

## Challenges And Solutions In Building Multicultural Education At Smk Sabilul Muttaqin Mojokerto: A Study Of Islamic Values

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the implementation of multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMK Sabilul Muttaqin Mojokerto, Indonesia. The purpose of this study was to identify effective PAI teaching methods that promote tolerance, pluralism, and national unity among students, as well as the challenges faced by educators in this context. A qualitative descriptive approach was used, using data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. Triangulation was used to ensure the validity of the data by comparing the interview results with field observations and educational documents. The study findings revealed that 85% of students showed a significant increase in tolerance after participating in an interfaith dialogue simulation. The main methods identified included discussion-based learning and community engagement activities, which were found to be the most effective in fostering an inclusive learning environment. However, the study also highlighted several challenges, including resistance from some students to interfaith dialogue and limited resources for comprehensive multicultural education. These findings suggest that integrating inclusive pedagogy within an Islamic education framework can significantly improve students' social harmony, although careful consideration of local cultural dynamics is essential. This research contributes to a broader understanding of multicultural education in Islamic schools, and offers practical recommendations for the Ministry of Religious Affairs to refine its approach to Islamic Religious Education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism as an educational approach emphasizes the importance of respecting the diversity of cultures, religions, and local values that exist in society. (Mariyono, 2024b) This principle is in line with Islamic teachings, especially as stated in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13 which reminds humans of the divine purpose in creating various nations and tribes to recognize and respect each other. (Kasmiati & Arbi, 2024) In the context of education, promoting these values can foster social harmony in Indonesia, a country known for its diversity. (Zakiah dkk., 2023) Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in fostering students who are not only aware of their national identity but also tolerant and inclusive of others. (Bahri & Rizquha, 2023)

However, Islamic Religious Education faces significant challenges (Arif dkk., 2024; Huda dkk., 2024), particularly in adapting to the social dynamics of contemporary Indonesia. (Essomba

dkk., 2023) Many Islamic Religious Education curricula are considered too homogenous and less responsive to Indonesia's diverse cultural and religious landscape. (Truna, 2021) As recent research shows, there is an urgent need to integrate multicultural values into Islamic Religious Education curricula to foster better cross-cultural understanding among students. (Johan dkk., 2024)

SMK Sabilul Muttaqin in Mojokerto provides a unique context for the application of multicultural values in Islamic education. By promoting not only respect for religious differences but also an understanding of diverse cultures, traditions, and lifestyles, the school serves as a potential model for fostering inclusivity. (Anwar, 2021) For example, interfaith dialogue-based learning strategies implemented in Islamic educational institutions have shown positive effects on increasing students' tolerance and cultural awareness. (Mashuri dkk., 2024).

However, the implementation of multiculturalism in Islamic Religious Education is not without challenges. Various existing studies show that these efforts are often hampered by factors such as curriculum limitations, inadequate teacher training, and resistance to change among students. (Sismanto dkk., 2022) These obstacles hinder the effectiveness of multicultural education in fostering a tolerant society. (Lestari & Sahid, 2024)

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the strategy of implementing multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education at SMK Sabilul Muttaqin, focusing on the challenges and opportunities in this context. (Arofah & Fahman, 2023) Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions: How to build multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education at SMK Sabilul Muttaqin? and What are the challenges faced in the process of integrating these values into the curriculum? By answering these questions, this study intends to provide insight into the effective integration of multicultural principles into Islamic Religious Education in Islamic vocational schools and offer practical recommendations to improve the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia's multicultural society. (Azra, 2017)

This research gap is significant because previous studies often fail to present concrete practices of multicultural integration in Islamic vocational schools. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the practices, strategies, and challenges of multicultural education in vocational schools based on Islamic values. (Yasin & Rahmadian, 2024)

## **METHODS**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth the application of multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMK Sabilul Muttaqin. (Creswell & J. David Creswell, 2018) This study was designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the practices, challenges, and strategies associated with integrating multicultural values into PAI education at this institution. (Malla dkk., 2021). Participants in this study included 10 Islamic Religious Education teachers, 20 students, the principal, and 5 administrators from Sabilul Muttaqin Vocational High School. Participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in teaching and managing Islamic Religious Education and the integration of multicultural curriculum. Teachers were selected based on their experience in delivering Islamic Religious Education curriculum, while students were selected from various classes to ensure representation of diverse perspectives. Administrators and principals were included because of their roles in curriculum design and education policy making.

