

## Strategy for Developing a Multicultural Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Islamic Boarding School-Based Universities

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received Apr 10, 2025

Revised Apr 18, 2025

Accepted Apr 20, 2025

Online First Apr 21, 2025

#### Keywords:

Islamic boarding schools  
Islamic Religious Education  
Islamic Universities  
Multicultural Curriculum  
Religious Moderation

### ABSTRACT

**Purpose of the study:** This study aims to analyze strategies for developing a multicultural Islamic Religious Education curriculum in pesantren-based universities to strengthen religious moderation and manage diversity. It employs a qualitative case study approach using interviews, observations, and documentation, with data analyzed through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing.

**Methodology:** This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The instruments included interview guidelines, observation sheets, and document analysis checklists. Informants were selected using purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

**Main Findings:** The results show that the multicultural curriculum is developed through integrating multicultural values into learning outcomes and curriculum structure, strengthening tolerance and inclusivity based on pesantren values, applying contextual and dialogical learning methods, and exemplifying religious moderation through kiai and lecturers, supported by a pesantren culture emphasizing ukhuwah, tasamuh, and ta'awun.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** This study offers a comprehensive model of multicultural Islamic Religious Education curriculum development in pesantren-based higher education by integrating planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. It highlights the role of pesantren culture as a foundational element in shaping inclusive, dialogical, and value-based learning, bridging Islamic teachings with multicultural competencies in a systematic and contextual framework.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation with a very high level of social, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity [1], [2]. This multicultural reality demands that the education system, particularly Islamic Religious Education, not only instill religious values but also foster an attitude of tolerance, moderation, and respect for differences. Islamic boarding school-based higher education institutions (pesantren) hold a strategic position in shaping students' character, enabling them to live harmoniously in a pluralistic society [3].

However, the practice of religious education in many universities still tends to be normative-doctrinal and has not been fully integrated with a multicultural approach [4], [5]. The curriculum often emphasizes

cognitive-religious aspects over strengthening social values, intercultural dialogue, and national awareness. This situation has the potential to foster exclusive attitudes and a lack of responsiveness to the realities of diversity [6].

The concept of multicultural education emphasizes that education must provide equal opportunities to all students and develop competencies for living in a pluralistic society. James A. Banks emphasized that multicultural education is not simply the addition of cultural material to the curriculum, but rather a comprehensive transformation of the educational structure to make it more just, inclusive, and democratic. In the Indonesian context, curriculum development must also align with local values and Islamic spirituality, as emphasized by H.A.R. Tilaar, who emphasized that multicultural education needs to be rooted in national culture and social realities. The need for a comprehensive model is increasingly pressing given the increasingly complex dynamics of child and adolescent development, particularly in the digital era [7]-[9].

As traditional Islamic educational institutions, Islamic boarding schools (Pesantren) are unique in character formation, the instillation of good manners, and the internalization of moderate Islamic values. The integration of the higher education system with the pesantren culture opens up significant opportunities for developing a holistic multicultural Islamic Religious Education curriculum, combining scientific, spiritual, and social dimensions [10], [11]. Through this approach, students are equipped not only with religious understanding but also with multicultural competencies such as empathy, dialogue, and conflict resolution. The pesantren environment plays a strategic role in shaping students' character by instilling moral and religious values in their daily lives. The Qur'anic-based character education model within the pesantren environment has been proven to create a more humanistic educational culture oriented toward the development of noble character [12].

However, empirical studies on multicultural Islamic Religious Education curriculum development strategies in Islamic boarding school-based universities are still relatively limited, particularly those that systematically focus on curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation [13]. Therefore, this study aims to analyze multicultural Islamic Religious Education curriculum development strategies in Islamic boarding school-based universities, with the hope of providing theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic Religious Education studies and practical contributions for Islamic educational institution managers in designing curricula relevant to the challenges of national diversity [14].

