

The Concept of Multicultural Education in the Perspective of Islamic Religious Education in Higher Education

Nina Aria Putri^{a*}, Erina Dwi Ari Utami^b, Tania Citra Ana Bella^c, Meri Rosmiaty^d, Ika Pertiwi^e

^{abcde}UIN Fatmawati Bengkulu, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: ikapertiwi927@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the concept of multicultural education from the perspective of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in higher education. Multicultural education emphasizes respect for diversity in ethnicity, culture, religion, and social values as an integral part of the learning process. Within the context of IRE, multicultural education does not merely focus on cognitive aspects but also on cultivating tolerance, religious moderation, and appreciation for differences among students. This research employs a literature review method by examining books, scientific articles, and previous relevant studies. The findings indicate that the concept of multicultural education in Islamic teachings is closely related to the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, the notion of *ukhuwah* (Islamic, national, and human brotherhood), as well as the values of justice and equality reflected in the Qur'an and Hadith. In the higher education setting, IRE holds a strategic role in embedding multicultural awareness through the integration of tolerance, respect for diversity, and social cooperation into teaching and learning practices. Therefore, the implementation of multicultural education in IRE can serve as a foundation for fostering social harmony and strengthening students' national character amidst diversity in academic environments.

Keywords: Multicultural Education, Islamic Religious Education, Higher Education, Tolerance, Religious Moderation, Diversity.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a diverse nation with diverse tribes, languages, cultures, and religions. This diversity is a wealth that should be grateful for making Indonesia a nation rich in identity, values, and traditions. However, on the other hand, plurality also holds the potential for friction if not managed properly. Differences that should be a force can turn into a source of social conflict, discrimination, and intolerance if there is no collective awareness in maintaining social harmony. In the context of education, especially higher education, diversity is evident in campus life which is colored by students from various regions, tribes, cultures, and beliefs. This situation requires an inclusive learning approach that is able to accommodate diversity. Multicultural education exists as a strategic solution because it emphasizes the importance of tolerance, respect for differences, and respect for the cultural identity of each individual. Through multicultural education, a peaceful, harmonious and productive academic life can be realized.

Multicultural education is not just a discourse, but also a real need in college. The life of a pluralistic student has the potential to cause differences in views, thought patterns, and even the potential for small conflicts if not directed properly. Therefore, higher education needs to instill multicultural values so that students can develop social skills, empathy, and awareness to build respectful relationships within the framework of Indonesian nationality. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic position in instilling multicultural values. As part of the national curriculum, PAI in higher education not only serves to transfer religious knowledge, but also forms the personality of students who are religious, tolerant, and value differences. The basic principles of Islamic teachings, such as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, *ukhuwah*, equality, and justice, are a strong foundation for the development of multicultural attitudes. Thus, the integration of multicultural education in PAI becomes very relevant to answer the challenges of the

Times. The Qur'an itself asserts that diversity is a sunnatullah that cannot be denied. In QS. Al-Hujurat verse 13 mentioned that humans were created Nations and tribes in order to know each other (TA'aruf). This verse affirms that differences are a nature that must be managed with mutual respect, not with enmity. By internalizing the message of the Qur'an in Pai learning, students can be invited to see differences as an opportunity to enrich their insights, not as a threat.

However, social reality shows that the phenomenon of intolerance, discrimination, and even SARA-based conflicts are still common in various regions. It is not uncommon for exclusionary and radical attitudes to emerge among the younger generation, including students. This phenomenon indicates the existence of a gap between the ideality of religious teachings and the reality of social practice. This is where the importance of strengthening the role of PAI in higher education as a means to instill multicultural awareness that is aligned with Islamic values.

