



# The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Building Harmony Living with Neighbors in a Multicultural Environment

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## ABSTRACT

The education of Islamic religion has a strategic role in building social harmony, especially in a multicultural environment. This research aims to explore the contribution of Islamic religious education in forming harmonious neighborly relationships and identify challenges in its implementation. The method used is qualitative research based on literature studies (library research), with analysis of various theoretical and empirical references. The results of the study show that Islamic religious education can be an effective means of instilling the values of tolerance, mutual respect, and building social awareness in a pluralistic society.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Netherlands is a multicultural country inhabited by various ethnicities, religions, and cultures. In this context, Islamic religious education has a role that is not only spiritual, but also social. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (2020), the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim (87%), but coexists with Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians. Therefore, religious education must be able to bridge differences and foster mutual respect.

Previous research has shown that Islamic religious education has a significant role in forming tolerant attitudes (Sukardi, 2021; Rahman, 2022). However, there have not been many studies that specifically discuss Islamic religious education in the context of neighborly relations in a multicultural environment, especially in the formation of social harmony based on daily interactions. This gap is what this study tries to answer by focusing on the original contribution of Islamic religious education as a tool of social integration at the local community level.

In Indonesia, which is known as a country with cultural and religious diversity, Islamic religious education not only serves to deepen the teachings of Islam, but also to promote the values of tolerance and mutual respect between religious communities. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (Statistics, 2020), around 87% of Indonesia's population is Muslim, but there are also other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism that coexist. Therefore, it is important to explore how Islamic religious education can contribute to creating harmony in the midst of such diversity.

Various previous studies have shown that religious education can increase tolerance and reduce interreligious conflicts (Sukardi, 2021). However, there are still shortcomings in the literature that specifically discusses how Islamic religious education is applied in a multicultural context in Indonesia. This research aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of how Islamic religious education can be optimized to support social harmony.

Rahman who researched the influence of religious education on tolerance among students. The study found that students who received a good religious education tended to have higher tolerant attitudes (Rahman, 2022). In addition, Santoso's research shows that educational programs that involve interfaith dialogue can improve understanding and understanding between religious communities (Santoso, 2021). However, there are still inconsistencies in the results of the study that show that not all forms of religious

education can effectively promote tolerance (Hidayati, 2023).

This gap in the literature suggests that there is a need to explore more about religious education methods and approaches that can be applied in a multicultural environment. This study aims to identify the factors that affect the effectiveness of Islamic religious education in building social harmony. In addition, this study will also examine the challenges faced in the implementation of religious education in diverse communities, as well as provide recommendations for the development of more inclusive education programs.

The main issue that will be examined in this study is how Islamic religious education can contribute to creating harmony in a multicultural environment. The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of religious education in building good relationships between citizens, as well as to identify the challenges faced in the process. The context of this research is that Indonesian society has cultural and religious diversity, with an analysis unit consisting of individuals involved in Islamic religious education, both in formal and non-formal educational institutions.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with the library research method. Data was collected from books, scientific articles, research reports, and official documents relevant to the theme of religious education and social harmony. The data analysis technique is carried out by classifying, comparing, and synthesizing information from various sources to find patterns, challenges, and opportunities in the implementation of Islamic religious education in multicultural societies. Data validation is carried out through triangulation of theories and sources.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Islamic Religious Education and Social Character

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a very important role in shaping the character and morals of individuals. In the context of Indonesia, which is a country with various ethnicities, religions, and cultures, PAI functions as a bridge to instill the values of tolerance and mutual respect. PAI is not only oriented towards strengthening faith, but also forms social characters such as tolerance, empathy, and cooperation (Nurhayati, 2019). These values are essential in fostering harmonious neighborly relations in the midst of cultural and religious diversity. His research also shows that students who get a good religious education tend to be more open to differences and are able to interact harmoniously with people from different backgrounds. Data shows that 75% of students who are active in PAI activities in school have a higher attitude of tolerance compared to those who are inactive.

Supriyadi (2020) added that Islamic-based character education has a significant impact on strengthening students' social relations with the surrounding environment. Through activities such as social service and community service, students are taught to care for the surrounding environment. Students who engage in social activities tend to have higher empathy for others, including those from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Islamic religious education also teaches the importance of living in society. In the Qur'an, Allah SWT says,

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

"O mankind, We have created you from a man and a woman and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another" (Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13)

This verse emphasizes that differences are a necessity that must be accepted and respected. Therefore, good religious education can be the foundation for building a harmonious neighborly life in a multicultural environment.

### Social Harmonization Theory

The theory of social harmony explains how individuals and groups can coexist peacefully despite significant differences. According to Giddens (2006), social harmonization is formed through positive interactions based on respect for differences. Islamic religious education can be a means to foster this value through inclusive and dialogical learning. Islamic religious education not only focuses on the spiritual aspect, but also teaches social values that support harmony. For example, Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of respecting each other and understanding differences. As stated in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13, which shows that differences are part of God's creation that must be appreciated and understood, not used as an excuse for conflict.

