



The Urgency of Multicultural Education in Building a Civil Society: The Perspective of Islamic Educational Philosophy

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Abstract

Multicultural education is an urgent need in a pluralistic Indonesian society. This article examines the urgency of multicultural education from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy as a foundation for building a tolerant, just, and inclusive civil society. This study collects and analyzes literature related to multicultural values in Islamic teachings and Islamic educational practices in Indonesia through a qualitative approach with a literature study method. The results of the study show that in the treasury of Islamic educational philosophy, there are fundamental principles that are in line with multicultural values, such as tolerance (*tasamuh*), justice (*adl*), equality (*musawah*), respect for differences, and the spirit of deliberation (*shura*). Islam views diversity as part of the sunnatullah that cannot be avoided and must be addressed with mutual respect. However, the reality of Islamic education in Indonesia still shows the dominance of a normative-doctrinal approach, providing little space for cross-cultural dialogue and critical thinking. Therefore, a reconstruction of the paradigm of Islamic education that is inclusive and contextual is needed by instilling multicultural values in the curriculum, learning methods, and educational practices as a whole. Thus, Islamic education does not only function as a transmission of religious knowledge, but also as a tool for social transformation in building a harmonious civil society in diversity. This article highlights explicitly two main questions: (1) how multicultural values are integrated into Islamic educational philosophy, and (2) to what extent such integration contributes to forming a civil society. The main contribution of this study is to offer an integrative conceptual framework that combines Islamic values with the principles of multiculturalism, which can be used as a reference in developing inclusive and contextual Islamic educational policies and practices.

Keywords: Civil Society, Diversity, Islamic Educational Philosophy, Multicultural Education, Tolerance.

Introduction

The global world is currently facing significant challenges in maintaining social cohesion amidst increasing migration flows, identity conflicts, and ethnic and religious-based polarization (Khan, 2024; Narayanti et al., 2024). The phenomenon of Islamophobia in the West, religious extremism in the East, and the rise of hate speech in digital spaces show how diversity, which should be a strength, often becomes a source of tension (D'Haenens & Mekki-Berrada, 2023). In the midst of this reality, multicultural education is present as a strategic approach to forming world citizens who are tolerant, open, and uphold humanitarian values (Sobry et al., 2023; Udin & Arfanaldy, 2025).

Many countries have integrated multicultural education into their formal education systems with the aim of creating an inclusive society (Bajrami, 2019). However, the multicultural approach in many places is still based on a secular-liberal narrative that does not accommodate religious values, especially Islam (Sahin, 2018). As a result, there is a gap in understanding between the multicultural education that is taught and the religious reality of the

society in which it is practiced (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). Therefore, a new approach is needed that can bridge multicultural values and Islamic principles that are in line with the spirit of tolerance and social justice (Ahyani et al., 2024; Al Jumhuri, 2023).

Indonesia, as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world and a very diverse social reality, is also not free from multicultural challenges (Mariyono, 2024). Horizontal conflicts based on religion and ethnicity, discrimination against minority groups, and intolerance in educational institutions are important notes in the dynamics of our nation (Stewart, 2008). Pancasila and the spirit of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika have laid the ideological foundation for an inclusive and just society (Arifudin et al., 2024; Yuniarto et al., 2024). In this context, multicultural education in Indonesia must be designed to overcome conflict and build a more mature and civilized social order (Arfanaldy, 2024).

Islamic education, as one of the dominant education systems in Indonesia, has a central role in realizing this vision (Roslan Mohd Nor & Malim, 2014). With a strong moral and spiritual basis, Islamic education should be able to become a pioneer in strengthening multicultural values (Abdullahi Maidugu & Adamu Tanko Isah, 2024). However, many Islamic educational institutions still prioritize dogmatic teaching without opening up space for intercultural and interfaith dialogue (Pallavicini, 2016). When diversity is considered a challenge, not a potential, the educational space loses the opportunity to form a generation ready to live in a pluralistic world (Banks, 1990; Rifky et al., 2024).