The integration of multicultural education in PAI not only aims to prevent the birth of intolerance, but also to form a young generation that is ready to live in a global society. Students need to be equipped with critical thinking skills, an open attitude, and cross-cultural communication skills. Thus, they not only become religious individuals, but also become agents of peace who are able to care for the diversity of the nation in the midst of an increasingly complex globalization. In addition, multicultural education in PAI in higher education is also relevant to the goals of national education that emphasizes the development of the potential of students to become people of faith, piety, and noble character while being able to live in a democratic, plural, and civilized society. With a multicultural approach, PAI can contribute more broadly in shaping students who are not only intellectually and spiritually intelligent, but also socially mature.

Through this literature review, the study seeks to analyze the concept of multicultural education in the perspective of Islamic Religious Education in higher education. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in enriching academic treasures on the integration of multicultural education with PAI. Moreover, this research also has practical value as a reference for lecturers and managers of higher education in designing Pai learning that is more inclusive, tolerant, and relevant to the reality of multicultural society in Indonesia. Thus, the urgency of this research lies not only in the academic aspect, but also in a real social need. Multicultural education in the PAI perspective in higher education is believed to be able to be one of the strategic solutions in facing the challenges of diversity in the modern era. Students as the next generation of the nation need to be prepared to have a strong multicultural awareness, so that diversity is truly a blessing that strengthens the unity and unity of the Indonesian nation.

II. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to the type of research literature studies (library research). This approach was chosen because the purpose of the study is to explore in depth the concept of multicultural education in the perspective of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) by examining relevant literary sources, both classical and contemporary. The study of literature is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to obtain a comprehensive overview of the theoretical foundations, Islamic values, as well as the application of multicultural education in the context of Pai learning. The data source of this study consists of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources in the form of Islamic classical books, the Qur'an, Hadith, as well as the work of scholars who discuss education, morals, and relationships between people. The secondary sources include textbooks, scientific journals, research articles, proceedings, and previous research reports—both national and international—that discuss multicultural education, Islamic Religious Education, religious moderation, and character education.

Data collection is done through several stages. First, identify the theme by determining the focus of the study on multicultural education in the perspective of Islam and PAI. Second, literature search through physical and digital libraries such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, ResearchGate, and national journal databases (eg Garuda). Third, literature selection by choosing relevant, current, credible sources, and related to the focus of study. Fourth, the classification of data by grouping the reading results into several themes such as the basics of multicultural education, Islamic values related to diversity, the role of PAI in the internalization of multicultural values, and the challenges of implementation. The collected Data is then analyzed using content analysis techniques. This analysis is carried out through several steps, namely data reduction to filter important information according to the focus of the study; interpretation of data to understand the meaning of the information obtained, especially related to the principles of multicultural education and Islamic teachings; synthesis to connect literature findings with Islamic education theory to produce integrative understanding; and analytical description to present the results of the study systematically with descriptive-analytical writing style to explain how the concept of multicultural education is viewed and implemented in PAI.

To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses the triangulation technique of sources by comparing various Literatures from different disciplines, such as education, sociology, and Islamic studies. In addition, the selection of references gives priority to sources published in the last five to ten years, except for Islamic classics that remain as the main reference. Through this literature study method, it is expected to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical foundation of multicultural education in the Islamic perspective, the integration of multicultural values in the PAI curriculum and learning, as well as the relevance of multicultural education in answering the challenges of intolerance, radicalism, and social disintegration in Indonesia.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Conceptual Foundations Of Multicultural Education

The results of the literature review indicate that multicultural education is an educational approach that emphasizes the importance of recognition and appreciation of ethnic differences, culture, religion, and social values in society. Banks (2009) states that multicultural education aims to create educational justice by providing equal space for all learners, without discrimination. In the Islamic perspective, diversity is *sunnatullah* as the word of Allah in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 13, which asserts that man was created in tribes and nations to know each other (*TA'aruf*). This verse becomes the theological foundation that Islam supports the principle of multiculturalism.