Statistics from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) show that Indonesia is a country with more than 300 tribes and more than 700 languages. This diversity requires efforts to create social harmony through education. A study conducted by the Center for Education Policy Research shows that areas that implement inclusive religious education tend to have lower levels of social conflict compared to areas that do not (Center for Education Policy Research, 2020).

The example of the case in Yogyakarta City shows that religious education programs involving various communities can increase cooperation between citizens from different backgrounds. Through joint activities such as recitation, interfaith dialogue, and social activities, citizens can get to know and understand each other, which in turn strengthens social bonds in the community.

Thus, the theory of social harmonization is not only a concept, but can also be applied in practice through Islamic religious education that can build awareness and tolerance between individuals in a multicultural society.

### **Multiculturalism and Social Dynamics**

Multiculturalism is a condition in which different cultures, ethnicities, and religions coexist in a single society. In Indonesia, multiculturalism is not only a social reality, but also part of national identity. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2021), multiculturalism in Indonesia must be understood as wealth that can strengthen the unity and unity of the nation. However, the social dynamics that arise from this diversity often pose challenges that need to be overcome.

Social dynamics in multicultural societies can be seen from intercultural interactions that often result in conflict, but can also create opportunities for collaboration. For example, in the context of education, students from different backgrounds often interact at school. If not managed properly, these interactions can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. However, if Islamic religious education is integrated with multicultural values, students can learn to appreciate differences and find commonalities.

Data from the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) shows that people who have a good understanding of multiculturalism tend to be more tolerant and open to differences. In a survey conducted in 2022, 75% of respondents who received a multicultural education in school felt better prepared to interact with people from different backgrounds (LSI, 2022). This shows that education has a key role in shaping individual social attitudes and behaviors.

A clear example of the application of multiculturalism in religious education can be seen in several schools in Jakarta that hold a "Multicultural School" program. The program engages students from different faiths and cultures to learn together, share experiences, and undertake social projects that benefit society. As a result, students not only learn about religious lessons, but also about the importance of cooperation and tolerance.

Thus, multiculturalism and the accompanying social dynamics require a difference-sensitive educational approach. Islamic religious education that prioritizes the values of tolerance and mutual respect can be a strong foundation in building a harmonious society.

### **The Relationship between Religious Education and Social Harmony**

Religious education has a very important role in creating social harmony, especially in the context of a multicultural society. Through religious education, individuals are taught to understand and appreciate human values, including tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation. In the context of Islam, the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH about compassion and unity are very relevant to be applied in daily life.

A study conducted by the State Islamic University (UIN) showed that students who received a good religious education tended to have a more positive attitude towards diversity. The study found that 80% of students involved in religious education programs that teach the values of tolerance reported that they felt closer to friends from different backgrounds (UIN, 2021). This shows that religious education can serve as a bridge to build relationships between individuals.

Another example can be seen in community service activities carried out by Islamic educational institutions. In some areas, Islamic educational institutions hold programs that involve people from different backgrounds to work together on social projects, such as cleaning up the environment or providing assistance to those in need. This activity not only strengthens social ties but also increases awareness of the importance of harmonious coexistence.

However, challenges remain, especially when it comes to different understandings of religion and social values. Some groups may feel threatened by differences, which can fuel conflict. Therefore, it is important for religious education to include a curriculum that teaches about diversity and the importance of tolerance. In this way, religious education serves not only to strengthen the faith of individuals, but also to build a harmonious society.

Overall, the relationship between religious education and social harmony is very close. Religious education that prioritizes the values of tolerance and cooperation can be an effective tool in creating a peaceful and harmonious society, especially in the midst of existing diversity.

### **Methods and Approaches to Religious Education That Can Be Applied in a Multicultural Environment**

Islamic religious education has an important role in building harmony of neighborly life, especially in a multicultural environment. One method that can be applied is the dialogical approach. This approach

encourages interaction between individuals from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Through dialogue, students can get to know each other, understand differences, and find common ground. According to research conducted by Murtadho (2020), interfaith dialogue can reduce prejudice and increase tolerance in diverse societies. In this context, Islamic religious education not only teaches spiritual values, but also social values that support harmony between religious communities.

Another effective method is project-based learning. In this approach, students are invited to work together on projects involving members from different backgrounds. For example, community service projects that involve the creation of environmental parks or other social activities. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2021, collaboration between citizens from different backgrounds can increase a sense of ownership and social responsibility. This shows that Islamic religious education can serve as a bridge to build better relationships between neighbors.

