



# Implementation of Multicultural Islamic Education in Higher Education in an Effort to Reconstruct Students' Inclusive Character

Pratiwi Tri Aminah<sup>1</sup>, Fery Diantoro<sup>2</sup>, Nurfida Mardatillah<sup>3</sup>, Shofiatuz Zahroh<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>UIN Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo, Indonesia

Email : [aztiwi32@gmail.com](mailto:aztiwi32@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>, [diantoro@uinponorogo.ac.id](mailto:diantoro@uinponorogo.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>,  
[nurfidamardatillah@gmail.com](mailto:nurfidamardatillah@gmail.com)<sup>3</sup>, [sofiatuzzahroh5@gmail.com](mailto:sofiatuzzahroh5@gmail.com)<sup>4</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

Multicultural Islamic Education, Higher Education, Inclusive Character.

\*Corresponding Author  
[aztiwi32@gmail.com](mailto:aztiwi32@gmail.com)

This research is motivated by the phenomenon in higher education where many students still have intolerant attitudes and lack inclusive attitudes. This study was conducted with the aim of describing and analyzing the role of multicultural Islamic education in building the inclusive character of students in higher education. The method used is a descriptive qualitative method with a literature study approach. Data in this study were obtained by collecting, reviewing, and analyzing data from several literature sources such as books, journals, and research relevant to this research. Data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman model. The results show that the implementation of multicultural Islamic education is a solution in building and strengthening the inclusive character of students in college through the integration of Islamic values with the curriculum, learning methods, and academic culture of higher education. Thus, multicultural Islamic education does not only focus on theoretical understanding, but also on efforts to internalize Islamic values in the learning process, thereby creating a tolerant and inclusive generation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a multicultural nation, boasts a vast diversity of cultures, languages, religions, and ethnicities. Therefore, a platform is needed to build an inclusive character for its people, especially the younger generation. Therefore, multicultural Islamic education has begun to be implemented at all levels of education, including universities. Universities, as intellectual spaces, serve not only as venues for the development of knowledge but also as spaces for character development, enabling students to thrive in a diverse society. The pluralistic social reality of Indonesia demands openness, tolerance, and mutual respect among individuals. However, in practice, various forms of exclusive attitudes and a lack of acceptance of differences among students are still found. This

situation demonstrates the importance of fostering an inclusive character throughout the higher education process. (Susrianto & Putra, 2023).

One approach to developing this character is through multicultural Islamic education. Islamic education focuses not only on worship and religious knowledge but also encompasses universal values such as justice, tolerance, and respect for diversity. From a multicultural perspective, these values can serve as a foundation for developing inclusive attitudes in students, enabling them to interact harmoniously despite their diverse backgrounds. Various previous studies have shown that the implementation of multicultural education has a positive influence on attitudes of religious tolerance and moderation. Several studies have shown that integrating multicultural values into learning can increase students' awareness of the importance of respecting differences and fostering more inclusive social interactions (Nasution et al., 2025). However, studies specifically linking multicultural Islamic education to inclusive character development for university students are still relatively limited. Furthermore, existing research tends to emphasize conceptual aspects and has not examined how these values are internalized in the real lives of students on campus (Aulia et al., 2025).

Based on this, the role of multicultural Islamic education is not only as a learning concept, but also as a process of forming inclusive character which is manifested in the attitudes and behavior of individuals in everyday life, gender, language, race, ethnicity, culture and other differences (Nugraha et al., 2020). Thus, the discussion focuses not only on understanding values but also on how these values are implemented in social interactions at universities. The research question is the role of multicultural Islamic education in strengthening the inclusive character of students at universities, as well as the factors influencing the success of this process. The purpose of writing this article is to describe and analyze the role of multicultural Islamic education in building the inclusive character of students in higher education, so that it is hoped that it can contribute to the development of educational practices that are more inclusive and responsive to diversity.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, employing library research. Data were obtained through collecting, reviewing, and analyzing data from several literature sources, such as books, journals, and research relevant to the study. The collected data were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model of analysis techniques: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Sugiono, 2024). In the data collection stage, data is gathered from several literature sources relevant to the research topic. Once collected, the next step is to sort and simplify the data to facilitate the discussion of the study. In the data presentation stage, the data is presented in descriptive narrative form using simpler words to facilitate understanding of the research content. The process of drawing conclusions is

carried out systematically while maintaining the data's substance.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

