

Multicultural Educational Values in the Thought of Azyumardi Azra

Muhammad Ismail, Ismaraidha, Rahayu Dwi Utami

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the multicultural educational values in the thought of Azyumardi Azra and examine their relevance to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. The study is motivated by the growing challenges of living in a multicultural society, characterized by increasing incidents of intolerance, discrimination, radicalism, and identity-based social conflicts. These conditions highlight the urgent need for an Islamic educational paradigm capable of cultivating tolerance, moderation, and respect for diversity. This research employed a qualitative approach using a library research design. Primary data were obtained from the works of Azyumardi Azra, while secondary data were collected from books, scholarly journal articles, and other relevant academic publications. Data were gathered through document analysis and analyzed using content analysis and the intellectual biography approach, following the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that Azyumardi Azra's conception of multicultural education is grounded in the paradigm of moderate Islam, which views diversity as *sunnatullah* (God's divine decree) and as social capital for building a harmonious society. The study identifies seven core values of multicultural education in Azra's thought: tolerance (*tasamuh*), moderation (*wasathiyah*), humanism, democracy, social justice, peace, and nationalism. These values are integrated into an inclusive, democratic, and civilized model of Islamic education. Furthermore, they are highly relevant to the development of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, character education, the implementation of religious moderation, and the cultivation of school cultures that respect diversity. Therefore, Azyumardi Azra's educational thought remains highly relevant as a conceptual foundation for developing Islamic education capable of nurturing generations who are religious, moderate, tolerant, and committed to national unity within Indonesia's multicultural society.

Keywords: *Multicultural Education, Azyumardi Azra, Islamic Education, Religious Moderation, Tolerance.*

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Introduction

Indonesia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, characterized by a rich plurality of religions, ethnicities, languages, cultures, traditions, and social values. This diversity constitutes a valuable national asset that must be preserved and managed constructively. Nevertheless, numerous social conflicts rooted in religious, ethnic, and cultural differences indicate that diversity is not always perceived as a positive social force. Under certain circumstances, differences may become sources of tension when they are not accompanied by attitudes of tolerance and respect for diversity.

Education plays a strategic role in fostering multicultural awareness within society. Through education, learners can be nurtured into individuals who are capable of accepting, appreciating, and living harmoniously alongside people from diverse backgrounds. According to Banks (2019), multicultural education is an educational process that aims to provide equal learning opportunities for all students regardless of their cultural, religious, racial, or ethnic backgrounds.

Within the Indonesian context, one of the Muslim scholars who consistently developed the concept of multicultural education is Azyumardi Azra. Azra argues that multicultural education is an urgent necessity for Indonesia's pluralistic society. Education should function not merely as a medium for knowledge transmission but also as an instrument for cultivating national character, tolerance, and respect for diversity. According to Azra, multicultural education is education about and for cultural diversity that aims to strengthen national unity within the framework of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

Azra's educational thought emerged from his concern over the rise of exclusivism, radicalism, and intolerance in religious and social life. He emphasized that Islamic education must promote an inclusive, moderate, and open understanding of Islam that encourages intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Islamic education should not be confined to narrow and exclusive teaching models but should instead serve as an instrument for developing a democratic, peaceful, and civilized society.

Previous studies have shown that Azra's concept of multicultural education emphasizes the values of tolerance, moderation, respect for diversity, humanity, and peace as the foundation of contemporary Islamic education. However, studies specifically focusing on identifying and analyzing the multicultural educational values embedded in Azra's thought remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine the multicultural educational values in Azyumardi Azra's thought and analyze their relevance to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Literature Review

2.1 Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is an educational paradigm that emerged in response to the realities of culturally diverse and plural societies. This concept emphasizes the importance of respecting differences in culture, religion, ethnicity, language, gender, and social background throughout the educational process. Multicultural education is not merely concerned with acknowledging diversity but also seeks to promote social justice, equal opportunities, and harmonious coexistence within pluralistic societies. In this perspective, schools and educational institutions are viewed as strategic spaces for instilling tolerance, dialogue, and respect for diversity from an early age.

According to Banks (2019), multicultural education is simultaneously an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process aimed at providing equal educational opportunities for all learners regardless of their cultural, religious, racial, or socioeconomic backgrounds. It not only teaches diversity as knowledge but also cultivates attitudes and

behaviors that appreciate differences and reject all forms of discrimination. Similarly, Nieto (2017) explains that multicultural education seeks to develop students' critical awareness of issues such as social injustice, stereotypes, prejudice, and social exclusion that frequently arise within pluralistic societies.