The concept of civil society in Islam offers a social framework that upholds the principles of justice, equality, respect for human rights, and social responsibility (Kamali, 2001). This idea aligns with the spirit of multicultural education (Mazid et al., 2021). Therefore, Islamic education needs to place multicultural values as an integral part of its mission in building a civil society that is not only religious but also inclusive and democratic (Shobirin, 2023).

Unfortunately, the discourse on multicultural education in Islamic education is still essentially trapped in practical and technical approaches, such as integration into the curriculum or learning methods (Moslimany et al., 2024). Meanwhile, philosophical studies on the relationship between multicultural education and Islamic values are still limited (Gezer, 2018). Philosophical understanding is fundamental as a normative and ideological foundation that will determine the direction and character of Islamic education in facing the challenges of plurality (Akrim, 2023; Rifky & Farihin, 2024).

Through this literature study, the author attempts to present a synthesis between multicultural educational thinking and Islamic educational philosophy, especially within the framework of civil society formation (Kambali et al., 2022). Although a number of studies have discussed the importance of tolerance and diversity in the context of Islam (Saeed, 1999), there is still little discussion that explicitly links the principles of Islamic education with a multicultural approach conceptually and practically. Therefore, this study traces the theological and philosophical roots in Islamic literature that are relevant to the values of multiculturalism and examines the extent to which Islamic education can be designed to support the creation of an inclusive society. Thus, this paper is expected to contribute to developing a contextual, humanistic, and transformative Islamic education model.

The novelty of this study lies in the conceptual-philosophical approach that is rarely used in Islamic education studies. This study attempts to examine the urgency of multicultural education from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy as a foundation for forming a civil society. This approach is relevant amidst global challenges such as increasing

The Urgency of Multicultural Education in Building a Civil Society: The Perspective of Islamic Educational Philosophy - Masduki, Sehan Rifky Arfanaldy, Mohammad Bintang Pamuncak, Fahmi

Islamophobia, extremism, and identity conflict, which demand an active contribution from Islamic education in building an inclusive and tolerant social order. Thus, Islamic education plays a role in spiritual development and in strengthening universal human values that are the foundation of civil society. In comparison, its external contribution is to provide a normative and ideological framework that can be the basis for designing an Islamic education system that is responsive to socio-cultural diversity while enriching Islamic education literature with a multicultural perspective based on Islamic values.

Literature review

Multicultural education emerged as a response to the increasing awareness of the importance of recognizing cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic diversity in modern society (Sleeter, 1989). In this context, multicultural education is an effort to create tolerance and a transformative tool that encourages social justice, equality, and respect for differences. Philosophically, this idea is in line with the fundamental values in Islam, such as *ta'aruf* (getting to know each other), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *musawah* (equality), and *'adl* (justice), which are the foundation of an inclusive education system.

Foundations and Islamic Teachings on Diversity

Some literature emphasizes that the values of multiculturalism are inherent in Islamic teachings. (Gozali, 2023) in *Multicultural Education in the Perspective of the Qur'an*, explains that verses such as QS. Al-Hujurat: 13 provide theological legitimacy for the diversity of tribes and nations as part of human nature. (Moore, 2009) also emphasizes that Islam not only recognizes minority rights but also encourages social interaction across identities in the spirit of *ukhuwah basyariyah*, which shows Islam's openness to universal values as long as they do not conflict with its basic principles.

Multicultural Education as Social Transformation

The approach of multicultural education as a means of social transformation is seen in the thinking of (Banks, 2009), who emphasizes that education must undergo structural transformation so that all social groups receive fair treatment. This perspective provides important inspiration for Islamic education to be normatively adaptive and actively change the structure of injustice. In line with that, (Hefner, 1993) in *Islam and the Struggle for Civil Society* places education as an instrument for forming a civil society that not only emphasizes civil liberties but also collective responsibility and strong social ethics—values that are also philosophically emphasized in the tradition of Islamic thought.