The literature review shows that Islam contains a number of fundamental values that are relevant to multicultural education, including:

- a) Tolerance (*tasamuh*): teaches Muslims to respect differences in beliefs and outlook on life of others.
- b) Justice (*'adl*): granting equal rights regardless of social, cultural, or religious background.
- c) Brotherhood (*ukhuwah*): includes *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, *wathaniyah*, and *insaniyah* which emphasizes the importance of solidarity, both in the scope of religion, nationality, and humanity.
- d) Moderation (*wasathiyah*): an attitude of balance that avoids extremes in religion.
- e) These values show that the concept of multicultural education is actually inherent in Islamic teachings and can be internalized in the curriculum of Islamic Religious Education.

The role of Islamic Religious Education in internalizing multiculturalism

The results showed that PAI serves not only as a means of transfer of religious knowledge, but also as a medium for the formation of attitudes and character of students. Through PAI learning, teachers can instill multicultural awareness by:

- a) integrating the values of tolerance, moderation, and brotherhood in the material of moral creed, *fiqh*, and the history of Islamic culture.
- b) apply participatory learning methods such as group discussions, case studies, and problem based learning that allow students to learn to respect differences of opinion.
- c) set an example (*uswah hasanah*) in an attitude of respect for differences, both in the school environment and in the community.

Challenges of implementing Multicultural Education in PAI

Although conceptually in line with Islam, the implementation of multicultural education in PAI faces several challenges. First, there is still the phenomenon of intolerance, hate speech, and racial conflict in the community and schools. Second, the limited understanding of teachers about the concept of multicultural education makes the integration of these values is not optimal. Third, globalization and digital media often create identity polarization that has the potential to break unity. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of PAI teachers, developing an inclusive curriculum, and supporting a conducive school environment are important factors in the successful implementation of multicultural education. The relevance of Pai Multicultural Education for The Life Of The Nation

Discussion of the literature shows that multicultural education in PAI has great relevance in maintaining social harmony in Indonesia. By instilling the awareness that differences are inevitable, students are encouraged to be tolerant, fair, and able to coexist peacefully. This is in line with the purpose of National Education, which is to form Indonesian people who have faith, piety, noble character, and are able to appreciate diversity in the frame of national unity.

The Theoretical Foundation of Multicultural Education in Islamic Religious Perspective

The theoretical foundation of multicultural education in Islam rests upon the recognition of diversity as a divine decree. The Qur'an emphasizes that human beings are created in different nations, tribes, and communities for the purpose of mutual recognition (*ta'aruf*), not for conflict or division. This is explicitly stated in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13, which stresses that diversity is a natural law that should

encourage respect and cooperation. Such a principle directly aligns with the philosophical underpinnings of multicultural education, which emphasizes the acceptance and celebration of differences.

From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), these foundations serve to integrate spiritual values with social awareness. Multicultural education in Islam is not an imported or external concept, but rather an inherent part of the religion's universal message of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. The concept signifies that Islamic teachings are intended to promote peace, justice, and harmony among all people regardless of differences. Therefore, when higher education incorporates multicultural education within IRE, it is essentially applying what Islam has long taught about inclusivity and social harmony. Another theoretical dimension can be found in the principle of *ukhuwah*, which highlights different layers of brotherhood: *ukhuwah islamiyah* (among Muslims), *ukhuwah wathaniyah* (among fellow citizens), and *ukhuwah insaniyah* (among all humanity). These categories reflect a comprehensive model of social relations that transcends narrow identities and embraces universal human solidarity. Such a framework demonstrates that Islam not only recognizes diversity but also provides ethical guidelines to navigate it constructively.

The values of justice (*al-'adl*) and equality (*al-musawah*) also form the core of multicultural education in the Islamic tradition. Islam consistently emphasizes fairness in human relations and prohibits discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, or social class. These values resonate with the principles of multicultural education, which call for equal opportunities in education, respect for minority groups, and the eradication of systemic discrimination. Thus, integrating these values into higher education strengthens the moral foundation of multicultural practices. Pedagogically, IRE at universities must evolve beyond the transfer of religious knowledge into a transformative approach that cultivates multicultural awareness. This involves teaching students not only the doctrinal aspects of Islam but also its ethical and social dimensions that encourage tolerance and empathy. By doing so, students learn to connect religious teachings with real-life challenges in a diverse society, making their learning more meaningful and applicable.

