

# Development of Pluralist and Multicultural Approaches In PAI Learning: A Conceptual Model For Strengthening Students' Inclusivity Competencies

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## ABSTRACT

In a culturally and religiously diverse society like Indonesia, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) must promote values of inclusivity, tolerance, and respect. This study aims to develop a conceptual model that integrates pluralist and multicultural approaches into PAI learning to enhance students' inclusivity competencies. Using a qualitative methodology, the research adopts a systematic literature review analyzing primary and secondary sources, including academic books, journal articles, and policy documents. Content analysis was employed to extract key themes related to the implementation of pluralism and multiculturalism in Islamic education. The findings indicate that an effective integration requires the alignment of curriculum design, teaching methods, teacher roles, learning materials, and evaluation systems with inclusive values. It emphasizes that multicultural education focuses on cultural and ethnic diversity, while pluralist education addresses religious pluralism and interfaith understanding. Both approaches are complementary in creating an inclusive and peaceful educational environment. The study concludes that the conceptual model can serve as a foundation for reforming PAI by fostering tolerance, empathy, and cooperation among learners. It also suggests that further empirical research and implementation trials are needed to test the model in practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, societies around the world are becoming increasingly interconnected through globalization, migration, and digital communication. These developments have led to the intensification of cultural and religious encounters in everyday life, creating both opportunities and challenges for social cohesion. In such a context, education is not only expected to provide academic knowledge but also to cultivate intercultural competence, empathy, and an inclusive worldview among students. This is particularly vital in religious education, which often serves as a foundation for shaping moral values, identity, and social attitudes [1].

Indonesia, as a nation characterized by extraordinary cultural and religious diversity, finds itself at the heart of these global dynamics. With over 17,000 islands and hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, and belief systems, Indonesia stands as one of the most pluralistic societies in the world. As the country with the largest Muslim population globally, this diversity is deeply embedded within its Islamic community [2]. Muslims in Indonesia come from various ethnic backgrounds and interpret their faith through different cultural lenses and religious traditions. This reality demands a rethinking of how Islamic religious education is conceptualized and delivered across the country [3].

In the current era of globalization, cultural and religious diversity has increasingly become a striking reality in various parts of the world, including in Indonesia. As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has an extraordinarily diverse cultural and religious wealth. This diversity includes ethnic, linguistic, and cultural dimensions and variations in religious understanding and practice [1].

A clear and rational conceptual foundation is needed regarding the plural and multicultural approach in the context of Islamic religious education. Religious pluralism refers to the recognition of the existence of various religions that coexist peacefully with mutual respect. Meanwhile, multiculturalism reflects the recognition and appreciation of cultural and ethnic diversity in society [3]. These two concepts are becoming increasingly crucial in Islamic religious education to encourage the creation of social harmony and respect for differences [4].

If religious education fails to acknowledge the pluralistic and multicultural nature of society, there is a risk of reinforcing exclusivist and intolerant mindsets among students. Therefore, it becomes imperative to develop an Islamic education model that not only transmits religious knowledge but also integrates values of pluralism and multiculturalism in its curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional culture. This integration can serve as a preventive measure against radicalism and a means of strengthening national unity.

By understanding and taking a pluralistic and multicultural approach in Islamic religious education, it is hoped that it will be able to give birth to a generation that is tolerant, inclusive, and has a high appreciation for diversity [4]. Through this study, it is hoped that materials, methods, strategies, media and evaluations can be formulated by integrating plural and multicultural values into the Islamic religious education curriculum in Indonesia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The pluralist and multicultural approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) seeks to create a learning environment that respects the diverse backgrounds of students, including ethnicity, culture, religion, and tradition. This approach is essential in fostering social harmony and tolerance in a plural society like Indonesia. Banks (2010) emphasizes that a multicultural approach helps students develop the competence to live peacefully in diversity by promoting mutual respect and reducing prejudice [6][7]. Pluralist education thus becomes a means to prevent discrimination and exclusivism within the school environment.

Inclusivity in PAI focuses on developing religious understanding that is open to differences and rooted in Islamic values of tolerance and compassion. According to Azra (2007), Islamic education must equip students with the ability to avoid exclusive attitudes that can lead to conflict, and instead promote peace and social cohesion [8][9]. An inclusive education model encourages students to internalize values such as respect for others, religious identity that coexists with openness, and tolerance toward different beliefs.

To support this, several strategies can be adopted. First, curriculum design should integrate multicultural values, such as examples from Islamic history that highlight tolerance and interfaith relations [10]. Second, interactive learning strategies—such as group discussions, case studies, and simulations—can foster dialogue and mutual understanding among diverse learners [11]. Third, teacher training is crucial so that educators have a strong grasp of pluralism and the pedagogical skills to apply it in classrooms [12]. Finally, evaluation tools should not only measure academic understanding but also assess inclusive attitudes like cooperation, respect, and empathy [13]. By applying these approaches, PAI can play a transformative role in shaping a generation that is both faithful and inclusive.