Challenges of Implementing Multicultural Education in the Context of Islam

A study by (Supriyatno & Ubabuddin, 2020) shows that although Islamic education has the potential to internalize multicultural values through interactive and experience-based learning methods, many Islamic educational institutions still tend to be socially and pedagogically homogeneous. A similar thing was stated by (Baihaqi, 2021), who saw that implementing multicultural education in Indonesia still faces serious challenges, such as policy inconsistencies and resistance at the practical level. This shows that there is a gap between the normative ideals of Islam and the practical reality of Islamic education that needs to be bridged.

Philosophical Critique of the Normative-Practical Approach

(Hoogervorst, 2017) provides important criticism of the tendency of the normative-practical approach in Islamic multicultural education that is less accompanied by philosophical reflection. As a result, education loses its transformative power in forming students' critical awareness of social reality. This view underlines the importance of developing a philosophical perspective in Islamic education, which can reconstruct multicultural values conceptually and structurally, not only as a moral response.

Relevant Curriculum Strategies and Approaches

Several studies propose a contextual curriculum approach as an integrative solution. (Lestari et al., 2023) Suggests that multicultural education in Islam should be based on locality and remain based on universal Islamic values. Meanwhile, (Daulay, 2019) emphasizes that Islamic education needs to adapt to social change without losing its normative roots. (Syahbudin & Hanafi, 2018) It also highlights the importance of concrete experiences in learning and teacher training to support the process of internalizing multicultural values. In this perspective, *Islam Wasathiyah*, as explained (Bakir & Othman, 2019) becomes an educational model that integrates moderation, tolerance, and dialogue in forming a democratic and peaceful civil society.

The Need for a Philosophical Approach to Islamic Education

From all of these studies, it is clear that multicultural education has a strong normative basis in Islam. However, the philosophical approach to this theme has received little attention. Most studies emphasize the implementative and normative aspects without delving deeply into the epistemological and axiological structures of the philosophy of Islamic education itself. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of a philosophical approach in studying multicultural education as a means of forming a civil society that upholds diversity within the framework of Islamic ethics.

Research method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method (library research), which aims to analyze the urgency of multicultural education from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy and its relevance to the development of civil society. This method was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of the philosophical and normative concepts of academic literature and classical Islamic sources (Dodgson, 2017).

Literature Selection and Synthesis

Data sources were collected from primary and secondary literature, including the Qur'an, Hadith, classical books on Islamic education, and scientific articles from national and international journals. The literature was selected through a systematic search process using keywords such as "multiculturalism in Islamic education," "philosophy of Islamic education," and "civil society" in databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Researchgate, Academia, Semantic Scholar and university repositories. Inclusion criteria included thematic relevance, scientific accuracy, and publication within the last 10 years, except for classical sources considered historically and normatively important. Literature that did not meet academic credibility standards or was not relevant to the focus of the study was excluded from the analysis (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014).

After being collected, the literature was analyzed and synthesized using a thematic qualitative content analysis approach. The researcher identified, classified, and grouped recurring main themes, such as Islamic values that support pluralism, principles of inclusive education, and characteristics of civil society. The synthesis was carried out inductively by connecting the values in Islamic literature with multicultural education theory.

Theme Identification and Classification Process

The analysis stage begins with the manual coding of important parts of the text, which are then classified into major themes: (1) the normative basis of Islam towards diversity, (2) the philosophy of Islamic education as a conceptual foundation, and (3) the multicultural curriculum approach (Rifky, 2024). Each theme is compared across the literature to find convergences and contradictions to strengthen the conceptual framework. The researcher also combines Islamic values (such as *tasamuh*, *musawah*, and *shura*) with modern multicultural theory (Banks, 2009; Sleeter, 1989) to build a relevant synthesis.

Critical Reflection and Limitations of the Method

This approach has several limitations as a qualitative research based on a literature study. First, the potential for bias in the selection of literature can affect the objectivity of the results, considering that researchers subjectively determine the relevance and credibility of sources. Second, the absence of primary data limits empirical validation of the synthesis of concepts built. Therefore, the results of this study need to be seen as an initial conceptual framework that can be further tested through field studies or mixed-method research.