An experiential learning approach or experiential learning can also be implemented. Through activities such as visits to different places of worship or interfaith cooperation training, students can learn firsthand about diversity. As revealed by Hidayati (2019), direct experience can increase understanding and empathy for others. Thus, Islamic religious education can be a means to strengthen relationships between citizens in a multicultural environment.

Furthermore, Islamic religious education can also utilize information technology as a learning method. With online platforms, students from different backgrounds can interact and learn together without geographical restrictions. According to a report from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) 2022, internet usage in Indonesia continues to increase, allowing for wider access to information and learning. Therefore, Islamic religious education that utilizes technology can broaden students' horizons and create an inclusive discussion space.

It is important to involve parents and the community in the process of religious education. This involvement can be done through seminars, workshops, or group discussions involving various elements of society. According to research by Suparman (2021), the active participation of parents in children's education can increase learning effectiveness. By involving the community, Islamic religious education can be more relevant and in accordance with the needs of multicultural communities.

### **Challenges in Implementing Religious Education**

The implementation of Islamic religious education in a multicultural society cannot be separated from various challenges. One of the main challenges is the existence of stereotypes and prejudices against other religions that develop in society (Pew Research Center, 2021). Many individuals who grow up in a homogeneous environment tend to have a narrow view of other religions. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2021), around 30% of respondents in Indonesia admitted to having a negative view of adherents of other religions. This shows that religious education needs to emphasize the importance of tolerance and understanding between religions.

Another challenge is that the educational curriculum often does not reflect diversity. Many schools still use a curriculum that focuses on one religion without making room for understanding other religions. This can create a gap in students' knowledge of the diversity that exists around them. A study by Rahman (2020) shows that an inclusive curriculum can increase students' awareness of the importance of interfaith harmony. Therefore, a more inclusive curriculum revision needs to be done to create a more harmonious education.

Moreover Lack teacher training in multicultural education; only 40% of teachers have participated in the training (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). Many educators do not have enough skills or knowledge to teach the values of tolerance and harmony. Therefore, it is important for governments and educational institutions to provide adequate training for educators so that they can better manage diverse classrooms.

Another challenge faced is the existence of interreligious conflicts that still occur in several regions. These conflicts are often triggered by misunderstandings and ignorance about the teachings of other religions. According to a report from Komnas HAM (2020), there is an increase in the number of cases of religion-based conflicts in Indonesia. This shows that Islamic religious education needs to focus more on conflict prevention efforts through education based on human values and unity.

The lack of support from the government and the community in the implementation of religious education is also a challenge. Many educational programs do not receive enough attention or funding to be able to run properly. According to research by Setiawan (2021), the success of religious education programs is highly dependent on community support and participation. Therefore, collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and the community is needed to create an environment conducive to inclusive religious education.

### Strategies and Recommendations

To address the challenges in the implementation of religious education in multicultural societies, several recommendations can be proposed. First, it is important to revise the religious education curriculum to make it more inclusive. A curriculum that includes the teachings of various religions and emphasizes the values of tolerance and harmony can help students understand diversity. According to research by Wibowo (2022), an inclusive curriculum can increase students' understanding of the importance of harmonious coexistence.

Second, training for educators must be improved. Educators need to be given the knowledge and skills to teach in a multicultural classroom. Training programs that focus on classroom management, teaching the values of tolerance, and interfaith understanding can help educators in dealing with existing challenges. A study by Sari (2021) shows that trained educators can create a more inclusive and harmonious learning atmosphere.

Third, it is important to involve parents and the community in the education process. This engagement can be done through seminars, workshops, or other activities involving various elements of society. By involving parents and the community, Islamic religious education can be more relevant and in accordance with the needs of the community. According to research by Haryanto (2020), the active participation of parents in children's education can increase learning effectiveness.

Fourth, religious education programs must utilize information technology to reach more people. The use of online platforms can facilitate wider interfaith discussions and learning. According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) 2022, internet usage in Indonesia continues to increase, which opens up opportunities for religious education to reach a wider audience.

### CONCLUSION

Islamic religious education plays an important role in building social harmony in a multicultural environment. By instilling the values of tolerance, empathy, and respect for differences, PAI can create a harmonious and peaceful society. This research confirms that religious education is not only an instrument of individual faith, but also a means of social reconciliation. It is hoped that educational institutions need to reform the PAI curriculum so that it is dialogical and contextual. Teachers need to be equipped with multicultural training to be able to manage classroom diversity productively. The community and parents also need to be actively involved in open religious activities.

Follow-up research can use a field study or participatory approach to delve deeper into the impact of PAI programs on interfaith social relations in grassroots communities. This article contributes to the enrichment of literature on religious education as the foundation of social harmony, as well as providing a strategic perspective in strengthening the role of PAI in the lives of neighbors in a multicultural society.

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