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method (*library research*) to explore the concept of plurality and multiculturalism in Islamic religious education. This approach involves collecting and analyzing data from

a variety of relevant written sources, such as books, scientific articles, academic journals, and other documents related to the research theme [14].

The research data is classified into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include scholarly books and articles that specifically address the concepts of plurality and multiculturalism in education, especially in the context of Islamic religious education. Meanwhile, secondary sources include journals, research reports, and official documents related to education policy and the application of these concepts in Indonesia.

To analyze the data, this study uses a content analysis technique (content analysis) [14], which aims to identify the main themes and subthemes related to plurality and multiculturalism in Islamic religious education. The validity of the data is ensured through the source triangulation technique, which involves examining information from various sources to ensure its accuracy and consistency. The results of the analysis are then interpreted and compiled in the form of a descriptive narrative that describes the understanding and application of plural and multicultural approaches in Islamic religious education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Multicultural Education in Islamic Religious Education

Multicultural education is a process of developing all human potentials that respects plurality and heterogeneity as a consequence of cultural, ethnic, ethnic, and sectarian (religious) diversity [15][16]. According to Zakiyuddin Baidhaw, multicultural education is a way to teach diversity (*teaching diversity*). Multicultural education requires ethical, intellectual, social, and pragmatic rationality in an interrelation manner. Namely, teaching the ideas of inclusivism, pluralism, and respecting everyone [17][16]. James A. Banks defines multicultural education as a concept, idea or philosophy as a series of beliefs and explanations that recognize and assess the importance of cultural and ethnic diversity in shaping lifestyles, social experiences, personal identities, educational opportunities from individuals, groups or countries [18][19]. Confirming J. A. Bank's opinion above, several experts (L. Frazier, R.L. Garcia, C.A. Grant, Banks & Banks, in Tilaar), define multicultural education as a concept, framework, way of thinking, philosophical outlook, value orientation, and a set of criteria for better decision-making of educational needs services for culturally different students. [18], [20].

Based on some of the definitions mentioned above, it can be interpreted that multicultural education is not just a practice or educational praxis but must depart from a philosophy and mindset that clearly pays attention, respects, and utilizes the differences of students culturally as the basis for creating educational services that are in accordance with the needs of culturally diverse students [21]–[23]. This means that the learning process in intellectual development is directed to understand the differences in race, ethnicity, culture, and religion in human interaction.

Multicultural education in Islamic religious education in this article is a concept that integrates the principles of Islam with multicultural values [24]–[26]. This concept aims to strengthen understanding of the Islamic religion while still recognizing and appreciating the diversity of cultures, religions, and traditions[19]. In the context of Islamic religious education, a multicultural approach has an important role in shaping tolerance, mutual respect, and building peace between religious communities.

### Plural Education in Islamic Religious Education

The Great Dictionary of Indonesian, the word pluralism comes from the word "plural" which is interpreted as something that says plural or not one, in different meanings. Plurality is plurality based on virtue (uniqueness) and distinctiveness [27]–[29]. While in the social sciences, pluralism is defined as "*a framework of interaction in which groups show sufficient respect and tolerance of each other, that they fruitfully coexist and interact without conflict or assimilation* i.e. a framework of interaction in which each group displays respect and tolerance for each other,

interacting without conflict or assimilation (blending/refraction) [30]. In its development, the concept of pluralism is interpreted as the understanding of plurality.

Understand, how to see diversity in religions, why and how to view religions, which are so many and diverse. Is there only one true religion or all religions are true [31], [32]. Islamic perspective, according to Nurcholis Majid, the concept of pluralism departs from the awareness of the reality of pluralism, which then tries to be constructed with theological, sociological, and historical approaches so that it can be widely accepted and understood. This is part of the basic attitude of Islam, namely an open attitude to dialogue and accept differences fairly [33].

Plural education in Islamic religious education is an approach that integrates Islamic religious values with the concepts of pluralism and tolerance. This approach aims to build a deeper understanding of the Islamic religion while still respecting and acknowledging the diversity of cultures, religions, and traditions. Therefore, it can be seen that the plural education approach in learning Islam helps to form a generation that is more inclusive, tolerant, and concerned about differences between religious communities. This is very important to build a peaceful, harmonious, and respectful society [34]–[36].

Based on the description of the above definition, we can underline that multiculturalism education contains the meaning of cultural pluralism, while pluralism is more about religious pluralism [31]. In pluralist-multicultural education, it means accepting the plurality of human cultural expressions in understanding the main message of religion, without worrying about the differences in the details of the religious role models. It creates space for tolerance, appreciation, and mutual understanding among different religious and cultural groups [37], [38].