#### **The Concept of Multicultural Education in Higher Education**

The basic concept of multicultural education emphasizes the importance of understanding diversity in society. Multiculturalism is generally defined as cultural diversity encompassing various aspects, such as beliefs, values, customs, and habits shared by one or more groups. In the context of education, multiculturalism not only acknowledges differences but also emphasizes the importance of accepting and respecting other groups regardless of background, such as ethnicity, religion, language, or gender. There are three terms often used to describe diverse societies: plurality, diversity, and multiculturalism. Although all three relate to the concept of difference, their meanings are not entirely the same. Plurality simply indicates the presence of more than one group, while diversity emphasizes variation. Multiculturalism, however, has a broader meaning because it includes the recognition and appreciation of these differences on an equal footing (Steinfatt, 1999).

Multiculturalism is closely linked to cultural diversity, namely the readiness to live together peacefully with other different groups. The principles espoused include social justice, democracy, human rights, tolerance, and solidarity. These principles form the basis for building national consciousness and an open social life. In education, this idea is realized through a multicultural education system. The goal of this education is to help students understand, acknowledge, and appreciate the differences around them. The primary goal of multicultural education is to produce individuals capable of empathy, mutual respect, and harmonious coexistence in diverse environments. Throughout the learning process, students are expected to reject all forms of discrimination, conflict, and social injustice. James A. Banks's thinking outlines five components of multicultural education: curriculum integration, developing understanding, reducing prejudice, implementing equitable learning, and strengthening an inclusive school culture. These five components are crucial strategies for building an education system that values diversity.

#### **Inclusive Character Education**

Inclusive character education is a systematic effort to shape the attitudes, values, and behaviors of individuals so that they are able to accept, appreciate, and coexist with various differences. In the context of higher education, inclusive character is very important because students come from diverse backgrounds, both in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity, and social conditions. Therefore, education does not only focus on mastering knowledge, but also on developing an open and tolerant personality (Yaya Suryana, 2020). An inclusive character is characterized by several key attitudes, such as tolerance, empathy, fairness, and

the ability to work together regardless of differences. Students with an inclusive character tend to be better able to adapt to heterogeneous environments and have a high level of social awareness (Banks, 2019). This is in line with research which states that multicultural-based education can increase attitudes of mutual respect and strengthen harmonious social interactions in the educational environment. (Aulia et al., 2025).

From an Islamic educational perspective, the values of inclusivity have long been a part of Islamic teachings. Concepts such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), and *'adl* (justice) form the basis for building harmonious social relationships. These values, when integrated into the learning process, can strengthen the development of students' inclusive character. Recent research also shows that multicultural Islamic education plays a role in instilling the values of religious moderation and inclusive attitudes among students (Kurnaedi & Muslih, 2022). Character education implementation in higher education can be achieved through various means, such as integrating inclusive values into the curriculum, using participatory learning methods, and creating a campus environment that supports diversity. For example, lecturers can use collaborative learning models and group discussions that encourage interaction between students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, student activities are also a strategic platform for instilling inclusive values.

However, several challenges remain in its implementation, such as a lack of understanding of the importance of inclusive education, the persistence of exclusive attitudes among students, and the suboptimal integration of these values into the learning process. Therefore, a commitment from all parties, including lecturers, institutions, and students themselves, is needed to create a sustainable educational environment (Pudyastuti & Trinugraha, Yosafat Hermawan, 2023). Inclusive character education plays a crucial role in shaping students who are not only academically intelligent but also possess social sensitivity and the ability to live within diversity. Through appropriate education, it is hoped that students will become individuals who uphold the values of tolerance, appreciate differences, and contribute to creating a harmonious society.

