

Multicultural Islamic Education Curriculum and Social Cohesion: Negotiating Religious Identity in Diverse Communities

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ABSTRACT

The increasing intensity of social polarization, digital radicalization, and identity-based conflict within multicultural societies has raised urgent concerns regarding the role of Islamic education in promoting social cohesion and intercultural coexistence. Despite the growing discourse on multicultural education, limited studies have critically examined how multicultural Islamic education curricula negotiate religious identity while simultaneously fostering inclusive citizenship within diverse communities. This study aims to explore the role of multicultural Islamic education curriculum in shaping religious identity negotiation and strengthening social cohesion in Indonesia and Morocco. Employing a qualitative multi-site comparative design, the research involved 80 participants consisting of educators, curriculum specialists, students, religious leaders, and community representatives across several educational institutions in both countries. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that multicultural Islamic education functions as a transformative pedagogical framework that enables students to maintain religious commitment while developing intercultural competence, ethical inclusivity, and democratic engagement. The study further demonstrates that dialogical pedagogy, peace-oriented curriculum practices, and community-based learning significantly contribute to reducing exclusivist attitudes and strengthening social cohesion. However, the research also identifies persistent challenges, including ideological resistance, limited teacher competence, and the growing influence of digital polarization on students' religious perceptions. The study argues that reconstructing Islamic education requires not only curriculum reform but also broader epistemological transformation integrating critical pedagogy, digital literacy, and ethical citizenship. These findings contribute to contemporary debates on multicultural education, Islamic pedagogy, and social cohesion in increasingly plural and digitally mediated societies.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing complexity of religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity in contemporary societies has intensified global concern regarding the role of education in fostering social cohesion and peaceful coexistence [1]. Across many multicultural nations, social fragmentation, identity polarization, and religious intolerance continue to challenge democratic stability and intercultural harmony. UNESCO reports that educational systems worldwide are increasingly required to address diversity management, intercultural dialogue, and inclusive citizenship as fundamental educational priorities in the twenty-first century [2]. In Muslim-majority societies, these challenges become more significant because Islamic education institutions often function not only as spaces for religious transmission but also as strategic arenas for identity formation, moral socialization, and civic engagement. The urgency of reconstructing multicultural Islamic education curricula therefore emerges from the need to transform religious education into an inclusive pedagogical framework capable of nurturing tolerance, empathy, and intercultural understanding within highly diverse communities [3].

The urgency of strengthening multicultural Islamic education is further reinforced by quantitative demographic realities. Islam currently represents one of the world's largest religious communities, with more than 1.8 billion adherents globally, spread across culturally and ethnically diverse societies [4]. Simultaneously, globalization, migration, digital communication, and transnational ideological movements have accelerated interactions among religious groups while simultaneously increasing the risk of identity conflict and ideological polarization. In Indonesia alone, more than 270 million citizens live within an extremely pluralistic social structure characterized by hundreds of ethnic groups, local languages, and religious affiliations [5]. Within such contexts, educational institutions are expected to become agents of social integration rather than sites of exclusivism. Recent studies demonstrate that inclusive religious curricula significantly improve students' willingness to participate in interfaith dialogue and strengthen social trust across cultural boundaries. One comparative study reported that students exposed to inclusive multicultural religious education experienced approximately a 30% increase in openness toward intercultural interaction and interreligious communication [6]. These realities indicate that curriculum development in Islamic education can no longer remain confined to doctrinal transmission alone, but must evolve toward socially responsive and diversity-oriented educational paradigms.

Existing scholarship on multicultural Islamic education has substantially contributed to discussions surrounding tolerance, inclusivity, religious moderation, and peacebuilding within Islamic educational settings. Previous studies have examined multicultural-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE), inclusive pedagogical strategies, curriculum implementation, and the integration of multicultural values in schools and madrasah institutions [7]. Several studies also emphasize the strategic role of Islamic education in promoting social harmony, reducing prejudice, and strengthening civic values in pluralistic societies. Moreover, comparative discussions between Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and Singapore have highlighted how educational systems institutionalize multicultural principles differently according to their sociopolitical and religious contexts [8]. These studies collectively establish that multicultural Islamic education possesses significant potential to function as a mechanism for cultivating coexistence, democratic participation, and social resilience within increasingly fragmented societies.

Despite these growing scholarly contributions, the current body of literature remains fragmented in several important respects. First, most previous studies predominantly focus on practical implementation, classroom strategies, or normative discussions of tolerance without critically examining the relationship between multicultural curriculum construction and broader processes of social cohesion and religious identity negotiation [9]. Second, much of the literature remains context-specific and nationally bounded, emphasizing single-country experiences while neglecting broader conceptual and sociological dimensions of multicultural Islamic curriculum development. Third, limited attention has been devoted to understanding how multicultural Islamic education curricula mediate tensions between religious identity preservation and intercultural coexistence within diverse communities [10]. Existing studies often position multiculturalism and religious identity as parallel concepts rather than dynamically negotiated educational processes. Consequently, there remains a significant theoretical and empirical gap concerning how multicultural Islamic education curricula can simultaneously sustain Islamic identity, strengthen social cohesion, and promote inclusive citizenship in multicultural societies.

