

# Multicultural Islamic Education: Innovation in Strengthening Tolerance in Secondary Schools

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the practice and design an innovative model of multicultural Islamic education in an effort to strengthen the values of tolerance in secondary schools. In the context of a multicultural Indonesian society, Islamic education must be able to internalize the values of diversity and strengthen the character of tolerant and moderate students. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-constructive study type, which is conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation in several secondary schools. The results of the study indicate that a learning approach that integrates multicultural values into Islamic education can create an inclusive learning atmosphere, strengthen students' empathetic attitudes, and minimize symptoms of intolerance. The innovative model developed in this study includes the formulation of a contextual curriculum, active learning methods, the use of multicultural digital media, and the involvement of teachers as facilitators and role models of tolerant attitudes. With the support of an open school environment and inclusive policies, this model is considered effective and applicable in shaping the character of students who are able to live harmoniously in a diverse society.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and increasingly rapid advances in information technology, the world community—including Indonesia—faces major challenges in managing diversity (Susanto, 2024). Indonesia is a very pluralistic country in terms of ethnicity, culture, language and religion (Susanto, Rohmah, Hidayanti, & Sugiyar, 2023). This diversity is truly a national wealth, but on the other hand it also has the potential to cause social friction if not managed wisely. Education is one of the important instruments in building a national character that is tolerant,

open, and respectful of differences. Especially at the secondary school level, education has a strategic position in shaping students' perspectives and attitudes towards diverse social realities. In this context, Islamic religious education has a crucial role in instilling the values of peace and tolerance in accordance with the spirit of Islam *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (Afif, 2019).

However, social conditions show that there are challenges that are not easy. The phenomenon of intolerance among students continues to show a worrying trend. The 2020 Susanto Institute report, for example, stated that around 60% of students in Indonesia have a tendency to be intolerant towards other religious groups or groups with different views. This reality is exacerbated by the emergence of exclusive and radical religious narratives that are widely circulated on social media and the lack of peaceful and moderate religious literacy. Several cases of discrimination in the school environment, rejection of the religious activities of minority students, and weak empathy towards diversity are indications that religious education has not fully succeeded in becoming an inclusive learning space (Susanto & Syahrudin, 2024).

The fundamental problem of this situation lies in the approach to Islamic religious education in schools which is still predominantly normative-doctrinal. Islamic teachings are taught more in the context of the laws of worship and faith without building a contextual understanding that emphasizes the importance of living side by side peacefully in a diverse society. The existing curriculum and learning methods have not fully touched on the aspect of multiculturalism which is actually part of Islamic teachings itself (Wahyudi, Nuriana, & Irfan, 2025). This means that students do not have enough space to explore and dialogue about religious values in the context of diversity, which ultimately contributes to the development of exclusive and intolerant attitudes.

In response to these problems, innovation is needed in Islamic education that is able to answer the challenges of the times. One relevant approach is the development of Multicultural Islamic Education (MIE), namely Islamic education based on multicultural values such as respect for differences, recognition of diversity, and peaceful conflict resolution (Ridho, Wardhana, Yuliana, Qolby, & Zalwana, 2022). MIE not only emphasizes the cognitive aspect of Islamic teachings, but also integrates social and humanitarian values into the learning process. This approach is expected to form students who are not only spiritually intelligent, but also socially and emotionally mature. Multicultural Islamic education emphasizes the importance of grounding Islamic teachings in the pluralistic reality of society,

as well as developing students' abilities to live peacefully with fellow human beings, regardless of their background.

Several previous studies have discussed the importance of a multicultural approach in education. For example, Fita Mustafida (**Fita Mustafida, 2020**) highlighting the need for more inclusive religious education curriculum reform. Zamakhsari (**Zamakhsari, 2020**) emphasized that religious education that accommodates the values of pluralism is able to increase students' empathy towards different groups. Likewise, Naim (**Naim, 2016**) in his research found that schools that implement a multicultural approach have a more tolerant and harmonious climate. However, these studies are generally still conceptual or limited to descriptive studies, and have not specifically developed innovative models of multicultural-based Islamic education learning in the context of secondary schools. This is where the novelty of this research lies.