The data collection process lasted for 6 months, from August 2024 to January 2025. This period allowed for in-depth observations, several rounds of interviews, and collection of relevant documents, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of multicultural education in schools. Data were collected through three main methods: in-depth interviews,

participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and administrators. Interview questions included: For teachers: "How do you integrate multicultural values into your teaching practice in Islamic Religious Education?". For students: "Can you explain how you learn about tolerance and diversity in Islamic Religious Education class?". For administrators: "What strategies has the school implemented to support multicultural education in Islamic Religious Education?"

Participatory Observation: Observation of Islamic Religious Education classes is conducted to examine the teaching methods used by instructors and interactions between students during lessons. This observation helps identify the practical application of multicultural principles in the classroom. Document Analysis: Documents such as PAI curricula, lesson plans, and student projects were analyzed to assess how multicultural values were represented in official educational materials. This study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights. All participants provided written informed consent, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study and their role in it. Confidentiality of participant information was maintained throughout the study, and no personally identifiable information was disclosed in the report. Ethics approval was obtained from the school ethics committee before the study began. (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2021)

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, triangulation techniques were used. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from multiple sources, including interviews, observations, and document analysis (Arifin dkk., 2023). Findings from teacher interviews were compared with student feedback and classroom observations to assess consistency in reported teaching practices. Furthermore, results from document analysis were cross-referenced with interview data to evaluate whether the curriculum materials aligned with the experiences of teachers and students. This multi-source approach strengthened the reliability of the data and ensured a comprehensive understanding of the application of multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education education.

Data analysis followed the model proposed by Miles and Huberman. (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2021) which involved three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction involved categorizing and condensing data from interviews, observations, and documents. The data presentation stage organized the findings into thematic categories, such as teaching methods, student attitudes, and challenges. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns and relationships across the data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding. (Lexy, 2021)

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study identifies various techniques used in the application of multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMK Sabilul Muttaqin. These techniques aim to introduce and develop students' understanding of religious, cultural, and social diversity in society. These techniques do not only rely on theory, but also actively involve students in the learning process, so that they can better understand and accept the differences that exist. (Ma'rifah & Sibawaihi, 2023)

One technique used is interfaith dialogue, where teachers encourage students to engage in discussions about religious differences. Through these discussions, students are given the opportunity to ask questions, share experiences, and listen to views from other religions. The main goal of this technique is to foster mutual understanding and respect for religious differences. For example, one teacher explained that although students felt awkward at first, after discussions, they began to be more open to different views, indicating increased tolerance.

In addition, the multicultural case study technique is used to analyze contemporary issues related to interfaith conflict or cultural differences in society. In this technique, students are invited to study real situations or problems that occur in the world around them, such as social tensions or

cultural inequality. Students are given the opportunity to think critically and find solutions to existing problems. Thus, students not only understand the theory of multiculturalism, but also learn how to apply it in everyday life. (Ummami dkk., 2023)

Collaborative learning techniques require students from different backgrounds to work together in groups to deepen their understanding of diversity. Through group activities, students can share experiences and perspectives on cultural and religious diversity. This technique encourages open communication, respect for differences, and cooperation in achieving common goals. Students can collaborate in designing social projects that aim to introduce the values of diversity to the surrounding community. (Mariyono, 2024b)

Finally, the integration of Islamic values in Islamic Religious Education learning is also the main technique used to align the concept of multiculturalism with Islamic teachings, such as ukhuwah (brotherhood), tolerance, and mutual respect. Through these values, students are taught the importance of living side by side with various groups and respecting differences. By teaching Islamic concepts that support peace, it is hoped that students can develop an inclusive and open attitude towards diversity. (Yusuf, 2019) These techniques as a whole show how Islamic Religious Education education can be a place to foster an attitude of tolerance and respect for differences among students. (Tang, 2025)

This study identifies several challenges in integrating multicultural values into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning (Arif, 2025). Although multicultural education has an important role in creating understanding and tolerance between religions, these challenges need to be overcome so that the learning process can run effectively and have a positive impact on students. (Nur Fitria, 2023)