**The Relationship Between Multicultural and Plural Approaches in Islamic Religious Education**

To find out the relationship between the two approaches, we first discuss the similarities and differences between multicultural and plural studies in Islamic religious education. The similarities of these two approaches include [3], [8]

- 1. Recognition of Diversity  
Multiculturalism and pluralism recognize and appreciate diversity in society.
- 2. Encouraging Tolerance and Dialogue  
Both encourage intercultural or interreligious dialogue and tolerance for differences.
- 3. Inclusive Education  
Both multiculturalism and pluralism ensure inclusive education for all groups in society.
- 4. Building Social Solidarity  
Both help build social solidarity in society by respecting and promoting diversity.
- 5. Forming a Positive Attitude to Differences  
Both multiculturalism and pluralism aim to form a positive attitude towards differences and diversity in society.

The differences related to multicultural and plural studies in Islamic religious education, can be presented in the following table [39] [8], [17]:

**Table 1.** The Difference Between Multicultural Approach and Plural Approach In Islamic Religious Education

Aspects	Plural	Multicultural
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Definition	Recognize and appreciate diversity in religious beliefs and practices	Recognize and respect the diversity of cultures, religions, and ethnic backgrounds in a society
Focus of Discussion	More focus on diversity in religious understanding and practice	More focus on cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity
Purpose	Building interfaith harmony and tolerance	Building intercultural harmony and tolerance
Curriculum Content	Emphasis is placed more on the recognition and understanding of various schools and understandings within a particular religion	Emphasis is placed more on the introduction and understanding of various cultures, religions, and ethnic backgrounds
Learning Focus	Focus on recognizing and appreciating the diversity of religious understandings and practices in daily life.	Focus on recognizing and appreciating the diversity of cultures, religions, and ethnic backgrounds in everyday life.

So, the relationship between the multicultural approach and the plural approach based on the study of the similarities and differences between the two approaches above, is to form a complementary relationship, that is, complementary because both seek to create harmony in society through the recognition of diversity. The plural approach focuses on religious aspects, while the multicultural approach has a wider scope covering culture, religion, and ethnicity.

### **Implementation of Multicultural and Plural Approaches in Islamic Religious Education Learning: Approaches, Materials, Methods, Media, and Evaluation**

#### **a. Islamic Religious Education Teacher**

In multicultural and pluralistic education, teachers and students have the same position, namely as objects. Teachers must not dominate in the learning process. According to Y.B. Mangunwijaya, education in schools must be returned to the students. Therefore, students must be considered, assessed, accompanied, and taught as children, not as mini parents or mini soldiers. Students are given opportunities according to their capacity as children [17].

For this reason, in the realm of multicultural education, especially in relation to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) with a multicultural perspective, teachers must be able to organize and organize the content, processes, situations, and activities of the school in a multicultural manner, where each student from various ethnicities, genders, and races has the opportunity to develop themselves and respect each other's differences.

The role of religious teachers in the implementation of religious values includes; 1) organizing a democratic and objective learning process in the classroom, 2) developing a learning plan or design that aims to direct students to have a high concern for certain events related to religion [17].

#### **b. Teaching Materials for Islamic Religious Education**

c. Materials can be categorized into two, namely text and context. Texts contain subject matter that is normative and general, while context is an empirical-factual reality that is specific. The source of material is only produced from the teacher, but also comes from the reality that exists around it [17].

d. Multicultural and plural education teaching materials must teach students the noble values of humanity, national values, and values of ethnic (cultural), racial, religious groups and as such are very relevant to the substance of Islamic teaching values. The following are the characteristics of potential materials that are relevant to multicultural and plural-based learning, namely [17], [40][39] :

1) Materials pay attention to cultural diversity

The material must pay attention to and recognize the diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions, and traditions in society. The material should cover various aspects of that diversity to ensure that all students feel recognized and valued.

2) Materials present diverse perspectives

The material must present diverse perspectives from various cultures, religions, and traditions. This helps students understand different viewpoints and appreciate diversity in society.

3) Materials encourage dialogue and discussion

The material should be designed to encourage dialogue and discussion among students about differences in culture, religion, and tradition. These discussions can help students understand the perspectives of others and develop an attitude of tolerance and respect for differences.

4) Materials form an attitude of tolerance and respect for differences

The material should be designed to reinforce tolerance, respect, and appreciation of cultural, religious, and traditional differences. This can be done through the introduction of stories, characters, or events that show the importance of tolerance and cooperation between cultures.

5) Relevant material on strengthening religious principles with multicultural and plural values

The material must relate religious principles to multicultural and plural values. This helps students understand that religious principles can be applied in a broader context of cultural diversity, religion, and tradition.

6) Materials encourage intercultural cooperation

The material should be designed to encourage intercultural cooperation. This can be done through collaborative projects or other activities that involve students from various cultural, religious, and traditional backgrounds.