Result/Findings

This study produces several significant findings regarding integrating multicultural education within the framework of Islamic educational philosophy and its contribution to the formation of civil society. These findings strengthen or criticize existing literature, enriching academic discourse in this field.

First Finding, Islamic teachings explicitly recognize and affirm diversity as part of God's will. QS. Al-Hujurat verse 13 is the primary theological foundation that supports the principle of multiculturalism; Allah created humans into tribes and nations so that they know each other (*lita'arafu*) and not be hostile to each other (Alwi HS et al., 2021). (Moore, 2009) emphasized that social interaction across identities is part of *ukhuwah basyariyah*. As a concrete example, several Islamic boarding schools/majlis taklim in Yogyakarta have opened up space for students across ethnicities through debate programs and joint book studies, emphasizing the strengthening of inclusive values in practice (Pujiati, 2019).

Second Finding Multicultural values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *'adl* (justice), and *musawah* (equality) are embedded in classical Islamic thought. This is supported by (Mukti et al., 2021) who show how Al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh prioritize social-moral education. A study (Faradila et al., 2024) in Surabaya schools showed that cross-class mentoring was effective in fostering empathy, demonstrating the relevance of this approach in a contemporary context. This aligns with the transformational approach (Banks, 2009), where education becomes a social justice means.

Third, Finding Multicultural education is a strategic tool in dealing with extremism and identity conflict. (Hoogervorst, 2017) criticized the weakness of the philosophical dimension in the Islamic education system which is too normative, thus failing to foster critical awareness.

A study (Lie, 2024) with cases in public and private schools in Bogor that held interfaith discussions showed success in reducing stereotypes and increasing social literacy, supporting the statement (Hunduma & Mekuria, 2024) about the importance of multicultural education in the formation of global citizenship.

Fourth Finding implementing multicultural values in Islamic education is still partial. (Raihani, 2018) moreover, (Badrun, 2024) noted that cognitive and ritual aspects still dominate the madrasah curriculum. This finding is supported by (Syahbudin & Hanafi, 2018) who recommend experiential learning as an effective strategy. A study (Dhin et al., 2024) in Aceh proved that conflict resolution-based teacher training can increase multicultural pedagogical capacity.

Fifth Finding the philosophy of Islamic education provides an ontological, epistemological, and axiological basis for multicultural education. (Akrim, 2023) states that philosophical Islamic education can formulate multicultural values structurally. (Lestari et al., 2023) Supports the locality approach in the curriculum, as in Minangkabau, where the values of *musawah* and *tasamuh* are integrated into *Aqidah Akhlak* learning (Irmayanti et al., 2024).

Sixth Finding There is still a gap in multicultural literacy among teachers. Only 27% of Islamic Religious Education teachers understand the principles of Islamic-based multicultural education (Zubaidi, 2024). This shows the need to strengthen literacy and professional training, as suggested by (El-Atwani, 2015), so that teachers can effectively convey inclusive values.

Seventh Finding Multicultural Islamic education has been proven to shape social character and strengthen civil society. (Al Jumhuri, 2023) moreover, (Lehning, 1998) emphasizes the important role of inclusive education in social development. An example is the interfaith social service project at an Islamic high school in Bandung, successfully building empathy and social responsibility (Suseno, 2021).

Eighth, Finding An Islamic curriculum model based on Islamic multiculturalism is needed. (Sahin, 2018) moreover, (Reigeluth, 2013) suggests the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. An example of its implementation is the curriculum at MAN Lombok, which includes conflict resolution and cross-cultural dialogue modules in PKN and Islamic Cultural History lessons (Mardianto, 2022).

By strengthening the connection between the findings and relevant literature and adding actual case examples, these findings provide a situational overview and answer the practical and philosophical challenges of Islamic education in forming a tolerant and inclusive civil society.