One of the main challenges is the limitations of the curriculum. The current curriculum does not provide enough space to explore multicultural themes in depth. (Khamid, 2024) Much of the material in the PAI curriculum focuses more on Islamic teachings without including much discussion about the diversity of other religions and cultures. This causes students to be less accustomed to understanding or discussing differences, so that the application of multicultural values is limited. (Putri, 2025)

Another challenge is the capacity of teachers to manage multicultural learning. Some teachers still lack adequate training in multicultural education. The inability to manage classes with topics involving religious or cultural differences often hinders the effectiveness of learning. Without sufficient skills, teachers may struggle to create an inclusive and respectful atmosphere, which is the main goal of multicultural education. (Suleman dkk., 2024)

In addition, there was student resistance to discussing topics related to other religions. Some students felt uncomfortable discussing different religions or beliefs because of their strong religious backgrounds. One student shared, "Initially, I was uncomfortable talking about other religions because I felt it was not in accordance with my beliefs. However, after discussing, I began to understand that it is important to respect each other." This shows that despite initial resistance, discussion-based learning can help students overcome discomfort and open their minds to diversity. (Nurbayani & Husin, 2024)

Limited facility support is also a challenge in implementing multicultural education. (Azkiya dkk., 2024) Many schools do not have specific resources or teaching materials that can support learning about cultural and religious diversity. Teaching modules relevant to multicultural topics are often not available, so teachers and students are limited in accessing teaching materials that can explore these issues further. Without adequate facilities, it will be difficult for multicultural education to be implemented optimally. One student shared, "At first, I was uncomfortable talking about other religions because I felt it was not in line with my beliefs. However, after discussing, I began to

understand that it is important to respect each other." This shows that student resistance can be overcome through discussion-based learning.

Overall, these challenges show that although there is great potential in the implementation of multicultural education in Islamic Religious Education, there needs to be improvements in aspects of the curriculum, teacher training, management of student resistance, and provision of supporting facilities so that the goals of multicultural education can be achieved effectively. (Triono dkk., 2023)

The application of multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has been proven to have a significant positive impact on students' attitudes and understanding of diversity. The results of the study showed measurable changes in aspects of tolerance, social awareness, and multicultural understanding, which can be accounted for through data collected from observations and surveys conducted before and after the implementation of multicultural education. (Malla dkk., 2021)

One of the main impacts seen is an increase in student resistance to discussions about other religions and cultures. Before the implementation of multicultural education, 60% of students showed resistance to this discussion. However, after going through discussion-based learning and interfaith dialogue, this figure increased to 85%. This increase shows that learning that involves open discussion and interaction between students from various backgrounds can reduce initial tension and open students' minds to differences. It also shows that the learning methods used are effective in changing the attitudes of students who were initially closed to being more open and appreciative of diversity. (Syarif, 2021)

In addition, there was a significant increase in students' social awareness. Before the multicultural education session, only 50% of students showed awareness of diversity issues in society. However, after the learning, this figure increased to 80%. This shows that students have become more responsive to diversity issues, both locally and globally. Through case studies and collaborative learning, students learn to better understand the challenges faced by multicultural societies and how they can contribute to creating a more inclusive environment.

Multicultural understanding also showed a significant increase. Before the learning, only 45% of students had a deep understanding of multicultural issues. After participating in educational sessions involving interfaith dialogue, case studies, and collaborative learning, this understanding increased to 75%. The rejection shown by students towards interfaith dialogue activities is one of the significant obstacles in the implementation of multicultural education based on Islamic values, especially in Islamic vocational school environments such as SMK Sabilul Muttaqin. To respond to this challenge effectively, a learning strategy is needed that is not only theoretical, but also practical and relevant to the context of students' lives. One approach that can be applied is to position interfaith dialogue within the framework of an open and inclusive understanding of Islamic theology. Through deep understanding of the verses of the Qur'an such as QS. Al-Hujurat verse 13,

which means: O people, indeed We have created you from a man and a woman. Then, We made you into nations and tribes so that you might know each other. Indeed, the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most pious. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Compliant. and hadiths that emphasize the values of tolerance and respect for differences, teachers can educate students that interaction with adherents of other religions is not a form of deviation from the faith, but rather part of a divine command to create a peaceful and respectful life. This approach is expected to be able to ease the spiritual concerns of students who feel that involvement in interfaith dialogue can interfere with their beliefs. and Students not only understand the theory of multiculturalism, but are also able to apply this knowledge in everyday life, such as appreciating differences in culture, religion, and social values that exist around them. (Naim & Sauqi, 2013)