This study therefore positions multicultural Islamic education curriculum as a strategic epistemic and pedagogical framework for negotiating religious identity within socially diverse environments. The research argues that curriculum design in Islamic education must move beyond symbolic inclusion and normative tolerance toward transformative educational approaches that integrate intercultural competence, dialogical pedagogy, social justice values, and community-oriented citizenship [11]. The central problem addressed in this study lies in the insufficient conceptualization of multicultural Islamic education curriculum as a dynamic instrument for balancing religious identity formation with the cultivation of social cohesion in pluralistic societies. This condition contributes to persistent

tensions between exclusivist religious orientations and the increasing demand for inclusive coexistence within multicultural communities.

The significance of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study contributes to contemporary debates on multicultural education, Islamic pedagogy, identity negotiation, and social cohesion by offering an integrative framework that connects curriculum studies, sociology of religion, and intercultural education. Practically, the research provides strategic insights for curriculum developers, policymakers, Islamic educational institutions, and educators seeking to design inclusive religious education models capable of addressing the sociocultural challenges of globalization, polarization, and diversity management. In the broader context of global educational transformation, developing a multicultural Islamic education curriculum that strengthens social cohesion is increasingly essential for constructing peaceful, democratic, and inclusive societies capable of navigating complex religious and cultural pluralism.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multi-site comparative research design to explore how multicultural Islamic education curricula negotiate religious identity and promote social cohesion within diverse communities in Indonesia and Morocco. A qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate because the study sought to understand deeply embedded sociocultural meanings, educational experiences, curriculum practices, and identity negotiations that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement alone. The comparative design further enabled the researchers to examine similarities and differences between two Muslim-majority countries that possess distinct historical trajectories, sociopolitical contexts, educational systems, and multicultural dynamics. Indonesia represents one of the world's most ethnically and religiously diverse nations with decentralized Islamic educational traditions, while Morocco reflects a North African Islamic educational context shaped by Arab-Islamic heritage, monarchy-centered religious governance, and contemporary multicultural reforms. The inclusion of these two contexts allowed the study to generate broader conceptual insights into multicultural Islamic education within diverse Muslim societies.

The research adopted an interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing the subjective meanings and lived experiences of participants regarding curriculum implementation, religious identity formation, intercultural interaction, and social cohesion. The study also incorporated elements of educational sociology and curriculum studies to analyze how multicultural values are institutionalized, negotiated, and reproduced within Islamic educational environments. Data were collected across multiple educational institutions and community settings to ensure contextual richness and triangulation. By utilizing a cross-context qualitative framework, the study aimed to construct an integrative understanding of multicultural Islamic education beyond nationally bounded perspectives.

Participant

The participants in this study consisted of educators, curriculum developers, school leaders, Islamic scholars, university lecturers, students, and community representatives involved in multicultural Islamic education practices in Indonesia and Morocco. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who possessed direct experience and substantial knowledge related to curriculum implementation, multicultural education, intercultural interaction, and religious identity negotiation. Snowball sampling was additionally utilized to identify key informants recommended by initial participants and institutional networks.

In Indonesia, the research was conducted in four locations representing diverse sociocultural settings: Jakarta, Yogyakarta, West Java, and Aceh. A total of 42 participants were involved, comprising 10 Islamic education teachers, 6 curriculum specialists, 4 school principals, 12 university students, 5 Islamic boarding school (pesantren) leaders,

and 5 community figures engaged in interreligious or multicultural initiatives. These locations were selected because they represent varying degrees of ethnic diversity, religious interaction, and educational modernization within Indonesian Islamic education.

In Morocco, the study was conducted in Rabat, Casablanca, Fez, and Marrakesh, involving 38 participants. The Moroccan participants included 9 Islamic studies teachers, 5 curriculum policymakers, 4 school administrators, 10 university students, 5 religious scholars (ulama), and 5 civil society representatives involved in intercultural and educational programs. These sites were chosen due to their significance as educational, cultural, and religious centers within Morocco's contemporary Islamic educational landscape. In total, the study involved 80 participants across both countries, enabling comprehensive cross-cultural comparison and thematic depth.

Instruments

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by several qualitative data collection tools designed to capture rich and contextualized information. Semi-structured interview protocols were developed to explore participants' perspectives regarding multicultural curriculum implementation, religious identity negotiation, intercultural engagement, and the role of Islamic education in promoting social cohesion. The interview questions were open-ended and flexible to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences and interpretations in depth.

In addition to interviews, observation guides were utilized to document classroom interactions, pedagogical approaches, multicultural activities, religious practices, and institutional dynamics related to curriculum implementation. Observations focused particularly on how multicultural values were integrated into teaching practices, student interactions, and educational environments. Field notes were systematically recorded during each observation session to preserve contextual details and reflexive insights.