It is also important to emphasize that the prophetic tradition (Sunnah) complements the Qur'anic foundation of multicultural education. The Prophet Muhammad's interactions with people of different faiths and cultures exemplify inclusivity, compassion, and respect. Historical accounts, such as the Prophet's treaties with non-Muslims in Medina, illustrate practical models of peaceful coexistence that can inspire contemporary efforts in higher education. This historical precedent underscores that multicultural education in Islam is deeply rooted in both scripture and practice.

The theoretical foundation further stresses that Islamic Religious Education should be seen not as a segregating subject but as a unifying one. It holds the potential to become a platform for dialogue, critical reflection, and character development. By highlighting the universality of Islamic values, educators can transform classrooms into spaces that nurture intercultural understanding and cooperation among students. In conclusion, the theoretical underpinnings of multicultural education from an Islamic perspective affirm that diversity is not a problem to be solved but a blessing to be embraced. Islamic principles of *ta'aruf*, *ukhuwah*, justice, and equality provide a robust foundation for fostering multiculturalism in higher education. When properly integrated into IRE, these values equip students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to thrive in a pluralistic society.

Challenges of Implementing Multicultural Values in Higher Education

Although the theoretical foundation of multicultural education in Islam is clear and strong, its implementation in higher education often faces serious challenges. One of the most pressing issues is the persistence of intolerance among certain groups of students. Despite being exposed to inclusive teachings, some students may adopt exclusivist interpretations of religion due to external influences, such as radical ideologies or politicized interpretations of faith. This demonstrates that theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient without effective pedagogical strategies. Another challenge lies in the imbalance of educational priorities. Many Islamic Religious Education courses at the university level tend to focus heavily on cognitive mastery—understanding texts, doctrines, and historical facts—while neglecting affective and behavioral dimensions. As a result, students may excel academically in religious knowledge but fail to translate this knowledge into attitudes of tolerance and inclusivity. This gap highlights the need for curriculum reforms that prioritize holistic character development.

Additionally, the pedagogical approaches of educators themselves present obstacles. Some lecturers continue to rely on conventional lecture-based methods that prioritize memorization and textual analysis. While these methods are valuable for academic rigor, they often fail to address contemporary issues related to diversity and multiculturalism. Without contextualizing Islamic teachings in relation to current societal dynamics, students may struggle to see their relevance in daily interactions with people of different backgrounds.

The influence of external socio-political contexts also complicates the implementation of multicultural values. Higher education institutions do not exist in isolation; they are embedded within broader social realities where identity-based conflicts, political polarization, and discriminatory practices persist. These societal tensions can infiltrate campuses, shaping the attitudes and perceptions of students. Thus, the classroom becomes a microcosm of broader societal challenges that must be addressed proactively. Furthermore, the lack of institutional support and resources for multicultural education poses another barrier. Not all universities provide adequate training, materials, or policy frameworks that empower educators to integrate multicultural perspectives into IRE. Without strong institutional backing, efforts to promote inclusivity often remain fragmented and inconsistent, depending largely on the initiative of individual lecturers.

Another significant challenge is the digital environment in which students operate. Social media platforms, while offering opportunities for intercultural exchange, also serve as spaces where misinformation, hate speech, and radical narratives spread rapidly. Students who are not equipped with critical thinking and digital literacy skills may be vulnerable to divisive ideologies that contradict the principles of multiculturalism and Islam itself. The cultural diversity among students, while enriching, also creates complexities in teaching. Differences in regional traditions, levels of religiosity, and prior exposure to multicultural settings can affect how students perceive and respond to the values taught in class. Educators must be sensitive to these differences and adopt flexible strategies that address varying needs without alienating any group.

