



## Revitalizing the Value of Tolerance in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning to Face the Challenges of Multiculturalism

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### ABSTRACT

The increasingly pluralistic global society has greatly influenced the dynamics of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), which plays a vital role in shaping students' moral and spiritual character. In Indonesia's multicultural context, IRE faces challenges in cultivating tolerance amid social polarization, religious exclusivism, and moral disintegration in the digital era. This study aims to analyze the strategies and implementation of tolerance value revitalization in IRE learning as a response to multicultural challenges in modern education. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with a library research method, this research examines classical Islamic literature, contemporary studies, and national education policies. The analysis highlights Islamic principles such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *ta'awun* (cooperation), *ukhuwah insaniyah* (human fraternity), and *'adl* (justice) as foundational values for social harmony and peace. The findings reveal that IRE can effectively foster multicultural awareness when learning processes are reflective, dialogical, and contextual. Revitalization of tolerance values is realized through curriculum reform promoting religious moderation, teacher exemplarity as moral role models, and the development of inclusive educational environments. The study concludes that revitalizing tolerance in IRE is essential for building students' humanistic character and strengthening national unity in a diverse society.

## 1. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a fundamental role in shaping the character and personality of students based on moderate, inclusive, and civilized Islamic values. In the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society, Islamic education is not only responsible for teaching the ritualistic and dogmatic aspects of religion but also for cultivating social awareness and humanistic values that respect differences. Tolerance is one of the core values that must be instilled through the educational

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process, particularly in facing the increasingly complex realities of multiculturalism in the era of globalization and digitalization (Azra, 2019).

The current social reality reveals serious challenges to the values of togetherness and harmony. Social polarization based on religion, politics, and ideology has created identity barriers that threaten national integration. Various surveys indicate that intolerance among students and university learners has been increasing, both in the form of exclusive attitudes and rejection of groups with different beliefs (Wahid, 2017). This condition shows that religious education especially PAI needs reflection and renewal so that it does not merely emphasize the cognitive aspects of religion but also its social and ethical dimensions (Aziz, 2021).

The idea of tolerance is, in fact, an integral part of Islamic teachings derived directly from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Islam views differences as a divine inevitability (sunnatullah) that must be managed wisely, as stated in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Hujurat [49]:13, which affirms that humankind was created into nations and tribes to know one another, not to deny each other. According to Gus Dur, tolerance is not merely the willingness to accept differences but the highest expression of humanity rooted in spiritual values. Therefore, Islamic education bears a moral responsibility to nurture generations who are not only devout in rituals but also open-minded, respectful of plurality, and oriented toward universal human values (Ikeda and Wahid, 2015).

From a pedagogical perspective, PAI learning is often trapped in a normative and indoctrinative paradigm. As a result, students tend to understand religion textually without internalizing the social values that are essential in real-life contexts (Syafi'i, 2020). Ideally, religious education should be able to internalize the values of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *ta'adub* (ethics), and *ukhuwah insaniyah* (human fraternity) through contextual and reflective learning methods. The failure to integrate these values may lead to a gap between religious understanding and students' social practices.

The background of this study arises from academic concern over the erosion of tolerance values among the younger generation, particularly university students living in a digital environment marked by opinion polarization and identity bias. PAI learning in higher education should serve as a medium for fostering inclusive values and respect for diversity. However, in reality, the learning process often emphasizes memorization and religious dogma without cultivating critical awareness of social and cultural differences (Nata, 2018). In this situation, there is an urgent need to revitalize and revive tolerance as the core spirit of Islamic education that embodies *rahmatan lil 'alamin* a mercy for all creation (Ali, 2022). Furthermore, the challenges of multiculturalism are not limited to religious differences but also encompass ethnicity, culture, language, and ideology, all of which interact in the public sphere. Islamic Religious Education is expected to serve as a learning platform that not only teaches theological doctrines but also builds intercultural dialogue skills, respect for differing opinions, and social empathy (Madjid, 2006). In this era of globalization, the success of religious education is not measured by how much students understand sacred texts, but by how well they can

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translate those teachings into concrete actions that promote peace and intercommunal harmony (Hidayat, 2020).