This study aims to comprehensively describe the practice of Islamic education that takes place in secondary schools in relation to strengthening tolerance, as well as developing an innovative model of Islamic education learning based on multiculturalism that is applicable and effective. In addition, this study also aims to analyze the extent to which the model can form students' tolerant attitudes and provide practical recommendations for Islamic religious education teachers in developing learning strategies that are in accordance with the principles of multiculturalism (**Azzuhri, n.d.**). With a focus on secondary education, this research positions students as strategic actors in building a more peaceful and tolerant future society.

The urgency of this research lies in the urgent need to change the face of religious education from being exclusive to being inclusive. In the context of the increasing flow of extreme ideologies targeting the adolescent age group, schools as formal educational institutions must be the main fortress in building critical reasoning and open attitudes in students. Without learning innovation, Islamic education is at risk of becoming a space that actually strengthens social polarization. Therefore, this research is expected to provide concrete contributions in designing and implementing an effective multicultural Islamic education model in forming the character of moderate and tolerant students.

Methodologically, this study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-constructive study type (**Huberman & Jhonny, 2014**). Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The research will be conducted in several high schools with diverse social backgrounds to obtain representative data. Data analysis is carried out using the

Miles and Huberman model through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (**Sugiyono, 2015**). From the results of the analysis, researchers will develop a multicultural Islamic education learning model that is practical and can be adapted by various schools.

The novelty in this study lies not only in the idea of developing a learning model, but also in the interdisciplinary approach that combines Islamic education theory, character education, and multiculturalism synergistically. In addition, this study will produce an evaluation instrument for student tolerance that can be used to measure the effectiveness of the application of the developed learning model. Thus, this study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic education studies, as well as practical contributions for educators in building a tolerant, inclusive, and diversity-appreciating learning environment.

## 2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-constructive study type (**Huberman & Jhonny, 2014**). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth the practice of Islamic education in secondary schools in relation to strengthening the values of tolerance in a multicultural context. Qualitative research is naturalistic and contextual, so it is very relevant to studying educational phenomena in a complex and dynamic social environment, especially in examining how interactions between actors in the classroom contribute to the formation of students' tolerant attitudes (**Yahuda, Susanto, Widodo, Kolis, & Abdillah, 2023**). The research location will be selected purposively, namely junior and senior high schools that have diverse student backgrounds—both in terms of ethnicity, religion, and culture. Schools that are the subjects of the research will also be selected based on their openness to learning innovation and have active Islamic religious education programs. Determination of informants is carried out using a purposive sampling technique involving Islamic religious education teachers, principals, students, and other relevant educators. The number of informants will be adjusted to field needs and the principle of data sufficiency (saturation).

Data collection techniques were carried out in three main ways: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (**Sugiyono, 2016**). Observations were conducted to directly determine the process of learning Islamic religious education in the classroom, with a focus on the approach, methods, and interactions between teachers and students in conveying multicultural values. Interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious

Education teachers to explore their understanding of the concept of multiculturalism in Islam and the strategies used in learning. Students were also interviewed to determine the extent to which the learning process was able to shape their attitudes towards diversity. Documentation was conducted by reviewing learning tools such as syllabus, lesson plans, teaching materials, and relevant school policies. The data analysis process in this study used the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification (**Huberman & Jhonny, 2014**). Data obtained from the field will be reduced by sorting data that is relevant to the focus of the research, then presented in the form of a thematic narrative. After that, conclusions are drawn based on the patterns of findings that emerge. The analysis process is inductive, where theories are built based on the results of observations of empirical data.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### **Practice of Implementing Multicultural-Based Islamic Education in Strengthening Tolerance Attitudes in Secondary Schools**