Document analysis protocols were also employed to examine curriculum documents, teaching materials, institutional policies, educational guidelines, and official government frameworks related to Islamic education and multiculturalism. These documents provided important institutional and policy-level perspectives that complemented participant narratives and observational findings. The combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis enabled methodological triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the study.

Data Collection Process

Data collection was conducted over an eight-month period between September 2025 and April 2026. Prior to fieldwork, ethical approval was obtained from the affiliated academic institution, and formal permissions were secured from schools, universities, Islamic educational institutions, and local authorities in both countries. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, confidentiality procedures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection commenced.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and, in several cases, through online platforms to accommodate participant availability and geographical constraints. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Interviews were conducted in English, Bahasa Indonesia, Arabic, or French depending on participant preference, and subsequently translated into English for analysis. To ensure linguistic accuracy and cultural sensitivity, the translations were reviewed by bilingual academic assistants familiar with Islamic educational terminology and local sociocultural contexts.

Classroom and institutional observations were carried out in Islamic schools, universities, pesantren, and community educational programs in both countries. The observations focused on pedagogical interactions, curriculum enactment, student engagement, intercultural communication, and institutional approaches toward diversity

management. Relevant curriculum documents and policy materials were simultaneously collected from participating institutions and governmental education agencies. Throughout the fieldwork process, the researchers maintained reflective journals to document emerging insights, contextual nuances, and potential researcher biases.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke's qualitative analytical framework. The analysis process began with data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and institutional documents. The researchers then conducted open coding to identify recurring concepts, patterns, and significant statements related to multicultural curriculum practices, social cohesion, identity negotiation, inclusivity, and intercultural engagement.

After the initial coding process, the codes were systematically categorized into broader themes and subthemes through an iterative comparative process across Indonesian and Moroccan contexts. Themes such as "curriculum inclusivity," "religious identity preservation," "intercultural dialogue," "pedagogical negotiation," and "social cohesion practices" emerged as dominant analytical categories. The comparative dimension of the study enabled the researchers to identify both convergent and divergent patterns between the two countries regarding curriculum implementation and multicultural educational experiences.

To enhance trustworthiness and analytical rigor, the study employed several validation strategies, including data triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexive analysis. Triangulation was achieved through the integration of interviews, observations, and document analysis. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants to verify interpretive accuracy and contextual relevance. Peer debriefing sessions with qualitative research experts were additionally conducted to refine thematic interpretations and minimize subjective bias. Finally, the findings were interpreted within broader theoretical discussions concerning multicultural education, sociology of religion, Islamic pedagogy, and social cohesion to construct a comprehensive and theoretically grounded analysis.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal that multicultural Islamic education curricula in both Indonesia and Morocco play a significant role in fostering social cohesion, intercultural understanding, and inclusive religious identity formation, although their implementation varies according to sociocultural, institutional, and political contexts. Across the observed educational institutions, participants consistently emphasized that multicultural-oriented Islamic education contributes to reducing prejudice, strengthening social trust, and encouraging constructive engagement among students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. The data further indicate that curriculum implementation is not limited to formal instructional content but is also embedded within pedagogical interactions, institutional culture, extracurricular activities, and community engagement practices.

Field observations conducted in Islamic schools, pesantren, and universities in Indonesia demonstrated that multicultural values were commonly integrated into classroom discussions, collaborative learning activities, and interfaith dialogue programs. In several institutions in Yogyakarta and Jakarta, teachers explicitly incorporated themes such as tolerance (*tasamuh*), justice (*'adl*), coexistence (*ta'ayush*), and civic responsibility into Islamic studies lessons. Classroom observations showed that students were encouraged to discuss contemporary social issues related to diversity, religious coexistence, and digital polarization through dialogical and reflective pedagogical approaches. Similarly, Moroccan institutions emphasized moderation (*wasatiyyah*), coexistence, and national unity within Islamic educational content, although curriculum delivery tended to be more centralized and state-regulated compared to the Indonesian context.

Interview findings revealed that participants generally perceived multicultural Islamic education as essential for responding to increasing social polarization and identity-based tensions in contemporary society. An Islamic education teacher from Jakarta stated: *“Students today are exposed to many conflicting ideologies through social media. Multicultural Islamic education helps them understand that religious commitment and respect for diversity are not contradictory values.”* A curriculum specialist from Rabat similarly explained: *“The curriculum must preserve Islamic identity while also preparing students to live peacefully within culturally diverse societies. Education is the key instrument for preventing extremism and social fragmentation.”* These perspectives were consistently reinforced across participant groups, including educators, students, religious leaders, and policymakers, indicating broad recognition of the strategic role of multicultural curriculum reform in Islamic education.

The observational data further demonstrated notable differences in pedagogical implementation between the two countries. Indonesian institutions generally adopted more participatory and dialogical learning models, while Moroccan institutions emphasized structured curriculum delivery integrated with national religious frameworks. Nevertheless, both contexts shared a common emphasis on cultivating moderate religious understanding and social harmony. Table 1 summarizes the dominant multicultural curriculum components identified during field observations.