In summary, the challenges of implementing multicultural values in higher education are multifaceted, encompassing pedagogical, institutional, societal, and digital dimensions. Overcoming these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that combine curriculum reform, innovative teaching methods, institutional support, and critical engagement with the digital environment. Only through such holistic efforts can the gap between theoretical ideals and practical realities be bridged.

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Promoting Multicultural Awareness

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in higher education plays a vital role in cultivating students' awareness of multicultural values. Unlike primary or secondary education, the university environment brings together students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds in closer and more intensive interactions. This makes higher education an important arena for promoting mutual respect, inclusivity, and cross-cultural dialogue. By embedding multicultural principles within IRE, educators can help students develop not only religious literacy but also the ability to navigate diversity constructively. One of the primary roles of IRE is to serve as a moral compass that guides students to interpret their faith in ways that foster peace and harmony. The subject must consistently emphasize the universal dimensions of Islam, such as justice, equality, and compassion, rather than focusing exclusively on sectarian differences. When students internalize these values, they become more capable of appreciating cultural differences without feeling that their religious identity is threatened. This nurtures an inclusive mindset that is crucial for social cohesion in a pluralistic society.

Moreover, IRE can act as a platform for dialogue. By encouraging open discussions about cultural and religious diversity, students can learn to express their perspectives respectfully while listening to others with empathy. Such dialogical learning not only reduces prejudice but also builds interpersonal skills that are essential for leadership in multicultural contexts. Universities, therefore, have a responsibility to provide spaces where students can engage in these constructive exchanges under the guidance of knowledgeable educators.

The curriculum of IRE in higher education should also be designed to include case studies and contemporary issues related to multiculturalism. For example, discussions on religious harmony, interfaith cooperation, and social justice can be integrated into course materials. By contextualizing Islamic teachings with real-life scenarios, students are better equipped to apply their knowledge in daily life. This approach ensures that the learning process is not merely theoretical but also practical and transformative. In addition, the role of IRE extends to shaping students' digital literacy. Since university students are active users of digital platforms, they are constantly exposed to both positive and negative narratives regarding diversity. IRE courses can incorporate critical discussions about online content, helping students to distinguish between authentic religious knowledge and extremist propaganda. This equips them to become responsible digital citizens who contribute positively to the digital public sphere.

Another significant contribution of IRE is fostering empathy. Through reflective assignments, service-learning projects, or community engagement programs, students can be encouraged to interact directly with people from different backgrounds. Such experiential learning helps them to see diversity not as an abstract concept but as a lived reality that requires understanding and compassion. By bridging theory with practice, IRE helps students internalize multicultural values at a deeper emotional level.

The role of IRE also involves countering stereotypes and misconceptions. Many conflicts arise from misinterpretations or lack of knowledge about other cultures and religions. By teaching students about the Islamic principles of coexistence, tolerance, and respect, educators can dismantle negative stereotypes and foster an environment of trust and mutual acceptance. This is particularly crucial in higher education, where students are preparing to take on leadership roles in society. In conclusion, IRE serves as a transformative agent in promoting multicultural awareness within higher education. It provides students with the ethical foundation, intellectual framework, and practical skills to thrive in a diverse environment. By integrating dialogue, contextualized learning, empathy-building, and digital literacy into its approach, IRE ensures that students not only understand multicultural values but also embody them in their interactions both inside and outside the university setting.

Strategies for Strengthening Multicultural Education through Islamic Religious Education

To effectively strengthen multicultural education through Islamic Religious Education in higher education, comprehensive strategies must be implemented at both curricular and institutional levels. One crucial strategy is the development of a curriculum that explicitly integrates multicultural themes with Islamic teachings. Rather than treating multiculturalism as an additional topic, it should be embedded across the course structure. This ensures that every aspect of IRE highlights values of inclusivity, justice, and respect for diversity.

Another strategy is adopting innovative pedagogical approaches. Traditional lecture-based teaching should be complemented with participatory methods such as group discussions, debates, role-plays, and collaborative projects. These methods encourage students to actively engage with diverse perspectives and practice the values of tolerance and cooperation in real-time. Interactive pedagogy also allows students to reflect on their biases and develop critical thinking skills, which are essential for navigating complex multicultural realities.