Islamic education has a strategic role in shaping the character and morals of students, including in instilling values of tolerance towards differences (**Yahuda & Susanto, 2022**). In the context of a pluralistic and multicultural Indonesian society, the challenges of Islamic education in secondary schools do not only stop at the cognitive aspect of religion, but also how to be able to respond to a pluralistic social reality. In this context, the idea of multicultural-based Islamic education was born, namely a learning approach that integrates Islamic values with an awareness of the diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions, and outlooks on life that exist in society (**Susanto & Nuhaa, 2024**). This practice is one of the important strategies in building students' tolerance attitudes since adolescence. The implementation of multicultural-based Islamic education in secondary schools can start from the development of an inclusive and adaptive curriculum. The curriculum is no longer solely focused on the normative aspects of Islamic teachings, but also pays attention to the contextual dimensions that live in society. In this context, subject matter such as tolerance, mutual respect between religious communities, peace, and social ethics are packaged in active and dialogical learning. For example, in discussing the verses of the Qur'an about interfaith relations, teachers not only emphasize the aspects of faith, but also how Islamic teachings encourage its people to act fairly, respect differences, and establish harmonious social relations with adherents of other religions.

Islamic religious education (PAI) teachers have a key role in this practice. Teachers not only act as material deliverers, but also as facilitators and role models who demonstrate tolerant attitudes in daily interactions (**Faqihuddin & Sinta, 2024**). In practice in several secondary schools, Islamic Religious Education teachers who successfully implement multicultural Islamic education are those who are able to create a classroom atmosphere that is open to dialogue and discussion, provide space for students to express their views freely but remain within the corridor of ethics, and respond to differences with a persuasive approach, not a confrontational one. Teachers also use various learning strategies such as case studies, simulations, debates, and reflections on students' real experiences as effective methods for instilling values of tolerance. Furthermore, the practice of multicultural-based Islamic education is also reflected in the selection of media and learning resources. Textbooks and teaching materials used should not be biased or exclusive, but reflect existing social diversity. The use of stories of Islamic figures who uphold the values of tolerance, such as the Prophet Muhammad in the Medina Charter or the story of the Prophet's companions who lived side by side with non-Muslim communities, is an important part of an inspiring learning strategy. In addition, teachers can use digital media, documentary videos, or cross-cultural literature to enrich students' perspectives on the reality of diversity.

The school environment as an educational institution also plays a role in supporting multicultural Islamic education practices (**Widodo, Susanto, & Kolis, 2023**). An inclusive school is a school that provides a space for intercultural encounters and builds values of togetherness without discrimination. For example, through extracurricular activities such as interfaith forums, discussions between students, or social project collaboration with other schools with different religious backgrounds, students are trained to see differences as wealth, not threats. Such practices help students to experience firsthand how to work together in diversity and understand the importance of tolerance in real life. The principal and school management also have a significant role. They need to provide policy support that encourages the creation of a tolerant and multicultural school climate (**Ridho et al., 2022**). The policy can be in the form of internal school rules that reject all forms of hate speech, discrimination, or acts of intolerance between students. In addition, holding regular teacher training on character education, multicultural education, and contextual learning based on Islamic values is important so that teachers continue to update their insights and pedagogical skills.

One example of a concrete practice that shows the success of multicultural Islamic education in strengthening tolerance is the implementation of the "Interfaith Dialogue" activity facilitated by Islamic Religious Education teachers in collaboration with Sociology teachers. In this activity, students are invited to visit houses of worship of other religions, discuss with religious leaders, and record their experiences and reflections in personal journals. From this activity, students not only learn theoretically about tolerance, but experience and feel it directly (**Ariefa Efianingrum, 2013**). They begin to understand that differences are not a reason to hate, but rather an opportunity to get to know each other and enrich themselves. However, the implementation of multicultural-based Islamic education is not without challenges. One of the main challenges is resistance from some teachers or parents of students who still hold exclusive views in religion. They tend to see Islamic education as having to be "pure" without the interference of multicultural values which are considered relativism. In this case, a dialogical approach, counseling, and empowerment need to be carried out continuously so that all parties understand the urgency of tolerance education amidst the diversity of the nation.