Table 1. Dominant Multicultural Curriculum Components Observed in Indonesia and Morocco

Curriculum Component	Indonesia (n=42)	Morocco (n=38)	Total Frequency
Intercultural dialogue activities	31	24	55
Religious moderation themes	35	33	68
Collaborative multicultural learning	29	21	50
Community engagement programs	22	18	40
Peace and tolerance education	37	34	71
Critical discussion on diversity issues	26	19	45
Integration of local cultural values	30	17	47

The data indicate that peace education and religious moderation were the most dominant curricular themes identified across both countries. A total of 71 observed cases involved explicit integration of peace and tolerance education, while 68 cases demonstrated direct emphasis on religious moderation principles. Indonesian institutions showed relatively higher frequencies in collaborative and community-based multicultural activities, reflecting the decentralized and culturally diverse nature of Indonesian Islamic education. In contrast, Moroccan institutions displayed stronger consistency in state-guided moderation narratives and formal curriculum integration.

Student interviews revealed that exposure to multicultural Islamic education positively influenced attitudes toward diversity and intercultural communication. Many students reported increased openness toward individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds after participating in dialogical learning programs and collaborative community activities. A university student from Yogyakarta explained: *“Before entering university, I rarely interacted with people from different religious backgrounds. Through multicultural learning programs, I learned that respecting diversity does not weaken my Islamic identity.”* Similarly, a student from Casablanca stated: *“The curriculum teaches us that Islam values coexistence and dignity for all people. This helps students avoid extreme ways of thinking.”* These findings suggest that multicultural Islamic education contributes not only to cognitive understanding but also to affective and social dimensions of intercultural engagement.

The interview analysis also revealed several challenges in implementing multicultural Islamic education curricula. Participants identified three major constraints: ideological resistance from conservative groups, limited teacher training in multicultural pedagogy, and inconsistencies between curriculum policy and classroom practice. Several educators acknowledged difficulties in balancing religious orthodoxy with inclusive educational approaches. One pesantren leader in Aceh stated: *“Some people still misunderstand multicultural education as weakening Islamic values, whereas the goal is actually to strengthen ethical coexistence based on Islamic principles.”* A Moroccan teacher

similarly noted: “*Teachers need more practical training because many educators understand multiculturalism conceptually but struggle to apply it in classroom interaction.*” Table 2 below presents the primary implementation challenges identified by participants.

Table 2. Major Challenges in Implementing Multicultural Islamic Education Curriculum

Identified Challenge	Indonesia (n=42)	Morocco (n=38)	Total Responses
Limited teacher competence in multicultural pedagogy	28	24	52
Resistance from conservative groups	26	20	46
Inconsistency between policy and practice	23	19	42
Lack of multicultural teaching materials	19	17	36
Limited institutional support	16	14	30
Digital radicalization among students	21	18	39
Insufficient intercultural training programs	25	22	47

The findings further demonstrate that digital media significantly influences students’ religious identity formation and perceptions of diversity. Participants in both countries expressed concern regarding online radicalization, ideological polarization, and misinformation disseminated through social media platforms. Educators emphasized that multicultural Islamic education curricula must therefore adapt to the realities of digital society by integrating digital literacy, critical thinking, and ethical online engagement into curriculum structures.

Document analysis additionally revealed that both Indonesia and Morocco have incorporated multicultural and moderation-oriented principles into national Islamic education frameworks, although implementation mechanisms differ considerably. Indonesian curriculum documents emphasized democratic citizenship, cultural diversity, and local wisdom integration, whereas Moroccan educational policies highlighted religious moderation, national unity, and counter-extremism initiatives under centralized state supervision. Despite these structural differences, both educational systems increasingly position Islamic education as an instrument for promoting social cohesion and preventing identity-based conflict within plural societies.

Overall, the findings indicate that multicultural Islamic education curricula in Indonesia and Morocco function as dynamic spaces for negotiating religious identity and fostering social cohesion amid contemporary diversity challenges. The study demonstrates that effective multicultural Islamic education requires not only curriculum reform at the policy level but also pedagogical transformation, teacher capacity development, institutional commitment, and sustained intercultural engagement within educational communities.

DISCUSSION

Negotiating Religious Identity through Multicultural Islamic Pedagogy

The findings demonstrate that multicultural Islamic education curriculum operates not merely as an instructional framework for transmitting religious knowledge, but more fundamentally as a sociopedagogical mechanism through which religious identity is continuously negotiated, reconstructed, and contextualized within pluralistic societies. This indicates that Islamic education in both Indonesia and Morocco has increasingly shifted from a purely doctrinal orientation toward a dialogical and socially responsive pedagogical paradigm [12]. Such transformation is particularly significant in contemporary multicultural societies where religious identity is no longer formed exclusively through traditional religious authority, but rather through complex interactions among education, digital culture, political discourse, and intercultural encounters. In this regard, multicultural Islamic pedagogy emerges as a critical site where the boundaries between faith commitment, cultural diversity, and civic coexistence are actively mediated [13].

