The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Building Inclusive and Tolerant Character in Educational Institutions

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in building inclusive and tolerant character in educational institutions. This study uses library research methods with a descriptive-analytical approach through a search of literature, scientific books, journals, educational regulations, and research reports related to the implementation of inclusive education and religious moderation. The results show that PAI has a significant contribution in fostering the values of tolerance, empathy, respect for differences, and strengthening moderate attitudes in students through the internalization of Islamic values rahmatan lil 'alamin. This role is realized through the integration of a curriculum based on religious moderation, the application of dialogic and collaborative learning methods, the exemplary role models of teachers as religious-humanist, and the development of an inclusive school culture. The research findings confirm that Islamic Religious Education functions not only as a transfer of theological knowledge, but also as an instrument for developing humanistic and adaptive character to social plurality. Thus, PAI has strategic potential in creating a generation that is religious, tolerant, and ready to live side by side in a multicultural society.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Inclusivity, Tolerance, Character, Religious Moderation

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Introduction

Education plays a vital role in developing the character of a civilized generation with noble morals and the ability to coexist peacefully in diversity. Education is not only responsible for transferring knowledge, but also for internalizing values and shaping personality (character building). In a multicultural society like Indonesia, developing an inclusive and tolerant character is an urgent and strategic need. This aligns with the mandate of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which affirms that education aims to shape students who believe in and fear God Almighty, possess noble morals, and become democratic and responsible citizens.

From an Islamic educational perspective, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a fundamental role in developing the character of students, who not only understand religious teachings cognitively but are also able to implement religious values in a peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive social life. According to Muhammad Abduh, the main goal of Islamic education is to "form human beings with morals and capable of providing benefits to their communities" (Abduh, 2010). This is in line with Al-Attas's view that Islamic education is essentially a process of "ta'dīb," namely the formation of manners, character, and ethical awareness in students (Al-Attas, 1991).

The values of inclusivity and tolerance in Islam are truly reflected in the teachings of Islam, which is rahmatan lil 'alamin (blessing for all the universe). This concept was emphasized by Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, who stated that Islam brings mercy, tolerance, and justice to all humanity, not just its adherents (Al-Qaradawi, 2006). This principle is reinforced by Surah AlHujurat, verse 13, which teaches that human diversity is a divine law that must be addressed with an attitude of mutual understanding (ta'āruf), mutual respect, and coexistence

However, the reality of education shows that the instillation of values of tolerance and inclusivity has not been optimal. A 2023 study by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) found that 51% of high school and university students exhibited moderate intolerance, and 12% exhibited high intolerance, particularly toward groups with different religions and views. 2022 data from the Islamic Religious Education Program (PPIM) at UIN Jakarta also revealed that 23.5% of Islamic Religious Education teachers held intolerant views toward religious minorities and other religious groups. This fact indicates that Islamic Religious Education still faces serious challenges in internalizing the values of tolerance and diversity.

According to Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur), religious education should shape "people of faith who are open, rational, tolerant, and respectful of diversity" (Madjid, 1999). This view emphasizes that Islamic religious education should not be exclusive and dogmatic, but rather dialogical, inclusive, and respectful of differences. In the context of modern learning, the approach to religious education must shift from an indoctrination paradigm to a humanist and transformational paradigm (Tilaar, 2002).

In the learning process, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can be an effective means of internalizing the values of tolerance if it utilizes a religious moderation approach, contextual learning, and a dialogical approach. This aligns with research by Hamid (2023), which showed that religious moderation-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning was able to reduce students' tendencies of intolerance by 40% in public schools in West Java. Similarly, a study by Rahman (2022) confirmed that schools implementing dialogue-based and multicultural Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning successfully increased students' inclusive attitudes in social interactions by 35%.

Given these facts and empirical data, it is highly relevant to examine in-depth how Islamic Religious Education can play a role in building inclusive and tolerant character in educational institutions. This study is important not only for theoretical development but also as a practical recommendation for teachers, schools, and Islamic education policymakers. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education in building inclusive and tolerant character in educational institutions through curriculum and pedagogical approaches, as well as the reinforcement of moderate Islamic values.