Another challenge is limited resources, both in the form of textbooks, teacher training, and policy support. Many schools do not yet have modules or teaching tools that explicitly integrate multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education learning. Therefore, intervention from the government is needed through the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Education to develop a national multicultural-based Islamic Religious Education curriculum and learning guide. On the other hand, several previous studies have shown that the application of multicultural education in the context of Islamic Religious Education has had a positive impact on the development of student character. Research conducted by Wibowo (2020) in high schools in Yogyakarta, for example, shows that a multicultural approach in Islamic Religious Education improves students' ability to appreciate differences and reduce conflicts based on religious stereotypes. Meanwhile, a study by Susanto (**Susanto et al., 2023**) noted that students exposed to multicultural Islamic education had higher social empathy and tended to choose a peaceful approach in resolving conflicts.

Thus, the practice of multicultural-based Islamic education is a strategic innovation in responding to the needs of the times, where education is not enough to only form individuals who are devout in worship, but also individuals who are able to live side by side in a pluralistic society. Islamic education in secondary schools must be a space for dialogue, the formation of

morals, and the strengthening of universal human values that are in line with the principles of Islamic teachings. In this context, Islamic education must not be uprooted from the social reality of students. It must be a way to connect the values of revelation with the dynamics of society, so that students can become individuals who are both religious and tolerant. This practice also opens up space for the birth of a young generation of Muslims who are not only strong in their beliefs, but also mature in social interactions—a generation that is able to become ambassadors of peace and role models in diversity.

### **Innovative Model of Multicultural Islamic Education Can Be Developed to Support Strengthening of Tolerance Values in School Environment**

Indonesia is a nation rich in cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. This reality provides challenges as well as great opportunities for the world of education, especially in building a young generation that has a tolerant attitude and respects differences (Herdiyanti, Janah, & Susanto, 2025). Islamic education as one of the important elements in the national education system is required not only to teach aspects of worship and theology, but also to instill social values that uphold humanity and peace. In this context, the development of an innovative model of multicultural Islamic education is an urgent need to strengthen the values of tolerance in the school environment. The multicultural Islamic education model refers to a pedagogical approach that integrates the values of Islamic teachings with the principles of social diversity. Islam as a religion of rahmatan lil 'alamin has basic teachings that strongly support respect for diversity and social justice. This model aims not only to strengthen students' understanding of Islam, but also to direct them to become individuals who are able to live harmoniously amidst differences, both at school and in society.

Innovation in multicultural Islamic education must start from the formulation of a contextual and inclusive curriculum. The PAI (Islamic Religious Education) curriculum must not only contain doctrines of faith, but also materials that invite students to understand social plurality and uphold universal human values (Junaidi, Sileuw, & Faisal, 2023). For example, themes such as ukhuwah insaniyyah (human brotherhood), social justice, anti-discrimination, and the history of interfaith relations in Islamic civilization can be integrated into the syllabus systematically. This kind of curriculum will provide a strong conceptual foundation for students to internalize the values of tolerance from an early age. Furthermore, this innovative model must be supported by active and reflective learning methods. Learning strategies such as interactive dialogue, case studies, debates between opinions, project-based



learning, and cross-cultural visits can be utilized to open students' insights into the reality of diversity. For example, in learning about tolerance in Islam, teachers can present dilemmas that occur in society and invite students to discuss, formulate solutions, and see the problem from the perspective of Islamic teachings. This not only trains students' critical thinking skills, but also fosters empathy and an open attitude towards differences.

Other innovations can be done through the development of creative and contextual learning media. Textbooks, modules, learning videos, and digital content based on multicultural values must be developed and actively used by teachers (**Kartiwan, Alkarimah, & Ulfah, 2023**). For example, making short videos about the stories of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in establishing interfaith social relations, or animations about the Medina Charter as early examples of the concept of multiculturalism in Islamic history. These media have proven to be more effective in attracting students' attention and conveying teaching values in a fun and relevant way to their daily lives. In addition, the role of teachers as the main implementers of this model cannot be ignored. Islamic Religious Education teachers must be figures who not only teach theory, but also be role models in being tolerant, fair, and appreciating differences. Teachers are required to have multicultural competence, namely the ability to understand the diversity of cultures, religions, and social backgrounds of students, and to be able to respond to these dynamics in a wise manner. For this reason, training and strengthening the capacity of teachers is very important so that they are able to develop learning approaches that are in accordance with the spirit of multiculturalism in Islam.

