THE IMPORTANCE OF MULTICULTURAL UNDERSTANDING IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

In the era of rapid globalization, an approach that combines religious dimensions with multicultural understanding becomes very important in the context of Islamic religious learning. This article seeks to understand the positive impact of the integration of multicultural understanding in the process of Islamic religious learning, especially in shaping individual character and contributing to unity in an increasingly heterogeneous society. In an era where cultural diversity is becoming increasingly apparent, it is important to consider Islamic religious learning as something broader than just understanding religious aspects. The integration of multicultural understanding underlies efforts to create an inclusive learning environment, respecting every individual difference. By involving students in a deeper understanding of Islam in a multicultural context, we are able to form a generation that not only has tolerance, but also readiness to face the challenges of an increasingly complex, connected global world. The approach applied involves in-depth research and thorough analysis using relevant theories and supporting data.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Di In the era of globalization, education plays a central role in shaping the mindset and character of future generations. Islam, as an integral part of the educational process, should not be viewed solely as a religious aspect. Islamic Religious Education must be capable of accommodating cultural diversity and the values reflected in an increasingly interconnected global society. Understanding multiculturalism has become a necessity, as it forms a strong foundation for creating an inclusive learning environment that respects individual differences (Arthur, 2002; Barker & Ukpong, 2020). Islamic multicultural education fundamentally aims to instill values of diversity based on Islamic principles, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the surrounding environment. Through such education, students are expected to develop character traits that reflect Islamic values and demonstrate attitudes of respect and tolerance toward the cultural and religious diversity around them (Areiqat et al., 2024). To achieve this goal, it is essential to implement Islamic multicultural education values through various school programs and activities, enabling students to more easily understand and apply them in their daily lives (Firdaus & Fatah, 2019).

Multicultural education emphasizes the philosophical foundation of cultural pluralism as a core principle in designing educational systems. This philosophy is translated into key principles such as equality, mutual respect, acceptance, understanding, and moral commitment to achieving social justice. Furthermore, multicultural education is not merely a concept, but a concrete effort to cultivate empathy and deep understanding of differences. This includes the politics of recognition, where individuals from minority groups are acknowledged and valued specifically within the educational context (Dwi Utari & Hamid, 2021; Iqbal, 2015).

From a foundational perspective, we recognize that indifference and lack of recognition do not solely stem from racial structural inequality. The multicultural education paradigm delves deeper by incorporating issues related to injustice, poverty, oppression, and marginalization faced by minority groups. This analysis extends beyond a single field and encompasses various aspects of life, such as social, cultural, economic, and educational domains (Jiménez-Morales et al., 2020; Wula, 2019). The mission of Islamic education is not limited to imparting knowledge and academic content to students. More than that, it carries the responsibility of purifying and nurturing their souls by instilling positive values and good morals. Thus, Islamic education not only focuses on intellectual aspects, but also aims to shape character grounded in strong morality, enabling students to lead meaningful and virtuous lives (Nyoman et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, there remains a gap in the practical implementation of Islamic-based multicultural education in schools, particularly in integrating pluralistic values comprehensively into the learning process. Many studies highlight the urgency of multicultural values in Islamic education, but they are often limited to conceptual discussions and do not sufficiently explore how these values are applied contextually and operationally in formal educational settings. This indicates a pressing need to explore strategies, approaches, and instructional models that can bridge Islamic teachings with the social and cultural diversity realities found in schools.

2.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design with a case study approach to explore in depth the integration of multicultural understanding in Islamic Religious Education (Cresswell, 2012). This approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon through naturalistic data collection and analysis. The participants in this study consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers, students, and school principals from several elementary schools that apply multicultural principles in teaching. Participants were selected purposively, considering their active involvement in the implementation of multicultural values in the school environment.

To gather rich and in-depth data, the study utilized several data collection instruments, including participatory observation of learning activities, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and both closed and open-ended questionnaires to capture students' perceptions of diversity values in Islamic Religious Education (Krishnaswamy et al., 2012). Observations were conducted to document classroom dynamics and interactions between students and teachers, while interviews aimed to explore the participants' views and personal experiences related to multicultural practices in the classroom. The questionnaires provided additional quantitative insights into students' perceptions on a broader scale.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, which included coding, categorization, and identifying key themes that represent the meaning of the collected data. This process involved triangulating data from various sources to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. The results of the analysis were interpreted by referring to theories of multiculturalism and Islamic education, to provide a comprehensive picture of the positive impact of integrating multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education.

3.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The importance of multicultural understanding in the context of Islamic Religious Education becomes crucial in an era marked by globalization and societal diversity. In this context, the concept of multiculturalism refers to the recognition, appreciation, and acceptance of cultural, ethnic, and religious differences within a community (Barker & Ukpong, 2020; de Andrade, 2020). Multicultural understanding offers students the opportunity to explore Islam more deeply by connecting its principles with the diverse realities of society. It fosters a greater appreciation for cultural diversity, enabling learners to recognize and respect differences in traditions, heritage, and religious beliefs among their peers. Moreover, learning Islam in a multicultural environment promotes the development of tolerance and encourages collaboration among individuals from various cultural backgrounds.

This understanding also plays a significant role in overcoming stereotypes and prejudices that may arise toward Islam, opening space for a more inclusive and respectful view of religious diversity (Roger, 2013). In facing global challenges, a multicultural approach in Islamic Religious Education equips students with the necessary skills to interact effectively within increasingly interconnected environments. Additionally, it serves as a catalyst for interfaith dialogue, facilitating communication and the exchange of ideas among followers of different religions through deeper mutual understanding.