To make it easier to understand and also more straightforward, the author presents it in Table 1 below:

Values of Multiculturalism	Equivalents in Islamic Education	Islamic References	Literature Study Findings
Tolerance	<i>Tasamuh</i> - respecting differences in views and beliefs	QS. Al-Kafirun Verse 6 & QS. Al-Hujurat Verse 13	Islamic education teaches tolerance as a fundamental principle in human relations, but its implementation is still weak in the formal curriculum.

The Urgency of Multicultural Education in Building a Civil Society: The Perspective of Islamic Educational Philosophy - Masduki, Sehan Rifky Arfanaldy, Mohammad Bintang Pamuncak, Fahmi

Justice	<i>Adl</i> - upholding social and moral justice	QS. An-Nahl Verse 90 and QS. Al-Maidah Verse 8	The concept of justice is very central in Islam, and Islamic education has not fully encouraged equality in the internal diversity of the ummah.
Equality	<i>Musawah</i> - equality of man before Allah	QS. Al-Hujurat verse 13	Although the concept of equality is powerful in Islam, Islamic educational practices still show a tendency towards exclusivism towards minority groups.
Intercultural dialogue	<i>Syura</i> -dialogue and deliberation	QS. Ash-Syura Verse 38 and QS. Ali Imran Verse 159	Islamic education has not yet adopted cross-cultural dialogue-based learning methods systematically, even though it strongly supports dialogue.
Respect for diversity	<i>Ta'aruf</i> - getting to know each other through differences	QS. Al-Hujurat verse 13	The value of ta'aruf as a framework for thinking has not been maximized in the development of the Islamic education curriculum.
Anti-discrimination	<i>La ikraha fid-din</i> – there is no compulsion in religion	QS. Al-Baqarah verse 256	Islam rejects discrimination, but the education system still marginalizes groups with different religious or cultural backgrounds.
Freedom of thought and opinion	<i>Ijtihad and ikhtilaf</i> – differences as a blessing	QS. Az-Zumar verse 18 & hadith friends	The concept of ijtihad opens up space for intellectualism and freedom of thought, but it is less applied in dogmatic learning environments.
Universal brotherhood	<i>Ukhuwwah insaniyyah</i> – the brotherhood of fellow human beings	QS. Al-Anfal verse 46 & QS. Ali Imran, verse 103	This concept has not become a core part of the character education strategy in Islamic schools, even though it has the potential to strengthen social integration.
Inclusive character education	<i>Tazkiyatun nafs</i> – purification of the soul and morals	QS. Asy-Syams verse 9-10	Islamic education focuses on the moral aspects of the individual but has not yet been developed towards the

			formation of multicultural and socially empathetic characters.
Peaceful conflict resolution	<i>Ishlah</i> – peaceful resolution of conflict	QS. Al-Hujurat verse 9-10	The concept of reconciliation has great potential for forming a generation of peacemakers, but it has not been integrated into the conflict learning approach in educational institutions.

Table 1 The Relationship between Multicultural Values, Islamic Values, and Literature Study Findings

Discussion

The results above strengthen the theory that multicultural education is not a foreign concept in Islam but originates from the fundamental values of Islamic teachings. The concept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* in QS. Al-Anbiya: 107 shows that Islam is a blessing for all nature without distinguishing ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds (Alfani, 2023). This shows that the paradigm of Islamic education has normatively accommodated the values of multiculturalism (Sahin, 2018).

However, integrating multicultural values into Islamic education is not free from challenges and limitations. One of the main challenges is resistance from some educators and stakeholders who view diversity as a threat to the purity of Islamic teachings. The dominance of the normative-doctrinal approach, which emphasizes formal obedience and order, often hinders the growth of dialogue and critical thinking in the classroom. In this context, a holistic philosophical approach, as put forward by Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas, which emphasizes moral education and character building, becomes very relevant in responding to the plurality of the times (Rahmatullah et al., 2022).