The overall school environment must also support the implementation of this model. Schools need to create a school culture that is inclusive, free from discrimination, and respects each student's identity. School policies must ensure that all students have equal rights to learn and develop, regardless of religious or ethnic background (**Ekawati, 2025**). For example, schools can adopt anti-intolerance policies, organize interfaith cultural programs, or create interfaith student forums as a forum for dialogue and collaboration. In this way, the values of tolerance are not only taught but also practiced in everyday school life. Innovative models of multicultural Islamic education also need to utilize technology and digital platforms. In this digital era, students are very familiar with social media and the internet. Teachers and schools can create positive digital spaces, such as student blogs about experiences of diversity, interfaith dialogue podcasts, or educational videos about tolerance. This approach allows

students to learn outside the classroom while making them agents of change in spreading messages of peace and diversity in their digital communities.

Evaluation in this model also needs to be adjusted. Assessment is not only focused on students' cognitive understanding of the material, but also on changes in their attitudes and behavior in everyday life. Teachers can use reflective journals, behavioral observations, or social project portfolios to assess the extent to which students understand and apply the values of tolerance (Wahyudi et al., 2025). This aims to ensure that multicultural Islamic education truly has an impact on the formation of students' character, not just academic discourse. This model can also involve the participation of parents and the community. Schools can organize community dialogues, family seminars, or cooperation with interfaith organizations to build social networks that strengthen the values of tolerance. Parental involvement is essential to ensure that the values taught in schools are also continued and reinforced at home.

Previous studies support the urgency of developing this model. For example, a study by Ridho et al. (Ridho et al., 2022) shows that students who follow multicultural-based PAI learning show an increase in openness and empathy towards differences. Research by Nurhidayat et al (Nurhadi, Hadi, I. M., & Suhandano, 2013) also found that this approach is effective in reducing attitudes of exclusivism and narrow fanaticism among high school teenagers. By considering the challenges of the times that are colored by identity conflicts, the spread of religious hoaxes, and increasing social intolerance, the development of an innovative model of multicultural Islamic education is not only an option, but a necessity. This model is present as an answer to the need for education that is able to produce a generation of Muslims who are religious and humanistic, who are not only obedient in worship but also able to live peacefully in a pluralistic society.

Overall, the innovative model of multicultural Islamic education is a strategic and applicable approach in building the foundation of tolerance since school. The success of this model depends on the synergy between teachers, curriculum, school environment, and community support. By systematically integrating Islamic values with the principles of multiculturalism, it is hoped that a young generation will be born who will become agents of peace, not only at the local level, but also in the global context.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that multicultural Islamic education is a very relevant and needed approach in the Indonesian education system that lives in the midst

of a diverse society. Educational practices that prioritize multicultural values have been proven to be able to increase students' tolerance, empathy, and openness to differences. Islamic Religious Education teachers play a key role as agents of change who not only deliver material, but also shape students' character through role models and contextual learning approaches. The innovative model designed in this study involves curriculum renewal, the use of active and reflective learning methods, and the integration of diversity-based digital learning media. An inclusive school environment, anti-discrimination policies, and the involvement of parents and communities are important supporting factors in the success of this model. This study also emphasizes that strengthening tolerance is not enough just through the delivery of theory, but must be practiced concretely and systematically inside and outside the classroom. Thus, multicultural Islamic education is an important strategy in forming a young generation that is religious, moderate, and ready to live in a pluralistic global society. Further research is recommended to develop a deeper theoretical framework regarding the integration between Islamic education and multiculturalism with an interdisciplinary approach.

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