Previous studies have addressed multicultural education and Islamic Religious Education from different perspectives; however, significant gaps remain. First, studies by Arikarani [15] Banks emphasize the conceptual framework of multicultural education as a transformative approach, yet they largely remain at the theoretical level and do not specifically address the integration of these principles into Islamic Religious Education curricula within higher education settings. Second, research inspired by Arifin [16] highlights the importance of aligning multicultural education with local cultural values, but it tends to focus on general national education without deeply exploring the unique characteristics of pesantren-based institutions. Third, [17] empirical studies on in Indonesian universities often concentrate on normative and doctrinal teaching practices, with limited attention to curriculum development that integrates multicultural competencies such as dialogue, tolerance, and conflict resolution. Moreover, these studies rarely examine the curriculum holistically, particularly in terms of planning, implementation, and evaluation within pesantren-based higher education. Therefore, a clear gap exists in the lack of comprehensive, empirical, and context-specific research that systematically investigates multicultural curriculum development strategies in Islamic boarding school-based universities.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative and contextual approach to developing a multicultural Islamic Religious Education curriculum within pesantren-based higher education institutions. Unlike previous research that tends to be either theoretical or fragmented, this study offers a comprehensive framework that encompasses curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation grounded in pesantren values and multicultural education principles [18], [19]. It uniquely combines religious, cultural, and social dimensions by embedding multicultural competencies such as empathy, intercultural dialogue, tolerance, and conflict resolution into the structure of learning. Furthermore, this study situates the pesantren not merely as a cultural background but as a pedagogical foundation that actively shapes curriculum design, thereby contributing new insights into how traditional Islamic education systems can be transformed to respond to contemporary challenges of diversity and globalization [20].

The findings of this study have important implications for both theory and practice in Islamic education. Theoretically, this research contributes to the advancement of multicultural education discourse by contextualizing it within Islamic Religious Education and pesantren-based higher education, thereby bridging the gap between global educational theories and local Islamic educational practices [21], [22]. Practically, the study provides a strategic framework for curriculum developers, lecturers, and institutional leaders to design and implement a more inclusive and responsive curriculum that addresses the realities of social and cultural diversity. It also offers guidance for integrating character education, spiritual values, and multicultural competencies in a balanced manner. In addition, this research can inform policymakers in formulating educational policies that support the transformation of Islamic higher education into institutions that promote moderation, tolerance, and social cohesion in a pluralistic society [23].

The urgency of this study is grounded in the increasing complexity of social diversity and the challenges posed by globalization and digitalization, which often amplify issues of intolerance, radicalism, and social fragmentation. In this context, Islamic Religious Education in higher education institutions plays a crucial role in shaping students' perspectives and attitudes toward diversity [24], [25]. Without a well-developed multicultural curriculum, risks remaining limited to normative teachings that are less responsive to contemporary societal needs. Moreover, pesantren-based universities, with their strong emphasis on moral and spiritual education, have a strategic opportunity to become pioneers in developing inclusive and moderate educational models. Therefore, this study is urgently needed to provide a systematic and contextually relevant framework for multicultural curriculum development, ensuring that Islamic education contributes effectively to building a harmonious, tolerant, and cohesive society.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design [26]. The qualitative approach was selected to explore and understand in depth the phenomenon of multicultural Islamic Religious Education curriculum development strategies within the real context of pesantren-based higher education. The case study design enabled the researcher to investigate the complexity, uniqueness, and contextual dynamics of curriculum development practices comprehensively. This study also applied a descriptive-analytical approach to systematically describe and interpret the findings related to curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation.

### **2.2. Research Subjects and Objects**

The subjects of this study consisted of key informants involved in the development and implementation of the curriculum in pesantren-based higher education institutions. These included institutional leaders, lecturers, curriculum developers, and students. The object of the study focused on the strategies for developing a multicultural curriculum, particularly how multicultural values are integrated into curriculum structure, learning processes, and academic culture. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in curriculum development.

### **2.3. Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques**

The data sources in this study were divided into primary and secondary data [27]. Primary data were obtained directly from informants through field interactions, while secondary data were derived from institutional documents and relevant literature. Data collection techniques included: (1) in-depth interviews to explore policies, strategies, and experiences related to curriculum development; (2) participatory observation to examine learning activities, academic interactions, and the implementation of multicultural values; and (3) documentation study to analyze curriculum documents, semester learning plans, academic policies, and institutional programs related to multicultural education.

### **2.4. Research Instruments**

The main instrument in this study was the researcher, supported by several research tools such as interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation checklists. Interview guidelines were designed to explore curriculum development strategies, while observation sheets were used to record learning processes and the implementation of multicultural values. Documentation checklists were utilized to systematically review written data relevant to the research focus.