### **Implementation of Multicultural Islamic Education in Higher Education**

Multicultural Islamic education in higher education is an effort to provide protection against various threats in the current era of global climate change, such as intolerance, radicalism, and exclusivism, which are beginning to plague human civilization. Students, as agents of change, who are expected to bring renewal to the human race, have a significant responsibility to achieve these goals and to cultivate personalities with noble morals (Jannah & Sulianti, 2021). Therefore, students need a strong foundation and support to form the basis for their actions and behavior in society. Therefore, a strong education in multicultural Islamic education in higher education is needed as a strategic step in developing students with inclusive, tolerant characters, sensitive to diversity,

and able to live within that diversity.

The implementation of multicultural Islamic education, especially in higher education, must not be limited to the curriculum aspect, but must also include learning methods, the academic culture of higher education, and student activities in an effort to support the internalization of the values of multicultural diversity in society (Dwi Ajeng Maulidya Makalao, et al., 2026). The forms of implementation of multicultural Islamic education in higher education can be seen as follows: First, there are efforts to integrate multicultural religious values into the Islamic religious education curriculum in the world of lectures. (Nasaruddin Nasaruddin, Ilham Ilham, 2025). Islamic values relevant to diversity can be in the form of tolerance (*tasamuh*), which can be the basis for students' attitudes and actions in the diversity of human civilization. Equality (*musawah*) and justice (*'adl*) serve as guidelines and perspectives in social life, ensuring that all humans have the same and equal standing in all aspects of life, the only difference being the level of faith and piety of individuals before the Almighty. Islam, *Rahmatan Lil'alamin*, serves as a guide for individuals in life so that every action is based on Islamic values as a guide to life (Anam, 2019).

The development of a multicultural Islamic religious education curriculum in higher education is a very urgent matter and requires careful planning to ensure high-quality curriculum development. Strategies for developing a multicultural Islamic religious education curriculum include identifying needs in the field, searching for or adopting curriculum materials, analyzing and selecting them, and then evaluating the curriculum and making decisions based on the analysis and assessment results (Jumari, Sri Wahyuni, 2025).

Second, learning methods. In classroom learning, the learning approach must be dialogic, participatory, and reflective. In the implementation of multicultural Islamic education, which seeks to build inclusive character in students, teachers/lecturers are required to apply an inclusive and moderate approach to learning. Considering this context, the role of lecturers is not only as educators but also plays other roles: a lecturer must be able to act democratically and non-discriminatory in learning, a lecturer must have an empathetic and responsive attitude to social issues related to religion, a lecturer must be able to emphasize the substance of religious teachings in lectures, and a lecturer is required to elaborate various innovative learning methods and strategies (Muqoyyidin & Widiyaningsih, 2021). Furthermore, lecturers also act as facilitators, encouraging students to think critically and be sensitive to changes and current issues in human civilization. Lecturers are required to foster interfaith dialogue to create a more lively and competent classroom atmosphere by implementing discussion methods and real-life project-based learning that can build diversity awareness in students.

Third, strengthening an inclusive academic culture at universities. Academic culture is the primary foundation for the development of thought and perspectives across all components of a university (Lailiyah, 2025). Therefore,

universities must be able to be open spaces in building perspectives on diversity, fostering an attitude of openness, respect for diversity, and being free from discriminatory attitudes. An inclusive learning environment that provides space for students with disabilities and upholds the concept of universal design for learning is one way universities represent building an inclusive and non-discriminatory academic culture towards differences in the classroom (Riswari et al., 2022). So it can be said that an inclusive academic culture is an interpretation of the values of multicultural Islamic education, namely brotherhood, justice, freedom and upholding the equal position of individuals in society.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that multicultural Islamic education plays a significant role in fostering inclusive character among university students. These findings reinforce the view that education functions not only as a medium for knowledge transmission but also as a mechanism for shaping values, attitudes, and social behaviors that support harmonious coexistence within a diverse society. In higher education, where students come from various cultural, ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds, diversity provides a strategic context for internalizing values such as tolerance, justice, empathy, and respect for differences.