In Indonesia, multicultural education is highly relevant because Indonesian society consists of hundreds of ethnic groups, local languages, cultural traditions, and religions coexisting within a single nation. While this diversity represents valuable social capital, it also has the potential to generate conflict if not managed through appropriate educational approaches. Consequently, multicultural education is regarded as an essential instrument for strengthening national unity, reinforcing social integration, and cultivating tolerant and inclusive citizens (Tilaar, 2012).

From the perspective of Islamic education, multicultural values are firmly rooted in Islamic teachings. The Qur'an affirms that human diversity is part of Allah's divine will (*sunnatullah*), as stated in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13. This verse emphasizes that differences in ethnicity, nationality, and social groups should not become grounds for discrimination but should instead encourage mutual understanding (*ta'aruf*) and cooperation. Therefore, multicultural education is fully consistent with Islamic teachings and represents an implementation of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation) (Azra, 2012).

Generally, multicultural education encompasses several core values, including tolerance (*tasamuh*), equality, justice, democracy, humanism, peace, and respect for diversity. These values serve as the foundation for building an inclusive, democratic, and civilized society (Banks, 2019).

2.2 Azyumardi Azra's Perspective on Multicultural Education

Azyumardi Azra is one of Indonesia's leading Muslim intellectuals who has made significant contributions to the development of Islamic education, religious moderation, and multiculturalism. His educational thought was shaped by his observations of Indonesia's pluralistic society as well as his extensive studies on Islamic history, education, and intercivilizational relations. According to Azra (2012), education plays a strategic role in developing societies capable of living peacefully amid religious, cultural, and social diversity.

Azra argues that multicultural education should teach respect for social and cultural diversity as an essential component of Indonesia's national identity. Education should not function as a tool for cultural homogenization or ideological exclusivism but rather as a medium for fostering mutual respect and collective awareness in pluralistic societies (Azra, 2019).

He further contends that Indonesia's greatest contemporary challenge is not merely scientific and technological advancement but maintaining social cohesion amid growing identity politics and globalization. Consequently, education should revitalize national consciousness by promoting the values of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the foundations of national life (Azra, 2019).

Furthermore, Azra emphasizes the importance of developing the paradigm of moderate Islam (*wasathiyah*) within Islamic education. According to him, Indonesian Islam is characterized by inclusiveness, tolerance, and adaptability to diverse socio-cultural realities. Therefore, Islamic education should cultivate students who possess moderate religious understanding, openness to dialogue, and appreciation for diversity as an integral part of social life (Azra, 2020). This paradigm is essential for preventing extremism, radicalism, and intolerance that may threaten national unity.

Within educational settings, Azra's thought demonstrates that multicultural education extends beyond cognitive development to include the cultivation of attitudes, character, and

social consciousness. Education should produce democratic citizens who respect human rights while remaining committed to national values and universal humanity (Hamzah et al., 2022).

2.3 Multicultural Educational Values in Azyumardi Azra's Thought

Based on Azra's writings and previous scholarly studies, several core values constitute the foundation of his multicultural educational philosophy.

a. Tolerance (*Tasamuh*)

Tolerance is the most prominent value in Azra's multicultural educational thought. It is understood as the willingness to respect religious, cultural, ethnic, and ideological differences without sacrificing one's own identity. According to Azra (2020), pluralistic societies require tolerance in order to coexist peacefully and respectfully.

b. Moderation (*Wasathiyah*)

Moderation refers to a balanced approach in understanding and practicing religious teachings. Azra regards moderate Islam as a defining characteristic of Indonesian Islam that should continuously be strengthened through education. Moderate attitudes encourage learners to avoid extremism and narrow fanaticism while promoting dialogue and social cooperation (Azra, 2020).

c. Humanism

Humanism in Azra's thought emphasizes respect for human dignity regardless of religion, ethnicity, or social status. Education should position human beings as subjects possessing equal rights, freedoms, and opportunities for personal development. Humanistic values therefore constitute the basis for inclusive and equitable education (Azra, 2012).

d. Democracy

Azra considers democracy as a social system that enables respect for diversity and active public participation. Within educational contexts, democratic values are reflected through freedom of expression, deliberation, and student participation in the learning process (Hamzah et al., 2022).

e. Social Justice

Social justice emphasizes equal rights and equal educational opportunities for all citizens. Multicultural education should ensure equal access to education without discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status. In this way, education becomes an instrument for achieving a more just and inclusive society (Banks, 2019).

f. Peace

Peace represents one of the principal goals of multicultural education. According to Azra, education should contribute to building a culture of peace through mutual respect, dialogue, and nonviolent conflict resolution. This value is particularly important for maintaining social stability within diverse societies (Azra, 2019).

g. Nationalism and National Insight

The final distinguishing characteristic of Azra's educational thought is the strengthening of national consciousness. Multicultural education is intended not only to cultivate tolerant individuals but also citizens committed to national unity. Therefore, education should instill the values of Pancasila, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, and national solidarity as the glue binding Indonesia's multicultural society together (Azra, 2019).