### **2.5. Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive analysis model consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, relevant data were selected, simplified, and categorized based on the research objectives. The data were then presented in descriptive and thematic forms to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the data. This analysis process was conducted continuously throughout the research.

### **2.6. Research Procedure**

The research procedure was carried out through several systematic stages. The first stage was preparation, including literature review, formulation of research focus, and preparation of research instruments. The second stage involved determining the research site and selecting informants using purposive sampling. The third stage was data collection through interviews, observations, and documentation. The fourth stage involved data analysis using an interactive model. The final stage was reporting the research findings in a structured and comprehensive

manner. To ensure data validity, techniques such as source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking were applied throughout the research process.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that the strategy for developing a multicultural Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren)-based higher education institutions is implemented through the integration of multicultural values into the curriculum structure, learning materials, and academic activities [28]. Multicultural values such as tolerance, respect for differences, intercultural dialogue, and religious moderation are incorporated into Islamic Religious Education courses and other supporting courses. This aims to develop students with inclusive attitudes and the ability to live side by side in a pluralistic society.

#### 3.1. Strategy for Integrating Multicultural Values in the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

According to Sugiono [29], multicultural education must be systematically incorporated into the curriculum so that students are able to understand, appreciate, and respond constructively to cultural and religious diversity. This perspective is not merely about adding multicultural content, but about transforming the curriculum structure, learning processes, and educational environment to become more inclusive and democratic. The findings of this study are in line with this view, as the integration of multicultural values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is carried out not only at the level of learning materials, but also through learning objectives, teaching methods, and academic culture within pesantren-based higher education institutions.

In the context of Islamic education, the integration of multicultural values is closely related to the principle of Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin (a mercy to all creation), which emphasizes universal values such as peace, justice, compassion, and respect for diversity. These values are translated into curriculum components through the formulation of graduate learning outcomes that prioritize attitudes of tolerance, moderation (wasatiyyah), and social responsibility. Furthermore, multicultural content is embedded in various subjects, including Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and ethics, by incorporating themes such as religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and peaceful coexistence. This approach ensures that students do not only gain doctrinal understanding but also develop the ability to contextualize religious teachings within a diverse societal framework.

Moreover, pesantren-based higher education institutions possess distinctive strengths in implementing multicultural curriculum integration through their unique educational traditions. The study of classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning), for instance, provides students with exposure to diverse scholarly opinions (ikhtilaf), which inherently fosters critical thinking and respect for differences. Religious discussions (bahtsul masail) further encourage dialogical learning, where students are trained to articulate arguments, listen to differing perspectives, and arrive at balanced conclusions. In addition, various social and community-based activities serve as experiential learning platforms that allow students to practice values such as cooperation (ta'awun), tolerance (tasamuh), and brotherhood (ukhuwah) in real-life contexts.

These findings are consistent with the perspective of Sechandini [30], who emphasizes that pesantren play a strategic role in promoting moderate and tolerant Islamic education in pluralistic societies. The integration of multicultural values in pesantren-based curricula is not only theoretical but also practical, as it is reinforced through daily interactions, institutional culture, and the exemplary behavior of religious leaders (kiai) and lecturers. Their role as moral and intellectual role models significantly influences the internalization of multicultural values among students.

In addition, the integration strategy is further strengthened through the use of contextual and student-centered learning approaches, such as case-based learning, group discussions, and reflective practices. These methods enable students to engage critically with contemporary social issues, including religious intolerance, cultural conflict, and social inequality. As a result, students are better equipped with the competencies needed to navigate and contribute positively to a pluralistic society.

Overall, the integration of multicultural values in the curriculum within pesantren-based higher education is a multidimensional process that involves curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and institutional culture. This comprehensive approach not only enhances students' cognitive understanding of diversity but also shapes their attitudes and behaviors, ultimately contributing to the development of inclusive, moderate, and socially responsible individuals..

#### 3.2. Implementation of the Multicultural Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Development Strategy

The implementation of the multicultural Islamic Religious Education curriculum development strategy in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren)-based higher education institutions is carried out through several stages: curriculum planning, learning implementation, and curriculum evaluation. During the planning stage, curriculum development is carried out in a participatory manner, involving institutional leaders, lecturers, and Islamic education experts. This process aims to ensure that the curriculum is able to meet the needs of a multicultural society.