Educator capacity-building is another key component. Lecturers must be equipped not only with theological knowledge but also with intercultural competence and pedagogical skills that support multicultural learning. Training workshops, academic exchanges, and professional development programs can enhance lecturers' ability to design inclusive lesson plans and facilitate sensitive discussions on diversity-related issues. Without competent educators, efforts to promote multicultural values may remain superficial.

Universities must also create supportive institutional policies. Establishing a multicultural campus culture requires policies that promote equality, protect minority rights, and encourage intercultural activities. This includes organizing interfaith dialogues, cultural festivals, and community service programs that involve students from different backgrounds. By institutionalizing these activities, universities can normalize multicultural engagement as part of the academic experience.

Technology can also be leveraged as a tool for strengthening multicultural education. Online platforms, digital storytelling, and virtual exchange programs can connect students with peers from different regions and even countries. Through these interactions, students gain broader exposure to global diversity and can compare how multicultural principles operate across different contexts. Such digital initiatives expand the scope of multicultural learning beyond the classroom.

Another strategy is fostering collaboration between universities and external stakeholders, such as religious organizations, NGOs, and community groups. By involving these stakeholders, universities can provide students with practical opportunities to apply multicultural values in real-world settings. Service-learning projects, interfaith volunteer programs, and community outreach initiatives can bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are equally important. Universities need to assess the effectiveness of their multicultural initiatives regularly, using surveys, focus groups, or performance assessments. This allows institutions to identify gaps, refine strategies, and ensure that multicultural education remains dynamic and responsive to emerging challenges. Without proper evaluation, efforts may lack sustainability and long-term impact. In summary, strengthening multicultural education through IRE requires a multi-dimensional approach that combines curriculum reform, innovative pedagogy, educator development, institutional policies, technological innovation, and community engagement. When these strategies are systematically implemented, IRE can fulfill its role as a transformative force that equips students with the values and competencies necessary to live harmoniously in a multicultural society.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study highlights that multicultural education is not only compatible with the principles of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) but also deeply rooted in the very essence of Islamic teachings. The Qur'anic emphasis on diversity as part of sunnatullah, the principles of ukhuwah, and the values of

justice and equality provide a strong theoretical foundation for embedding multicultural perspectives within higher education. These values demonstrate that Islam inherently supports inclusivity, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence. Despite this strong theoretical alignment, the practical implementation of multicultural education in higher education faces multiple challenges. Issues such as intolerance, exclusivist attitudes, lack of institutional support, conventional teaching methods, and the influence of external socio-political and digital environments hinder the effective internalization of multicultural values among students. This indicates that a more comprehensive and systematic effort is needed to bridge the gap between ideals and practice. Islamic Religious Education in higher education has a strategic role in addressing these challenges. By emphasizing dialogue, empathy, and contextual learning, IRE can transform classrooms into spaces where students develop intercultural competence and learn to embody the universal values of Islam in their everyday interactions. This positions IRE not only as a subject of doctrinal study but also as a catalyst for character development and social harmony.

To strengthen its effectiveness, various strategies must be implemented. These include reforming curricula to integrate multicultural themes, adopting innovative pedagogical approaches, enhancing educators' intercultural competence, establishing supportive institutional policies, leveraging technology, and engaging with community stakeholders. Such multi-dimensional efforts ensure that multicultural education becomes an integral part of higher education rather than a peripheral addition. In conclusion, Islamic Religious Education in higher education holds immense potential to promote multicultural awareness and inclusivity. When integrated with comprehensive strategies, it can prepare students to become not only knowledgeable and pious individuals but also tolerant, empathetic, and socially responsible citizens. In a diverse and globalized world, this role is crucial for sustaining harmony and ensuring that Indonesia's rich cultural pluralism continues to be a source of strength rather than division.

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