intercultural interactions.

Intercultural competence emerged as a particularly important mechanism linking multicultural education to resilience outcomes. Competencies such as cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, and effective communication enable individuals to engage productively within diverse environments and respond positively to social change. The study also highlighted the importance of inclusive participation and community engagement in translating educational experiences into broader societal benefits. Educational institutions that promote collaborative learning, democratic engagement, and community partnerships create opportunities for learners to develop practical skills that support collective resilience.

A major contribution of this research is the conceptualization of the Inclusive Resilience Development Process, which explains how multicultural educational experiences are transformed into social resilience outcomes. The framework suggests that resilience is not an automatic consequence of diversity but rather the result of intentional educational processes that foster inclusion, intercultural competence, and active participation. By identifying this mediating mechanism, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between multicultural education and social resilience. In conclusion, multicultural education represents a strategic approach for strengthening resilience in diverse societies. Through its emphasis on inclusion, equity, intercultural understanding, and democratic participation, multicultural education equips individuals and communities with the capacities necessary to adapt to change while maintaining social cohesion and collective well-being. Future research should empirically examine the proposed framework and explore its applicability across different educational and cultural contexts.

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