7) Materials that integrate multicultural and plural aspects in all subjects

The material should be integrated into all subjects, not just in religious studies or lessons that specifically address multiculturalism and pluralism. This helps students see the connection between various aspects of life and the diversity of cultures, religions, and traditions.

e. Islamic religious education methods and strategies

The methods used in multicultural and plural education have been designed in such a way as to reflect democratic values, which respect the different aspects and diversity of religions/beliefs, cultures, tribes, races, nations, and ethnic groups. In this context, the communicative model becomes the main foundation by making the aspect of difference a pressure point. The dialogue method is very effective, especially in the comparative study of religion and culture [17], [40].

In addition to dialogue, student involvement in learning can be done through active learning developed in the form of collaborative learning. The strategies used in developing multicultural and plural-based learning,

especially in Islamic Religious Education learning, include strategies for learning activities together (*cooperative learning*), which is combined with a concept achievement strategy (*concept attainment*), value analysis strategy (*value analysis*), as well as social analysis strategies (*social investigation*) [17].

Each learning strategy has different functional pressures. The concept achievement strategy is used to facilitate students in exploring local culture, discovering cultural concepts that interest them, and exploring the values contained in the culture of their home region. Meanwhile, the strategy *cooperative learning* help students develop the ability to learn together and socialize the concepts and values of local culture from their area in a learning community with friends [11], [41]. Thus, these methods and strategies not only allow students to learn about differences and diversity, but also help them appreciate and respect diversity in society.

#### f. Students of Islamic Religious Education Learning

Students in the view of Islamic religious education with a multicultural perspective must be conceptualized to respect each other. In classroom learning, they are divided into small groups with the aim of increasing their experience as a member of the group. This aims to enable them to develop an attitude of mutual respect, both in the educational environment and in society in general [17].

Using such a classroom model, learners are invited to get used to being in diversity that will help them understand each other. One of the important values they get is the leadership aspect. Each member of the group has the same opportunity to become a leader, even if not as a group leader. This helps them develop internal leadership that is beneficial to themselves.

#### g. Islamic Religious Education Learning Media

In the context of multicultural education, Enndha, for example, gives two examples of multicultural educational media, namely the poetry *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and images of regional cultural objects (tried to be different from the regional culture of students in the learning class, so that students' acting is more natural) (Enndha, 2019). In addition, it can also utilize various educational technology products as media. Educational technology is developed based on a number of assumptions, including that education can take place effectively, both in homogeneous, heterogeneous and individual groups. And learning can be obtained from anyone and anything, whether intentionally designed or benefited [17][40].

Educational technology can be a suggestion to encourage the occurrence of a multicultural and plural-based educational process, including Islamic Religious Education. The concept is all educational technology as a learning medium that aims to educate for all, without having to be disturbed by the differences in religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the very diverse Indonesian people.

#### h. Evaluation of Islamic Religious Education Learning

Evaluations cannot be carried out instantly. The evaluation must be carried out in a sustainable, complete, and comprehensive manner. The evaluation in multicultural education with plural funds in this case is Islamic Religious Education is emphasized on the assessment of students' behavior which includes perception, appreciation, and action on religious, cultural and ethnic diversity [17].

The criteria that can be used to determine the success of student learning activities are work reports (papers), work performances, and participation displayed by students in learning by means of discussion and exchange of opinions which include rationalization of opinions, tolerance, and empathy for staring at the cultural values of the region where friends come from, as well as the development of student learning achievement after taking the test at the end of learning [17].



## CONCLUSION

Multicultural education encompasses the notion of cultural pluralism, while plural education centers more specifically on religious pluralism. In the context of pluralist-multicultural education, this integration signifies an acceptance of the plurality of human cultural expressions as a way of understanding the essential messages of religion, without being constrained by differing religious models. Such an approach creates space for tolerance, appreciation, and mutual understanding among individuals from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. The multicultural and pluralist perspectives are not contradictory but rather complementary; together, they foster social harmony by embracing diversity. The implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) through this combined approach requires several key components. First, teachers and students must be positioned equally as co-learners within the educational process. Second, teaching materials should incorporate humanistic, national, and ethnic values that align with Islamic principles. Third, teaching methods and strategies must reflect democratic values that honor religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Fourth, students should be trained to respect one another through collaborative, small-group learning environments. Fifth, learning media should utilize educational technologies that support inclusive learning for all, regardless of cultural or religious backgrounds. Finally, the evaluation of learning outcomes must be ongoing, holistic, and comprehensive, focusing not only on knowledge acquisition but also on attitudes and behaviors that reflect inclusivity and respect for diversity.

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## Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the main contributor to this paper, some are as chairman, member, financier, article translator, and final editor. All authors read and approved the final paper.

## Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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