Literature Review 2.1 Key Concepts: Inclusive Character, Tolerance, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

Inclusive character is understood as a set of values, attitudes, and behaviors that foster respect for differences, social justice, openness, and the ability to collaborate across groups. This character encompasses traits such as empathy, appreciation for diversity, a sense of justice, and open-mindedness.

In educational studies, tolerance is defined as an attitude of accepting and respecting differences—whether differences in beliefs, cultures, ethnicities, or perspectives—while maintaining non-discrimination and maintaining constructive dialogue. In the Islamic context, the concept of tolerance is often associated with values such as rahmatan lil-'alamin (blessings for all the worlds), tasāmuḥ (tolerant attitude), and the principles of social justice.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not merely the transfer of religious knowledge; it is a process of values education, the formation of adab (ethics), and character formation. Therefore, PAI has the normative and practical capacity to internalize social values into students' attitudes and behaviors. Conceptual literature emphasizes the interconnectedness of these three terms: PAI, managed reflectively and contextually, can be a primary vehicle for inclusive character formation and the development of tolerant attitudes.

2.2 Empirical Research Findings: The Effectiveness of Islamic Education in Cultivating Inclusivity and Tolerance

Empirical studies on the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) show variations in outcomes depending on curriculum design, teaching methods, school context, and teacher competencies. A summary of the main findings in the literature is presented below. (1) The influence of a curriculum that explicitly instills pluralistic values: Schools that include modules on diversity, interfaith dialogue, and public ethics in religious studies courses tend to show an increase in students' tolerant attitudes compared to schools that teach Islamic Religious Education (PAI) ceremonially or textually only. (2) The role of pedagogical methods: Research has found that dialogic methods, case studies, problem-based learning, and project-based learning involving cross-group interactions are more effective in fostering empathy and openness than lecture methods. (3) The significance of teacher role models: Many studies confirm that the attitudes and behavior of Islamic Religious Education teachers are important determinants. Teachers who demonstrate openness, the ability to engage in dialogue, and respect for alternative perspectives are able to significantly influence students' attitudes. (4) The influence of the school environment and policies: An inclusive school culture (code of ethics, antidiscrimination regulations, cross-group activities) strengthens Islamic Religious Education learning outcomes. Conversely, a segregative social environment or the presence of intolerant narratives in society can hinder the internalization of tolerance values. (5) Limitations/counterfindings: There is also evidence that Islamic Education, if taught with a dogmatic or exclusive approach, can strengthen identity-based, partitioned attitudes. This confirms that bias towards content without methodological transformation can be counterproductive.

2.3 Islamic Education Curriculum and Materials: Content that Supports Inclusive Character

The curriculum literature identifies several principles and content that support the goals of inclusivity and tolerance: (1) Integration of universal values: Justice, humanity, and respect for human dignity as interfaith values that can serve as common ground. (2) Comparative study of texts: Learning that places religious texts in dialogue with other sources (e.g., other religious texts, pluralistic perspectives) fosters contextual understanding. (3) Issue-based and real-life case-based learning: Connecting religious teachings to contemporary social issues (minority rights, freedom of worship, social conflict) fosters application skills. (4) Emphasis on public ethics and citizenship: Modules that teach social responsibility and civic engagement strengthen students' inclusive orientation.

Research Methodology

This study employed a library research method with a descriptive-analytical approach. This method was chosen because the research focused on examining various relevant scientific literature, such as books, journals, educational regulations, previous research findings, and policy documents related to Islamic Religious Education, character education, inclusivity, and religious moderation. The descriptive-analytical approach was used to describe and analyze concepts in depth, then compile systematic and argumentative findings.

The data used in this study consisted of two types of sources: (1) Primary Data Sources in the form of basic books on Islamic Religious Education, character education, and religious moderation; (2) Official regulatory documents such as the National Education System Law, the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation on Character Education, and Ministry of Religious Affairs regulations regarding Islamic Religious Education and religious moderation; and (3) National and international scientific journal articles on educational inclusivity and tolerance education. (2) Secondary Data Sources in the form of research reports, seminar proceedings, theses/dissertations, official educational institution websites, and popular scientific articles relevant to the research focus.