Multiculturalism also contributes to the shaping of Muslim identity in contemporary society by providing a balanced perspective of Islamic values within the framework of diversity. Thus, multicultural understanding in Islamic Religious Education is not only beneficial for deepening one's comprehension of the religion itself, but also for shaping individuals who possess tolerance, openness, and a willingness to contribute positively to an increasingly complex society (Leifels & Bowen, 2021; Villalba, 2008).

The importance of integrating multicultural understanding in Islamic Religious Education can be comprehended through several essential aspects. First, applying multicultural perspectives fosters an inclusive learning environment where students from diverse cultural backgrounds feel welcomed and respected (Dwi Utari & Hamid, 2021; Sholikhah & Miftahuddin, 2019). This inclusivity provides crucial support in achieving the goals of Islamic education, which aim to offer deep and positive understanding of religious beliefs and practices. Furthermore, integrating multicultural awareness plays a pivotal role in shaping students' character toward becoming more tolerant individuals. Students learn to appreciate differences and explore the richness of various cultures, which in turn deepens their understanding of Islamic teachings. This process is vital in cultivating a generation capable of living harmoniously within a multicultural society.

In addition, in an increasingly integrated global era, multicultural understanding extends beyond local relevance and becomes a key element in preparing students to face global challenges. The ability to adapt to diverse perspectives and religious practices becomes a valuable skill in navigating the complex and evolving dynamics of the modern world (Ikasari, 2013; Usman, 2022).

The integration of multicultural understanding in Islamic Religious Education brings several significant positive impacts. One of them is the reduction of stereotypes and prejudices that may arise during the learning process (Wurdinger, 2017). Students do not only gain an understanding of Islamic teachings from a purely religious perspective but also recognize that Islam is part of cultural diversity that enriches human values. This approach also strengthens social relationships among students through collaboration and cross-cultural dialogue, which becomes a common practice, creating a strong foundation for a harmonious society (Rosana et al., 2017; Zhai, 2017). The positive impact of multicultural understanding extends beyond the school environment, contributing to unity in an increasingly diverse society. With deeper understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices across different cultural contexts, society can grow as a unified community that appreciates and draws strength from diversity.

In analyzing the positive impact of integrating multicultural understanding, it is evident that students' comprehension of Islamic teachings becomes more profound. They not only study religious doctrines and practices but also understand how these teachings can merge and find meaning within diverse cultural contexts. This encourages a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of religion. In addition, students involved in Islamic Religious Education that incorporates multicultural elements tend to form a positive identity regarding their religion and culture. They perceive religion as a source of cultural richness and a foundation in shaping their identity within a pluralistic society (Berizzi et al., 2017). This approach also creates opportunities for students to develop intercultural skills, such as the ability to communicate, collaborate, and interact with individuals from various backgrounds. These skills are essential not only for academic success but also for effective social life in a multicultural society.

The contribution of multicultural understanding in Islamic Religious Education is also evident in shaping students' character (Maulyda & Erfan, 2020). Values such as tolerance and empathy grow as students learn to appreciate differences in beliefs and religious practices. They are also encouraged to see the world from diverse perspectives, enhancing their sense of empathy and openness. Students who understand cultural diversity through religious learning are more likely to develop a deep appreciation for human diversity, laying a strong foundation for building an inclusive society. Furthermore, students engaged in this approach often show the courage to engage in dialogue with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Maulyda et al., 2024). They are taught not only to speak but also to listen with understanding, opening the door for constructive conversations.

In an increasingly interconnected global context, multicultural understanding becomes a crucial necessity. No longer confined to local interests, this understanding is an important asset for students to face complex global challenges. Individuals who respect cultural diversity tend to make positive contributions on an international scale. When multicultural understanding is integrated into Islamic Religious Education, it has a significant impact in promoting global peace and harmony. By understanding and appreciating differences, the potential for intercultural conflict can be reduced, fostering more harmonious and sustainable international relations (Indraswati et al., 2020).

Teachers play a key role in the integration of multicultural understanding. They are responsible for designing inclusive Islamic Religious Education materials that reflect cultural diversity. This includes using case studies from various cultural contexts, presenting diverse interpretations of Islamic teachings, and encouraging open discussion. The use of active teaching methods such as group discussions, collaborative projects, and field explorations can provide students with direct experiences in dealing with cultural diversity. These methods not only enhance students' understanding but also enrich their overall learning experience. Teachers are also expected to be sensitive to the needs of students from different cultural backgrounds by adapting the curriculum and creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment.

In everyday life, multicultural understanding plays an important role in helping students apply Islamic values within their own cultural realities. This approach helps create harmony between preserving religious

values and accommodating cultural diversity. Furthermore, the integration of multicultural understanding in Islamic Religious Education contributes to the improvement of the quality of interpersonal relationships. Individuals become more open to cooperation and build relationships based on mutual respect and deep understanding.

4.   CONCLUSION

To conclude this study, we can understand that the integration of multicultural understanding in Islamic Religious Education not only provides benefits at the local level but also has a significant impact in preparing future generations. Students who are engaged in inclusive and multicultural Islamic Religious Education tend to develop into more educated, tolerant individuals who are well-prepared to face the complexities of the modern world. The implications extend beyond the individual level, making a meaningful contribution to the development of a more inclusive and harmonious society.

In an era where cultural diversity is increasingly apparent, it is important to view Islamic Religious Education as more than just a means of understanding religious aspects. The integration of multicultural understanding forms the foundation for creating an inclusive learning environment that values individual differences. By involving students in a deeper understanding of Islam within a multicultural context, we are able to shape a generation that not only embraces tolerance but is also equipped to face the challenges of a globally interconnected world. This highlights the integral role of multicultural understanding in nurturing individuals who not only comprehend their religion but are also able to adapt and contribute meaningfully to an advancing world.

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