During the learning implementation stage, lecturers apply various learning approaches that support multicultural education, such as group discussions, case studies, and experiential learning. These approaches enable students to understand the realities of diversity firsthand. Furthermore, the Islamic boarding school environment, with its collective culture and dormitory life, helps students from various cultural and regional backgrounds develop multicultural values. During the evaluation stage, curriculum development is carried out periodically through academic evaluations and feedback from students and lecturers. This evaluation aims to improve and refine the curriculum to ensure it remains relevant to societal developments. According to Afriyanto [31], multicultural education must be part of curriculum reform so that the education system can produce a democratic generation that values diversity. The results of this study support this opinion.

Despite the growing body of literature on multicultural education and Islamic Religious Education, several critical gaps remain evident. First, studies by Nurlaelah [32] primarily emphasize the conceptual and transformative dimensions of multicultural education, yet they do not specifically address how these principles are operationalized within Islamic higher education curricula, particularly in pesantren-based institutions. Second, research influenced by Siti Nur Aisyah [33] highlights the importance of integrating multicultural values with local culture; however, it tends to focus on macro-level educational reform without providing detailed strategies for curriculum implementation at the institutional level. Third, studies such as those by Djamaluddin [34] underline the role of pesantren in promoting moderate and tolerant Islam, but they generally discuss cultural and institutional roles rather than systematically examining curriculum development processes, including planning, implementation, and evaluation [35]. Consequently, there is a clear gap in comprehensive empirical research that holistically investigates how multicultural values are structurally and pedagogically integrated into curricula within pesantren-based higher education.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive and integrative analysis of multicultural curriculum development strategies within pesantren-based higher education institutions [36]. Unlike previous studies that are either theoretical, fragmented, or limited to cultural observations, this research provides a systematic examination of curriculum development across three key stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. It also uniquely positions pesantren culture not merely as a supporting context but as a foundational element in shaping curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and value internalization [37]. Furthermore, this study integrates multicultural competencies such as tolerance, dialogue, and social responsibility into both formal curriculum structures and informal learning environments, offering a holistic model that bridges religious teachings with contemporary social realities.

The implications of this study are significant for both theoretical development and educational practice. Theoretically, the findings contribute to the enrichment of multicultural education discourse by contextualizing it within Islamic Religious Education and pesantren-based higher education, thereby bridging global educational theories with local Islamic traditions. Practically, the study offers a strategic framework for curriculum developers, lecturers, and institutional leaders to design and implement a more inclusive, contextual, and value-based curriculum. It highlights the importance of integrating multicultural values not only in course content but also in teaching methods and institutional culture. Additionally, this research provides valuable insights for policymakers in formulating educational policies that promote religious moderation, social cohesion, and inclusivity in higher education, particularly in societies characterized by high levels of diversity.

This study has several limitations that should be considered in interpreting its findings. First, the research adopts a qualitative case study approach focusing on a specific pesantren-based higher education context, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other institutions with different characteristics. Second, the data are primarily derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis, which may be subject to researcher interpretation and potential bias despite efforts to ensure validity through triangulation. Third, the study focuses mainly on curriculum development processes and does not quantitatively measure the impact of the multicultural curriculum on students' attitudes and behaviors over time. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ mixed-method approaches, involve a broader range of institutions, and examine the long-term effectiveness of multicultural curriculum implementation in shaping students' perspectives and competencies in diverse societal contexts.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study were obtained through a combination of Islamic educational principles with a multicultural approach, in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis at a pesantren-based higher education institution. The results indicate that academic policies, pesantren culture, teacher competencies, and student social dynamics are all factors influencing the development of a multicultural Islamic Religious Education curriculum. This curriculum development strategy generally focuses on strengthening the principles of religious moderation, tolerance, and respect for diversity. This strategy aligns with the concept of multicultural education, which emphasizes that the education system must be transformed to adapt to a pluralistic society.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all parties who have contributed to the completion of this research. Appreciation is extended to those who provided valuable support, guidance, and insights throughout the research process. The authors also thank all informants and participants for their willingness to share information and experiences that greatly enriched this study. Any form of assistance, whether direct or indirect, is highly appreciated and has been essential in the successful completion of this research.

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