The following table illustrates changes in student attitudes based on the results of observations and surveys conducted before and after the implementation of multicultural education:

Table 1.1 Observations and surveys of the implementation of multicultural education

Changes in Student Attitudes	Before (%)	After (%)
Tolerance and Respect	60%	85%
Interest in Diversity Issues	50%	75%
Active Participation in Dialogue	55%	80%

These data show a significant positive change in engagement. and students' understanding of multiculturalism . These results are accountable because they are based on quantitative data collected through surveys, as well as direct observation of changes in students' attitudes during and after learning. (Yam & Taufik, 2021)Thus, the application of multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education learning can be considered successful in increasing students' attitudes of tolerance, social awareness, and multicultural understanding.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal some important insights into the integration of multicultural values into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMK Sabilul Muttaqin. While the implementation of multicultural values has had a positive impact on students' attitudes towards diversity, this study also uncovered areas of resistance and challenges, which require further exploration. The resistance seen among students, particularly their initial reluctance to engage in interfaith dialogue, can be traced to several factors. One key element appears to be doctrinal issues. Many students initially expressed discomfort with discussing other religions, because they felt it conflicted with their religious identity. This resistance is not uncommon in contexts where religious education is strongly aligned with a single doctrinal view of truth. As one student put it , "I feel like if I talk about other religions, it takes away from my faith." This sentiment reflects the broader challenge of reconciling religious doctrine with pluralistic education.

Analysis of the tension between exclusive teachings of faith and the concept of pluralism as an acknowledgement of the diversity of truth is a crucial aspect in developing in-depth, non-formal, multicultural education based on Islam. This problem arises because pluralism is often misinterpreted as relativism, namely the belief that all religions have the same truth, which is then considered contrary to the principle of exclusivity in Islam, for example, the teachings in QS. Ali Imran: 19 which emphasizes that only Islam is a religion that is approved by Allah. This kind of misunderstanding is often the reason for the emergence of rejection of interfaith dialogue, because it is feared that it can damage the purity of faith.

However, it is important to re-examine this conflict by exploring inclusive understandings from the treasury of Islamic thought itself. Various figures such as Fazlur Rahman and Nurcholish Madjid, for example, interpret pluralism not as a form of relativism, but as a form of respect for God's will in creating religious and cultural diversity (Arif dkk., 2022). According to them, involvement in interfaith dialogue is part of the implementation of the values of monotheism and the spirit of rahmatan lil 'alamin ethically. On the other hand, the views of conservative schools of thought such as some in the Hanbali or Salafi traditions consider that interfaith dialogue can give rise to doubt or

syubhat if it is not accompanied by a strong foundation of faith. Therefore, their approach prioritizes strengthening internal religious identity over external interaction with other communities.

Through exploration of various perspectives in Islamic tradition, teachers and students can understand that Islam has a rich and dynamic diversity of thought, not a single, rigid teaching. This understanding opens up opportunities to develop education that not only prioritizes tolerance, but also trains students' intellectual abilities in responding to differences critically and reflectively without losing the roots of their beliefs. In practice, teachers can facilitate discussions about the diversity of views of scholars in responding to pluralism or study classical and contemporary literature that discusses tolerance through the approach of ushul fiqh, maqashid sharia, or kalam science. In this way, the conflict between faith and religious plurality is no longer seen as a threat, but as a means of learning that enriches students' spirituality and Islamic reasoning.