The results are consistent with the theory of multicultural education proposed by James A. Banks, who emphasizes that multicultural education aims to provide equal educational opportunities for all learners and reduce prejudice through curriculum reform, equitable pedagogy, and the development of an inclusive institutional culture. The present study demonstrates that the implementation of multicultural Islamic education extends beyond curriculum integration and encompasses dialogical, participatory, and reflective learning approaches. Such approaches encourage students to engage with multiple perspectives, thereby enhancing their openness to diversity and strengthening their ability to interact constructively with individuals from different backgrounds. From an Islamic educational perspective, the findings reveal that inclusivity is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. Values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), and *'adl* (justice) serve as fundamental principles for developing harmonious social relationships. Therefore, multicultural Islamic education should not be viewed as an external concept imposed on Islamic education; rather, it represents the practical manifestation of Islamic values within a pluralistic society. This finding supports previous studies indicating that multicultural Islamic education contributes to the development of religious moderation and inclusive attitudes among students.

Furthermore, the study highlights the crucial role of lecturers in the successful implementation of multicultural Islamic education. Lecturers are not merely transmitters of knowledge but also agents of value transformation who model democratic, fair, and non-discriminatory behavior. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of multicultural education largely depends on the quality

of interactions between lecturers and students. When lecturers create an open learning environment that respects diverse viewpoints, students are more likely to internalize inclusive values and apply them in their daily lives.

Another important finding is that an inclusive academic culture significantly strengthens students' inclusive character. Universities that provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of religion, ethnicity, culture, gender, or physical condition, create an environment that promotes healthy social interaction and mutual understanding. This finding aligns with social constructivist perspectives, which argue that character and value formation occur through continuous social interaction within a particular environment. Consequently, higher education institutions should not limit multicultural education to classroom instruction but should also cultivate an academic ecosystem that consistently reflects the principles of inclusivity and diversity. Despite its positive contributions, the study also identifies several challenges in implementing multicultural Islamic education. These include the persistence of exclusive attitudes among some students, limited awareness of the importance of diversity, and the inadequate integration of multicultural values across all academic activities. These challenges indicate that the development of inclusive character is a long-term process requiring continuous efforts and the active involvement of all stakeholders within the university. Without strong institutional commitment, multicultural education may remain a normative discourse rather than a transformative educational practice capable of influencing students' attitudes and behaviors.

In the contemporary global context, characterized by increasing intolerance, radicalism, social polarization, and identity-based conflicts, multicultural Islamic education has become increasingly relevant. Higher education institutions are expected not only to produce academically competent graduates but also individuals who possess social intelligence, intercultural competence, and a commitment to universal humanitarian values. In this regard, multicultural Islamic education can be viewed as a preventive and transformative strategy for preparing students to become moderate, inclusive, and socially responsible citizens. Overall, the findings affirm that the implementation of multicultural Islamic education through curriculum integration, inclusive pedagogical approaches, and the strengthening of an inclusive academic culture plays a vital role in shaping students' inclusive character. The more effectively multicultural Islamic education is implemented in higher education institutions, the greater the potential for developing students who are tolerant, respectful of diversity, and capable of living harmoniously within multicultural societies. These findings further highlight the strategic contribution of Islamic education in fostering a civilized, moderate, and socially cohesive society in the twenty-first century.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that multicultural Islamic education plays a strategic

role in fostering inclusive character among university students in higher education institutions. Through the integration of multicultural values into the curriculum, the implementation of inclusive and participatory learning approaches, and the development of an inclusive academic culture, students are encouraged to cultivate attitudes of tolerance, empathy, justice, and respect for diversity. These values are not only aligned with the principles of multicultural education but are also deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, particularly the concepts of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), and *'adl* (justice). The findings further demonstrate that the effectiveness of multicultural Islamic education depends on the active involvement of lecturers, institutional commitment, and the creation of a supportive learning environment that promotes meaningful interaction among students from diverse backgrounds. Such educational practices contribute significantly to the development of students who are capable of living harmoniously in multicultural societies and responding constructively to contemporary challenges such as intolerance, radicalism, and social polarization.

Therefore, higher education institutions should strengthen the implementation of multicultural Islamic education not only through curricular reforms but also through the cultivation of inclusive academic cultures and student engagement programs. By doing so, universities can contribute to the formation of graduates who are academically competent, socially responsible, and committed to the values of diversity, moderation, and peaceful coexistence. Future studies are recommended to explore the effectiveness of specific multicultural educational models and to examine their long-term impact on students' attitudes and behaviors across different higher education contexts.

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