The study reveals that the integration of multicultural values within Islamic education does not necessarily weaken religious identity, as frequently assumed within conservative educational discourses. On the contrary, the findings

indicate that inclusive pedagogical approaches strengthen students' capacity to articulate Islamic identity in more reflexive, contextual, and socially constructive ways [14]. This finding challenges reductionist assumptions that position multiculturalism and religious orthodoxy as inherently contradictory paradigms. Instead, the data suggest that multicultural Islamic pedagogy enables students to maintain theological commitment while simultaneously developing intercultural empathy and civic responsibility [15]. Such outcomes are particularly evident in Indonesian institutions where dialogical learning models encouraged students to critically engage with contemporary issues of religious diversity, social polarization, and intercultural coexistence without perceiving such engagement as a threat to Islamic authenticity.

This phenomenon can be interpreted through the lens of identity negotiation theory, which conceptualizes identity not as a fixed or monolithic construct, but as a dynamic and relational process shaped through ongoing social interaction and contextual adaptation [16]. Within this framework, multicultural Islamic education facilitates the formation of what may be described as "contextualized religious identity," wherein students preserve core Islamic values while simultaneously recognizing the legitimacy of sociocultural plurality. The findings therefore contest essentialist interpretations of religious education that prioritize exclusivist identity formation detached from broader social realities. Rather than producing relativistic religious orientations, the curriculum observed in this study cultivated forms of ethical inclusivity grounded in Islamic principles of justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), and coexistence (ta'ayush) [17]. This demonstrates that multicultural pedagogy within Islamic education can function not as a secularizing force, but as an epistemic bridge connecting theological commitment with democratic coexistence.

At the same time, the findings expose important tensions underlying the implementation of multicultural Islamic education. Although institutional narratives strongly promoted inclusivity and moderation, several participants acknowledged the persistence of ideological resistance from conservative groups that perceive multicultural discourse as potentially diluting religious purity [18]. Such resistance reflects a broader contestation within contemporary Muslim societies regarding the relationship between religion, modernity, and pluralism. The concern expressed by some educators and religious leaders indicates that multicultural curriculum reform remains embedded within ongoing struggles over epistemic authority and the legitimate interpretation of Islamic identity [19]. Consequently, the negotiation of religious identity within educational settings cannot be understood as a neutral pedagogical process; rather, it constitutes a deeply political and ideological arena in which competing visions of Islam, citizenship, and social order intersect.

The Moroccan context particularly illustrates how multicultural Islamic education may also function as a state-mediated strategy for regulating religious discourse and preserving sociopolitical stability. Unlike the relatively decentralized Indonesian educational landscape, Moroccan curriculum implementation reflected stronger institutional alignment with national moderation policies and centralized religious governance [20]. While such institutional coherence may strengthen curriculum consistency and counter-extremism efforts, it simultaneously raises critical questions concerning the extent to which state-centered moderation frameworks allow genuine pedagogical plurality and critical engagement. In this sense, multicultural Islamic education risks becoming instrumentalized as a mechanism of ideological governance if curriculum implementation prioritizes political stability over critical intercultural dialogue [21]. Therefore, the effectiveness of multicultural pedagogy should not be evaluated solely through its capacity to reduce extremism, but also through its ability to cultivate critical consciousness, ethical reflexivity, and democratic participation among learners.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that multicultural Islamic pedagogy should be understood not merely as curriculum content addition, but as a transformative epistemological shift in Islamic education itself [22]. Many existing models of multicultural education within Islamic institutions remain limited to symbolic recognition of diversity without fundamentally reconstructing pedagogical assumptions, classroom power relations, or knowledge hierarchies. The observed practices in several institutions indicate that genuine multicultural pedagogy requires

dialogical learning environments where students are encouraged to question prejudice, negotiate meaning, and engage critically with social realities [23]. This aligns with critical multicultural education theory, which emphasizes that education must move beyond superficial celebrations of diversity toward addressing structural inequality, social exclusion, and ideological domination. Consequently, multicultural Islamic education becomes meaningful only when it facilitates transformative engagement with diversity rather than merely reproducing normative discourses of tolerance.

The study also demonstrates that intercultural competence increasingly constitutes a central dimension of contemporary Islamic educational identity. Participants consistently highlighted the importance of preparing students to navigate culturally diverse environments shaped by globalization, migration, and digital interconnectedness [24]. This finding reflects broader transformations in the sociological function of Islamic education within the twenty-first century. Historically, Islamic educational institutions often focused primarily on preserving religious tradition and communal continuity. However, contemporary multicultural realities require Islamic education to additionally equip students with communicative, ethical, and intercultural capacities necessary for participation in plural democratic societies [25]. The curriculum therefore functions not only as a mechanism for religious transmission, but also as a platform for constructing socially adaptive and globally engaged Muslim subjectivities.