Overall, Azyumardi Azra's multicultural educational philosophy aims to develop a tolerant, moderate, humanistic, democratic, and socially just society. These values remain highly relevant not only for Islamic education but also for fostering a peaceful and harmonious Indonesian society amidst its rich diversity.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach using a library research design. Library research was conducted by collecting and analyzing various scholarly sources related to Azyumardi Azra's multicultural educational thought (Zed, 2018).

The primary data consisted of Azyumardi Azra's published works on Islamic education, multiculturalism, pluralism, and nationalism. Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, previous research, and other relevant academic documents.

Data were collected through documentation techniques by systematically reviewing relevant literature. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using content analysis as proposed by Krippendorff (2019). The analytical process followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To enhance the validity of the findings, source triangulation was employed by comparing various relevant primary and secondary references.

Results

4.1. The Multicultural Education Paradigm in Azyumardi Azra's Thought

The analysis of Azyumardi Azra's scholarly works reveals that multicultural education constitutes an integral component of Islamic educational reform aimed at fostering a democratic, tolerant, and civilized Indonesian society. According to Azra, the pluralistic nature of Indonesian society necessitates an educational system capable of managing diversity constructively rather than allowing it to become a source of conflict. Education should therefore be directed toward developing learners' ability to understand, accept, and appreciate differences in religion, culture, ethnicity, language, and traditions as inseparable elements of the nation's identity (Azra, 2019).

Content analysis of Azra's writings indicates that multicultural education is not merely understood as introducing cultural diversity but rather as a process of value transformation that cultivates students' social consciousness. Education functions as a medium for internalizing the values of tolerance, respect for human rights, social justice, and peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic society. Consequently, education should produce not only intellectually competent individuals but also morally and socially mature citizens (Azra, 2012).

Furthermore, Azra positions Islamic education as a strategic instrument for strengthening national integration. He argues that Indonesian Islam is characterized by moderation (*wasathiyah*), inclusiveness, and adaptability to sociocultural development. Therefore, Islamic education should cultivate religious understanding that is open to dialogue, appreciative of diversity, and opposed to all forms of violence and extremism. This paradigm demonstrates that multicultural education is not contrary to Islamic teachings; rather, it represents the practical implementation of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation).

These findings are consistent with Banks' (2019) perspective that multicultural education is an educational reform process designed to promote equality, justice, and respect for diversity throughout all aspects of teaching and learning.

4.2. Multicultural Educational Values in Azyumardi Azra's Thought

Based on the analysis of Azyumardi Azra's writings and intellectual contributions, this study identifies seven core values that constitute the foundation of his multicultural educational philosophy.

a. The Value of Tolerance (*Tasamuh*)

Tolerance represents the central value of Azra's multicultural educational philosophy. It is understood as the ability to embrace diversity without compromising one's religious identity. Within a pluralistic society, tolerance does not imply equating all beliefs but rather respecting every individual's right to practice their own faith while fostering harmonious social relationships. Education bears the responsibility of cultivating mutual respect from an early age so that learners become accustomed to living peacefully alongside people from different backgrounds (Azra, 2020).

b. The Value of Religious Moderation (*Wasathiyah*)

The findings indicate that moderation is one of the defining characteristics of Azra's educational thought. Islamic education should cultivate balanced thinking while avoiding extremism, exclusivism, and fanaticism. Through education, learners are encouraged to develop a comprehensive understanding of Islam that enables them to engage in dialogue, respect differing opinions, and resolve conflicts through deliberation. Religious moderation also serves as an essential strategy for preventing the spread of radicalism within educational institutions.

c. The Value of Humanism

Humanism in Azra's thought emphasizes respect for human dignity as bestowed by God. Education should provide equal treatment to all learners regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic background. This value promotes the development of inclusive, safe, and equitable learning environments where every individual's rights are respected (Azra, 2012).

d. The Value of Democracy

Azra views education as a space for practicing democratic principles. Democratic values are reflected through respect for freedom of expression, deliberation, responsibility, and active student participation in the learning process. Democratic education prepares learners to appreciate diverse perspectives while developing the capacity to resolve problems through constructive dialogue (Hamzah et al., 2022).

e. The Value of Social Justice

According to Azra, multicultural education must guarantee equal educational opportunities for all citizens regardless of religious affiliation, cultural background, or economic status. Social justice is realized through inclusive and non-discriminatory educational practices that provide every learner with equal opportunities to develop according to their potential (Banks, 2019).

f. The Value of Peace

Peace constitutes the ultimate objective of multicultural education. Education should foster a culture of peace through dialogue, cooperation, empathy, and nonviolent conflict resolution. Azra argues that Indonesia can maintain its national unity only when its citizens develop a culture of peace nurtured through education from an early age (Azra, 2019).

g. The Value of National Consciousness

The findings further demonstrate that strengthening national consciousness is a distinctive feature of Azra's multicultural educational philosophy. Education should cultivate commitment to Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the foundations of national life. Consequently, learners become not only religious individuals but also citizens who possess patriotism, social responsibility, and a strong commitment to preserving national unity.