Data collection was conducted through documentation methods, namely by: Searching and identifying relevant literature through libraries, online scientific journal portals (Google Scholar, DOAJ, Garuda, Sinta, and ERIC), and official websites of educational institutions and ministries. Selecting, reading, and evaluating document content based on key themes such as the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), character education, inclusivity, tolerance, and religious moderation. Taking notes on concepts, theories, and findings important for analysis.

Results 4.1 Islamic Religious Education Plays a Role as an Instrument for Internalizing the Values of Moderation and Tolerance

A literature review shows that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic function in instilling universal Islamic values, such as rahmatan lil-'alamin (blessing for the universe), tasāmuh (tolerance), ta‘āruf (knowledge of one another), ‘adl (justice), and ukhuwwah insāniyyah (human brotherhood). These values form the basis of an inclusive and tolerant character.

PAI serves not only to transfer religious knowledge (learning about religion), but also to develop moderate religious understanding and attitudes (learning from religion), and to encourage the implementation of values in social life (living in harmony) within the educational environment. Thus, PAI has a transformational, not merely informational, role.

4.2 Islamic Religious Education Learning Methods and Approaches Significantly Influence Inclusive Character Building

The literature shows that the learning approach significantly determines the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in building inclusive character. Doctrinally oriented, lecturebased learning has proven less effective in fostering tolerance. In contrast, the following approaches have been shown to be more effective in developing inclusive character: (1) Dialogic and reflective approaches can enhance critical thinking skills and respect for differing opinions. (2) Values-based education can foster moral awareness and empathy. (3) Social project-based learning can enhance social sensitivity and cross-group cooperation. (4) Multicultural and interreligious learning can reduce religious prejudice and stereotypes. The application of these methods has been proven to shift students' paradigms from dogmatic exclusivity to a contextual, open understanding of religion that respects differences.

4.4 Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Role Models for Inclusive and Tolerant Character Development

The literature analysis confirms that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a central role in the successful internalization of inclusive and tolerant values. Teachers serve not only as mu'allim (teachers), but also as murabbi (educators) and uswah ḥasanah (role models).

Several literatures note that the ideal characteristics of Islamic Religious Education teachers in the context of inclusive education include: possessing a moderate understanding of Islam and not being oriented toward exclusivity or radicalism; implementing a humanistic, dialogical, and student-centered pedagogy; being able to facilitate students' social and religious experiences; and exemplifying a tolerant attitude in social interactions within the school environment. Islamic Religious Education teachers with moderate pedagogical and religious competencies have been shown to significantly influence students' attitudes of tolerance.

4.5 The School Environment and Educational Culture Support the Formation of Inclusive and Tolerant Attitudes

Research results indicate that tolerance-oriented Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning will not be effective without a supportive school culture. An inclusive, tolerant, and diversity-focused educational environment—whether in programs, regulations, or social practices—contributes significantly to strengthening students' character.

Some forms of school culture implementation that support inclusive character development include: cross-group religious extracurricular activities and religious dialogue, multicultural community service activities, anti-discrimination policies in student social interactions, and cross-religious and cultural collaboration in educational projects. The literature confirms that schools that implement PAI with a character-based education model based on religious moderation tend to have higher levels of tolerance and social empathy than schools that focus solely on religious cognition.

4.6 Islamic Religious Education Contributes to Preventing Intolerance and Radicalism in Schools

Analysis of recent literature shows that Islamic Religious Education can be a preventive instrument against the spread of intolerance, exclusivism, and radicalism in educational settings. Religious education that emphasizes religious texts in their historical-sociological context and emphasizes the values of religious moderation plays a role in suppressing the emergence of extreme religious attitudes, both right-wing (radical) and left-wing (secular, antireligious).

Several indicators of Islamic Religious Education's success in preventing intolerance include: increased critical thinking skills in understanding religious texts, a decrease in religious stereotypes and negative prejudices among students, and a growing awareness that religiosity should not be used as a tool to justify discrimination. These results demonstrate that Islamic Religious Education can function as an agent of peace education if implemented effectively, moderately, and contextually.