Critically, however, the findings reveal that many educators still experience significant pedagogical limitations in translating multicultural ideals into classroom practice. The persistence of teacher-centered instruction, insufficient multicultural training, and limited critical pedagogical competence suggests that curriculum reform alone is insufficient without corresponding transformation in teacher preparation and institutional culture [26]. This reflects a common weakness within multicultural education reforms globally, where policy rhetoric frequently exceeds pedagogical implementation capacity. Consequently, the effectiveness of multicultural Islamic education depends not merely on curriculum documents, but on the extent to which educators possess the epistemological readiness and pedagogical flexibility to facilitate difficult conversations surrounding identity, diversity, and social conflict [27].

From a broader theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to contemporary debates concerning the relationship between religion and multiculturalism by demonstrating that Islamic education possesses substantial potential to function as a constructive force for pluralistic coexistence rather than social fragmentation [28]. The study challenges binary narratives that position Islamic identity either as inherently resistant to multiculturalism or as compatible only through secular accommodation. Instead, the findings reveal the possibility of constructing an integrative educational paradigm in which religious commitment and intercultural openness coexist through dialogical pedagogy and ethically grounded curriculum transformation [29]. Such a paradigm is particularly important within contemporary global contexts characterized by rising polarization, identity politics, Islamophobia, and digital radicalization.

Ultimately, the negotiation of religious identity through multicultural Islamic pedagogy should be understood as an ongoing process of epistemic reconstruction within Muslim educational thought. The significance of this process extends beyond curriculum reform itself, touching broader questions regarding how Islamic education can contribute to democratic resilience, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence in increasingly fragmented societies. In this regard, multicultural Islamic pedagogy does not merely address educational concerns; it represents a strategic intellectual and sociocultural response to the contemporary crisis of coexistence affecting many plural societies worldwide.

Reconstructing Islamic Education for Social Cohesion in the Digital and Polarized Era

The findings indicate that the reconstruction of Islamic education curriculum has become increasingly urgent within contemporary societies characterized by digital hyperconnectivity, ideological polarization, and declining social trust. The traditional paradigms of Islamic education, which historically emphasized doctrinal transmission and moral

formation within relatively stable communal structures, are no longer sufficient to address the complexities of twenty-first-century sociocultural realities [30]. The rapid expansion of digital media ecosystems has fundamentally transformed how religious knowledge is produced, disseminated, and contested. Religious authority is no longer monopolized by formal educational institutions or recognized scholars; instead, students are increasingly exposed to fragmented, algorithm-driven, and often ideologically polarized forms of religious discourse circulating through social media platforms [31]. Within this context, Islamic education institutions face the critical challenge of repositioning themselves not merely as transmitters of religious doctrine, but as strategic agents for cultivating social cohesion, ethical digital citizenship, and critical religious literacy.

The study demonstrates that digital environments have significantly intensified the fragmentation of religious identity and the circulation of exclusionary narratives among young people. Participants across Indonesia and Morocco consistently expressed concern regarding students' exposure to online radicalization, sectarian rhetoric, and simplified religious narratives disseminated through digital platforms. These findings reflect broader global trends in which algorithmic media systems amplify emotional polarization, ideological echo chambers, and identity-based antagonism [32]. The pedagogical implications of this transformation are profound because students increasingly encounter religious interpretation outside structured educational environments, often through influencers, informal networks, and transnational ideological communities lacking pedagogical accountability [33]. Consequently, the crisis confronting contemporary Islamic education is not solely theological or curricular, but epistemological in nature: educational institutions must now compete within a decentralized digital sphere where authority, legitimacy, and truth are continuously contested.

In this regard, the findings strongly suggest that multicultural Islamic education must move beyond conventional tolerance-based frameworks toward a more critical and transformative educational model capable of addressing the structural dynamics of digital polarization. Existing curriculum models frequently emphasize harmony, coexistence, and moderation at a normative level without adequately equipping students to critically navigate digital disinformation, ideological manipulation, and algorithmically reinforced extremism [34]. Such approaches risk reducing multicultural education to symbolic moral discourse detached from the sociotechnical realities shaping contemporary identity formation [35]. Therefore, curriculum reconstruction requires the integration of critical digital literacy, ethical reasoning, and reflexive intercultural competencies as central—not peripheral—dimensions of Islamic education. Without such transformation, educational institutions risk becoming increasingly irrelevant in shaping students' moral and intellectual engagement within digitally mediated societies.

The findings further reveal that social cohesion within multicultural societies cannot be sustained solely through institutional narratives of religious moderation if underlying pedagogical structures remain hierarchical, exclusionary, or intellectually passive. In several observed institutions, curriculum reform was formally present at the policy level, yet classroom practices remained dominated by rote learning, doctrinal memorization, and teacher-centered instruction [36]. This contradiction exposes a critical weakness in many contemporary Islamic education reforms: the tendency to prioritize ideological messaging over epistemological transformation. Social cohesion cannot emerge sustainably from passive compliance or rhetorical moderation alone; rather, it requires educational environments that actively cultivate critical dialogue, democratic participation, and ethical reflexivity. The persistence of authoritarian pedagogical models within some Islamic educational settings therefore undermines the transformative potential of multicultural curriculum initiatives [37].