Criticism of the philosophical weaknesses of Islamic education was also conveyed by (Hoogervorst, 2017), who stated that a purely technical orientation makes education fail to form critical awareness of social reality. This is reinforced by the finding that only 27% of Islamic Education teachers understand the principles of Islamic-based multicultural education (Zubaidi, 2024). The lack of multicultural literacy and training means that Islamic education is not optimal in responding to diversity.

Another challenge is the separation between the Islamic and citizenship curricula, often taught without synergy. This creates cognitive dissonance in students who receive inconsistent messages about diversity and tolerance. The Islamic education model that unites the values of *musawah* (equality), *syura* (dialogue), and *ta'aruf* (getting to know each other) needs to be designed systematically in an integrative curriculum based on Islamic values and the principles of contemporary multiculturalism.

Compared with previous literature, this study strengthens the views of (Moore, 2009) and (Banks, 2009) that multicultural education is effective when integrated into the education structure, not just in content. However, this study expands its approach by including the philosophical dimension of Islam more explicitly as an integrative basis, something that has not been widely explained in previous studies. Thus, this article fills the gap between Islamic education theory and the modern multicultural education framework.

The policy implications of the results of this study cover three main areas. First, the curriculum of Islamic schools and Islamic boarding schools should be designed to include

The Urgency of Multicultural Education in Building a Civil Society: The Perspective of Islamic Educational Philosophy - Masduki, Sehan Rifky Arfanaldy, Mohammad Bintang Pamuncak, Fahmi

multicultural values explicitly and contextually. Second, teacher training is based on multicultural literacy rooted in Islamic teachings and trains them to manage heterogeneous classes inclusively. Third, strengthening school culture that upholds diversity through cross-cultural programs, interfaith dialogue, and collaborative social projects.

Overall, this study offers a philosophical-operational framework for the development of Islamic education that is normative, reflective, and transformative. The novelty of this study lies in the effort to unite two approaches that are often separated, Islamic educational philosophy and multicultural educational theory, into one comprehensive and contextual conceptual framework. This contribution is expected to enrich the literature on Islamic education and become a reference for policy and practice in designing an Islamic education system in the era of pluralism and globalization.

Conclusion

Multicultural education has a strong foundation in Islamic educational philosophy through values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *'adl* (justice), and *musawah* (equality). These values are theologically relevant and strategic in building an inclusive and just civil society. This study shows that although these principles have long been embedded in Islamic teachings, their implementation in Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia is still limited and partial, especially in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and the capacity of educators.

To answer these challenges, it is necessary to reconstruct the paradigm of Islamic education that is more inclusive, dialogical, and contextual. Some practical recommendations include: (1) integration of multicultural values in all elements of learning, not only in content but also in methods and school culture; (2) development of teacher training based on Islamic multicultural literacy; and (3) creation of an educational climate that encourages intercultural dialogue and respect for differences.

For future scientific development, further research is needed to explore the concrete implementation of multicultural education in various Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and other Muslim-majority countries. This comparative study across contexts will enrich our understanding of how multicultural values can be effectively internalized through an approach based on local wisdom and universal Islamic values. In addition, field studies on the impact of integrating multicultural values on students' attitudes toward diversity will also significantly contribute to the development of more adaptive and transformative Islamic education policies.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare no relevant conflicts of interest related to this research. All findings and opinions expressed in this article are based on an objective literature analysis. The findings and opinions are not influenced by personal or commercial relationships with any party that could have influenced the results. This research was conducted independently without any financial support or resources from third parties that could give rise to a potential conflict of interest.

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The Urgency of Multicultural Education in Building a Civil Society: The Perspective of Islamic Educational Philosophy - Masduki, Sehan Rifky Arfanaldy, Mohammad Bintang Pamuncak, Fahmi

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The Urgency of Multicultural Education in Building a Civil Society: The Perspective of Islamic Educational Philosophy - Masduki, Sehan Rifky Arfanaldy, Mohammad Bintang Pamuncak, Fahmi

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