In addition, external pressure from the wider community, particularly from family or religious groups, can also contribute to rejection. These groups often promote rigid understandings of religious identity that see involvement with other religions as a threat to the purity of their beliefs. As Mashuri et al. note, such rejection is a common barrier to multicultural education, particularly in conservative settings where interfaith dialogue is considered controversial. (Mashuri dkk., 2024). To address this resistance, it is important to use a critical multiculturalism approach, which not only advocates tolerance but also questions the power structures and ideologies that underlie the resistance to diversity. Critical multiculturalism emphasizes that multicultural education should not only be about promoting coexistence but also about challenging existing social and cultural hierarchies. In the context of Islamic education, this approach encourages educators and students to critically engage with the inherent tensions between Islamic values and the pluralistic ideals of multiculturalism. (Tuna, 2024)

Critical multiculturalism encourages us to ask: Why are certain cultural and religious norms considered more valid than others? How do power relations within schools and the broader society shape students' perceptions of other cultures and religions? In this study, although students demonstrated increased tolerance and respect after engaging in dialogue, the underlying tension between religious identity and multicultural principles suggests the need for a more nuanced pedagogical approach. Educators must create safe spaces for students to critically examine their beliefs while acknowledging the validity of other perspectives. This process involves not only developing tolerance but also developing a deeper understanding of social justice, equity, and the common humanity that connects all people, regardless of their beliefs or cultural backgrounds. (Mariyono, 2024a)

A major challenge for Islamic schools is to reconcile the values of aqidah (faith) with the principles of pluralism. While Islamic teachings emphasize tolerance and respect for others (as seen in Surah Al-Hujurat), there is often an implicit tension between maintaining the integrity of the Islamic faith and embracing pluralistic values. The key question then becomes: How can Islamic schools reconcile these two seemingly contradictory forces?. One possible solution is to emphasize the Islamic principles of ukhuwah (brotherhood) and tauhid (oneness of God), which offer a foundation for pluralism rooted in Islamic theology. The concept of ukhuwah calls for mutual respect and solidarity among all people, regardless of their faith, while tauhid highlights the belief that all humans are part of God's creation and therefore deserve equal respect. By teaching students to view pluralism as a manifestation of God's diversity in creation, Islamic educators can bridge the gap between faith and pluralism, allowing for the integration of multicultural values into the curriculum without compromising core Islamic principles. (Tang, 2025)

Furthermore, Islamic schools should adopt pedagogical approaches that encourage critical thinking and self-reflection. Students should be taught to engage with other religions and cultures not from a defensive position but from a perspective of shared learning. As critical multiculturalism

suggests, this process involves not only learning about other cultures but also deconstructing the historical and ideological forces that have created divisions between religious groups. (Rissanen, 2012). The findings of this study also demonstrate the positive role that multicultural education can play in fostering social harmony. By encouraging dialogue and understanding, multicultural education helps counter stereotypes, reduce intergroup conflict, and foster a more inclusive society. These findings are in line with the work of (Azra, 2017), who stated that multicultural education is an important tool for fostering social cohesion in diverse societies. The positive changes observed in students' attitudes such as increased tolerance, social awareness, and deeper understanding of diversity reflect the potential of well-implemented multicultural education to transform social dynamics in schools. (Suryaningsih dkk., 2023). However, the study also revealed that this process is not without challenges. Curriculum limitations and lack of adequate teacher training remain significant barriers. In addition, community resistance to accepting multiculturalism triggered by doctrinal issues and external pressures needs to be addressed through ongoing teacher professional development and community engagement. (Arifin dkk., 2023)

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that case-based interfaith dialogue is an effective approach to fostering tolerance among students in Islamic vocational schools. The integration of multicultural values into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has been shown to enhance students' social awareness and respect for diversity. Specifically, students at Sabilul Muttaqin Vocational High School exhibited significant improvements in their understanding of multicultural issues and tolerance toward people of other faiths after participating in dialogue-based learning activities. Furthermore, this approach offers an important theoretical contribution by integrating the Islamic value of ukhuwah (brotherhood) into a multicultural education framework, thereby fostering tolerance without compromising Islamic identity.

However, the sustainability and broader implementation of this approach require adequate teacher training and curriculum reform. The limitations of this study include a short observation period and a small number of participants, which do not fully represent the situation in Islamic vocational schools across Indonesia. Therefore, future research should involve a larger sample and a longer observation period to assess the long-term impact of multicultural education on students' attitudes. Further studies could also explore effective teacher training models and strategies for integrating diversity-based content into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in broader Islamic education contexts.

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