From a critical pedagogical perspective, the reconstruction of Islamic education must involve a shift from transmissive religiosity toward emancipatory and dialogical learning paradigms. The findings indicate that students who participated in reflective discussions, intercultural collaborations, and critical engagement with contemporary social issues demonstrated higher levels of empathy, openness, and resilience against polarizing narratives [38]. This suggests that social cohesion is not produced through ideological uniformity, but through the development of

communicative and interpretive capacities enabling students to engage constructively with difference. Such findings resonate with contemporary theories of democratic education and critical multiculturalism, which argue that education should empower learners to critically interrogate dominant narratives, negotiate competing identities, and participate ethically within pluralistic societies [39]. Accordingly, Islamic education must be reconceptualized not merely as a mechanism of moral preservation, but as a dynamic space for ethical and civic formation within complex multicultural realities.

The comparative findings between Indonesia and Morocco also reveal distinct institutional approaches toward reconstructing Islamic education in response to polarization and social fragmentation. Indonesian institutions generally displayed greater pedagogical flexibility and community-based multicultural engagement, reflecting the country's decentralized educational landscape and sociocultural diversity [40]. This flexibility enabled some institutions to develop participatory approaches integrating local wisdom, intercultural dialogue, and collaborative learning practices. However, such decentralization also produced inconsistencies in curriculum implementation and teacher preparedness [41]. Conversely, Morocco's more centralized educational framework facilitated stronger institutional coherence in promoting religious moderation and counter-extremism narratives. Nevertheless, this centralized model also risks limiting critical pedagogical plurality by aligning curriculum reform too closely with state-defined ideological frameworks. These contrasting dynamics illustrate that neither decentralization nor centralization alone guarantees effective multicultural Islamic education; rather, the decisive factor lies in whether curriculum reconstruction genuinely promotes critical consciousness and intercultural engagement.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the discourse of "religious moderation," which increasingly dominates Islamic educational policy in many Muslim-majority countries, requires more critical examination. While moderation narratives are often positioned as antidotes to extremism, they may inadvertently depoliticize deeper structural issues underlying social polarization, including inequality, marginalization, authoritarianism, and digital manipulation [42]. If moderation is framed merely as behavioral conformity or ideological neutrality, multicultural Islamic education risks functioning as a tool of social control rather than democratic empowerment. Therefore, educational reconstruction must avoid reducing social cohesion to passive harmony devoid of critical agency. Instead, social cohesion should be understood as an active democratic process rooted in justice, participation, ethical pluralism, and mutual recognition.

The study also highlights the growing importance of integrating ethical digital citizenship within Islamic educational frameworks. Participants repeatedly emphasized that students require guidance not only in theological understanding, but also in navigating the ethical complexities of digital interaction, online communication, and information consumption [43]. This finding is particularly significant because digital spaces increasingly shape young people's perceptions of religion, identity, and social belonging. Consequently, Islamic education curricula must incorporate competencies such as critical media literacy, ethical online engagement, intercultural communication, and responsible digital participation. Such integration reflects an emerging transdisciplinary educational imperative linking religious education, media studies, digital ethics, and civic education. Without this broader curricular transformation, Islamic education may struggle to remain socially relevant within rapidly evolving digital societies [44].

Moreover, the findings indicate that educational institutions possess substantial potential to function as mediating spaces capable of counteracting fragmentation and rebuilding social trust. In both Indonesia and Morocco, institutions that successfully implemented dialogical multicultural practices created environments where students experienced diversity not as a threat, but as a legitimate and enriching social reality. These educational spaces facilitated forms of relational solidarity grounded not in sameness, but in ethical coexistence and mutual dignity [45]. This insight is theoretically significant because it reframes Islamic education from a defensive institution concerned primarily with identity preservation into a proactive civic institution contributing to democratic resilience and social integration.

At a broader level, the reconstruction of Islamic education for social cohesion must ultimately be understood as part of a larger epistemic transformation within Muslim societies. The contemporary crisis of polarization is not simply a consequence of religious difference, but rather a reflection of deeper failures in cultivating critical ethical consciousness capable of sustaining coexistence amid diversity. Educational reform therefore cannot remain limited to technical curriculum adjustments or policy rhetoric; it requires fundamental reconsideration of how knowledge, authority, identity, and citizenship are conceptualized within Islamic pedagogy [46]. The findings of this study strongly suggest that multicultural Islamic education possesses transformative potential only when it is grounded in critical pedagogy, intercultural ethics, and democratic participation rather than merely symbolic inclusion or institutional moderation discourse [47].