4.3. The Relevance of Multicultural Educational Values to the Development of Islamic Education in Indonesia

The findings indicate that the multicultural educational values proposed by Azyumardi Azra possess strong relevance for the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

First, these values offer effective solutions to the growing challenges of intolerance, exclusivism, and radicalism within certain educational environments. Integrating the values of tolerance, moderation, dialogue, and respect for diversity enables learners to develop open-minded attitudes while maintaining their Islamic identity.

Second, multicultural education supports the development of a more contextual Islamic Religious Education curriculum. Learning materials should emphasize not only ritual religious practices but also integrate humanitarian values, nationalism, democracy, and harmonious social interaction. Such an approach reinforces the role of Islamic education as both character education and a means of strengthening social cohesion.

Third, multicultural educational values reinforce the implementation of Indonesia's Religious Moderation policy. Azra's concept of moderate Islam aligns closely with national efforts to promote religious harmony, peaceful coexistence, and appreciation of diversity. Consequently, his educational philosophy provides a valuable conceptual foundation for the advancement of Islamic education within multicultural societies.

Fourth, multicultural education contributes significantly to developing twenty-first-century student competencies. Beyond academic achievement, education should foster empathy, intercultural communication skills, collaboration, critical thinking, and social responsibility as essential qualities of Indonesian citizens.

4.4. The Implications of Azyumardi Azra's Thought for the Transformation of Islamic Education

The analysis demonstrates that Azyumardi Azra's educational philosophy has far-reaching implications for the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia.

From a philosophical perspective, Islamic education should be grounded in a moderate, inclusive, democratic, and diversity-oriented Islamic paradigm that recognizes pluralism as *sunnatullah* (God's divine order). Such a paradigm positions education as a means of building peaceful, just, and civilized societies.

From a curricular perspective, multicultural values should be integrated across all subjects, particularly Islamic Religious Education, Pancasila Education, and character education. This integration should encompass learning materials, teaching methods, instructional media, and school culture, thereby enabling learners to gain holistic educational experiences concerning life in a pluralistic society.

From a pedagogical perspective, teachers should serve not merely as transmitters of knowledge but also as role models who cultivate dialogue, tolerance, cooperation, and respect for diversity. Meanwhile, students should be positioned as active participants who construct multicultural experiences through positive social interaction.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the multicultural educational values articulated by Azyumardi Azra constitute a comprehensive paradigm for Islamic education. The interconnected values of tolerance, moderation, humanism, democracy, social justice, peace, and national consciousness collectively establish an educational system capable of producing Muslim generations who are religious, moderate, morally grounded, and firmly committed to national unity. These findings reaffirm that Azyumardi Azra's educational thought remains highly relevant as a conceptual foundation for the development of Islamic education in Indonesia amid the challenges of globalization, cultural pluralism, and the dynamics of contemporary society.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that Azyumardi Azra's concept of multicultural education represents an Islamic educational paradigm oriented toward fostering a tolerant, moderate, democratic, and civilized society. Education is viewed not merely as a process of knowledge transmission but also as a medium for value transformation that enables learners to appreciate religious, cultural, ethnic, and social diversity as an integral aspect of Indonesian national life.

This study identifies seven principal multicultural educational values within Azra's thought: tolerance (*tasamuh*), moderation (*wasathiyah*), humanism, democracy, social justice, peace, and national consciousness. These values complement one another in establishing an inclusive Islamic educational system that respects human rights, rejects discrimination and violence, and strengthens national integration. They further demonstrate that Islamic teachings provide a strong foundation for supporting harmonious and pluralistic societies through the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

The study also reveals that Azyumardi Azra's concept of multicultural education possesses significant relevance for the advancement of Islamic education in Indonesia. These values can be implemented through the development of Islamic Religious Education curricula that integrate character education, religious moderation, intercultural dialogue, and the cultivation of inclusive and democratic school cultures. Amid the increasing challenges of intolerance, radicalism, and social polarization, Azra's thought offers an important conceptual contribution toward developing an Islamic educational system capable of producing generations who are religious, moderate, humanistic, and firmly committed to national unity in accordance with the values of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

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