4.7 Theological and Philosophical Dimensions of Islamic Religious Education in Strengthening Inclusivity

Theologically, Islamic teachings emphasize respect for diversity and reject discrimination. Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13, emphasizes that human plurality is the law of God, and the purpose of diversity is to achieve mutual understanding and respect. Islamic Religious Education serves as a medium for transforming this theological message into students' social awareness, so that tolerance is understood not merely as a moral concept but as a religious commandment.

According to Fazlur Rahman (1982), Islamic education should be directed at fostering moral awareness that forms the basis for peaceful social behavior. This aligns with Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur) view of the indigenization of Islam, which emphasizes acceptance of differences as part of a humanistic and tolerant expression of Islam. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) should not only emphasize memorization of doctrine, but also internalize universal Islamic values such as mercy, justice, and tolerance.

4.8 The Islamic Religious Education Curriculum as an Instrument for Strengthening Tolerant Character

The Islamic Religious Education curriculum, based on Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and the Pancasila Student Profile, supports the strengthening of values of tolerance, empathy, and religious moderation. Integrating material on Wasathiyah Islam, interfaith

tolerance, and social harmony into the curriculum is a strategic approach to building an inclusive character.

According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2022), the implementation of religious moderation through the Islamic Religious Education curriculum has increased students' understanding of the concept of diversity by up to 72% in schools that adopt a moderate approach. This demonstrates that appropriate curriculum design can foster an open and dialogical mindset in students.

4.9 The Role of Teachers as Inclusive Role Models and Moderating Agents

Islamic Religious Education teachers serve not only as instructors but also as murabbi (leaders), mu'allim (leaders), and uswah hasanah (good examples). Teachers' role models in being fair, respecting differences, and fostering cross-identity dialogue significantly influence the development of tolerant attitudes in students.

Nurcholish Madjid's (1999) perspective emphasizes that Islamic education must foster civility, or a social civilization that upholds good manners, peace, and respect for differences. In this study, schools whose Islamic Religious Education teachers implemented dialogue-based learning and interactive discussions demonstrated improved social skills and sensitivity to tolerance in students.

4.10 Implementation of Inclusive and Contextual Learning Methods

The application of learning methods such as cooperative learning, interfaith dialogue, social case studies, and project-based learning has proven effective in developing inclusive and tolerant attitudes. These learning models not only transfer religious knowledge but also cultivate empathy, collaboration, and the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully. For example, in religious literacy projects, students are involved in observing interfaith houses of worship and social interactions with other religious communities. These experiences foster an understanding that differences are not threats, but rather realities of life that must be respected. **School Culture and the Educational Environment as Reinforcers of Tolerance**

A school environment that implements an inclusive culture, such as promoting interfaith greetings, intercultural dialogue, and tolerant celebrations of holidays, strongly supports the development of inclusive character in students. Educational institutions that transform schools into miniature multicultural societies are more successful in instilling values of tolerance than those that rely solely on classroom learning.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains that tolerant behavior is formed through observation, imitation, and internalization. Students learn not only from textbooks, but also from role models and social practices in school.

Conclusion

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in developing inclusive and tolerant character in educational institutions. Through theological, pedagogical, and social approaches, PAI not only transfers religious knowledge but also instills universal humanitarian values such as tolerance, justice, peace, and respect for diversity. The PAI curriculum, based on religious moderation and character education, fosters open, dialogical thinking in students, and respects differences.

PAI teachers act as agents of moderation and social role models, using interactive, contextual, and collaborative learning methods to effectively internalize the value of tolerance in students' learning experiences. A supportive school environment and culture are also crucial factors in realizing inclusive education. A culture of tolerance fostered through cross-cultural socio-religious activities and social empathy transforms schools into miniature models of peaceful multicultural societies.

Thus, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) not only shapes students who are spiritually religious, but also humanistic, moderate, and adaptive to the realities of a pluralistic society. Islamic Religious Education, designed with a perspective of religious moderation, is highly relevant for

creating a generation prepared to live side by side in social harmony, avoid conflict, and actively promote peace in global life.

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