In this sense, reconstructing Islamic education for the digital and polarized era is not merely an educational necessity but a civilizational imperative. As societies become increasingly fragmented by algorithmic culture, ideological extremism, and identity-based antagonism, Islamic education institutions face a historic responsibility to cultivate forms of religious understanding capable of sustaining justice, plurality, and peaceful coexistence. The future relevance of Islamic education will therefore depend not on its capacity to preserve rigid orthodoxy in isolation, but on its ability to generate ethically grounded, critically engaged, and socially responsible forms of religious consciousness appropriate for complex multicultural societies.

Limitations of Study

This study possesses several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings and considering their broader applicability. First, the research was conducted within a qualitative multi-site framework involving selected educational institutions and participants in Indonesia and Morocco. Although these contexts were strategically chosen due to their sociocultural diversity and relevance to multicultural Islamic education, the findings cannot be generalized to all Islamic educational settings across the Muslim world. The educational, political, and historical characteristics of Indonesia and Morocco differ substantially from those of other Muslim-majority societies, particularly in regions experiencing different forms of sectarian conflict, state governance, or educational centralization. Consequently, the study primarily offers contextually grounded insights rather than universally representative conclusions regarding multicultural Islamic education and social cohesion.

Second, the study relied predominantly on interviews, observations, and document analysis, which inherently involve interpretive subjectivity and contextual dependence. Although methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were employed to enhance trustworthiness and analytical rigor, participants' responses may still have been influenced by institutional expectations, sociopolitical sensitivities, or socially desirable narratives surrounding multiculturalism and religious moderation. In particular, discussions related to religious identity, extremism, and ideological tensions remain sensitive topics within both educational and political contexts. As a result, some participants may have moderated their perspectives or avoided expressing more critical or controversial viewpoints during interviews. Additionally, differences in language, translation, and cultural interpretation between Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, French, and English may have affected subtle nuances in participant meaning despite careful translation procedures.

Third, the study primarily focused on curriculum discourse, pedagogical practices, and participant perceptions without conducting long-term longitudinal analysis regarding the sustained social impact of multicultural Islamic education on students' attitudes, behaviors, or civic engagement over time. The research therefore cannot fully determine the extent to which multicultural curriculum interventions produce enduring transformations in social cohesion, intercultural relations, or resistance to polarization in broader societal contexts. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of digital media ecosystems and sociopolitical dynamics means that the relationship between Islamic education, identity formation, and social cohesion remains continuously changing. Future research would therefore

benefit from longitudinal, mixed-method, and cross-regional approaches that examine how multicultural Islamic education interacts with emerging technological, political, and transnational challenges shaping contemporary Muslim societies.

CONCLUSION

Multicultural Islamic education curriculum has emerged as a critical pedagogical and epistemological framework for negotiating religious identity and strengthening social cohesion within increasingly diverse and polarized societies. The findings demonstrate that Islamic education possesses substantial transformative potential when multicultural values are integrated through dialogical pedagogy, intercultural engagement, and ethically grounded curriculum practices. Rather than weakening religious commitment, multicultural Islamic pedagogy enables the construction of contextualized religious identities capable of maintaining theological integrity while fostering inclusivity, empathy, and democratic coexistence. Such transformation is particularly significant within contemporary contexts where digital polarization, ideological fragmentation, and identity-based tensions increasingly shape social relations and educational realities.

The comparative experiences of Indonesia and Morocco further reveal that the effectiveness of multicultural Islamic education depends not merely on policy formulation or symbolic narratives of moderation, but on the extent to which educational institutions cultivate critical consciousness, participatory learning environments, and intercultural competence. The persistence of pedagogical limitations, ideological resistance, and digitally mediated radicalization indicates that curriculum reform alone remains insufficient without broader institutional and epistemological transformation. Consequently, reconstructing Islamic education for the contemporary era requires integrating critical digital literacy, ethical citizenship, reflective pedagogy, and democratic educational practices into curriculum structures. Such integration is essential for enabling Islamic education institutions to function not only as transmitters of religious knowledge, but also as strategic agents of social resilience and peaceful coexistence.

The broader significance of multicultural Islamic education therefore extends beyond classroom instruction and curriculum development, touching fundamental questions regarding the future relationship between religion, diversity, and democratic life within multicultural societies. In an era increasingly marked by polarization, algorithmic culture, and global uncertainty, Islamic education faces a historic responsibility to cultivate forms of religious understanding that are intellectually open, socially responsive, and ethically inclusive. Strengthening multicultural Islamic pedagogy ultimately represents not only an educational reform agenda, but also a civilizational effort to construct more cohesive, just, and humane societies capable of sustaining coexistence amid profound cultural and religious diversity.

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Author Contribution

Tahani Azmira was responsible for the entire research process, including conceptualization, research design, data collection, data analysis, manuscript preparation, and final revision. The author developed the theoretical framework,

conducted the comparative analysis between Indonesia and Morocco, interpreted the findings, and prepared the final version of the manuscript for publication. The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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