Thus, this article aims to comprehensively examine how the values of tolerance can be revitalized through PAI learning as a response to the dynamics of multiculturalism in Indonesia. This study is expected to provide both conceptual and practical contributions to the development of PAI learning strategies that are more humanistic, dialogical, and relevant to the needs of a modern and heterogeneous society. In addition, this research serves as a reflection of the core mission of Islamic education to nurture faithful and knowledgeable generations capable of living peacefully amid diversity.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative library research approach focusing on the conceptual and normative analysis of tolerance values in Islamic Religious Education (IRE). This method allows an in-depth understanding of social and philosophical contexts without quantitative generalization (Moleong, 2019). Data were collected from classical texts such as *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* (al-Zarnuji) and contemporary works on religious moderation and multicultural education (Azra, 2019). The study is descriptive-analytical and interpretative, aiming to reconstruct PAI learning into a more humanistic and dialogical model (Creswell, 2018).

Primary data consist of classical and modern Islamic educational works, while secondary data include surveys and supporting studies (Wahid, 2017; Aziz, 2021; Syafi'i, 2020). Data were obtained through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation to ensure triangulation and contextual validity. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (2014) model data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing until saturation. Data validity was ensured using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility through triangulation, transferability via contextual description, dependability through an audit trail, and confirmability through reflexive verification. These steps ensured the findings accurately represented the revitalization of tolerance in IRE learning.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

The data in this study were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, conducted in selected Islamic educational institutions representing multicultural environments. Each technique was applied to obtain comprehensive and complementary information about how tolerance values are implemented and revitalized in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning. Observation focused on classroom dynamics during PAI sessions, particularly teacher and student interactions, students' participation in discussions about religious diversity, and learning activities reflecting cooperation and respect. The researcher recorded behaviors and dialogue that indicated understanding and practice of tolerance.

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Interviews were conducted with IRE teachers, students, and school principals using a semi-structured format to allow flexibility and depth. The questions explored perceptions, strategies, and experiences in internalizing tolerance in the classroom. The interview items were designed to reveal how educators apply tolerant pedagogical practices and how students perceive diversity in their learning environments, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Guide for Data Collection on Tolerance Revitalization in IRE Learning

No.	Respondent Type	Interview Question
1	IRE Teacher	How do you integrate the value of <i>tolerance (tasamuh)</i> into daily teaching activities?
2	IRE Teacher	What challenges do you face in promoting tolerance among students of diverse backgrounds?
3	Student	What do you understand by tolerance in religious learning, and how do you apply it in class interactions?
4	Student	Can you share an experience where differences in opinion or belief were handled respectfully in class?
5	Principal	How does your institution promote multicultural and interfaith cooperation among students?
6	Principal	In your opinion, how effective is Islamic Religious Education in building a culture of peace and inclusivity?

### ***Revitalization of Tolerance Values in the Context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Learning***

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers play a crucial and strategic role in revitalizing tolerance values within multicultural school environments. Their responsibility goes beyond transferring religious knowledge; they function as agents of moral transformation who guide students toward understanding Islam as a religion of peace, justice, and inclusivity. The process of revitalization involves strengthening students' understanding, shaping their attitudes, and cultivating daily practices that reflect respect for human dignity and diversity (Azra, 2019). Through this approach, teachers serve as facilitators of universal human values such as empathy, cooperation, justice, and respect for differences, thereby positioning IRE as a key medium for fostering intergroup harmony.

Traditionally, IRE learning in Indonesia has often been delivered in a normative and dogmatic manner, emphasizing the memorization of texts and ritual obligations. However, this study reveals a gradual paradigm shift toward a more humanistic, dialogical, and contextual model of learning. In observed cases, teachers have integrated contemporary issues such as interfaith dialogue, social justice, and religious moderation into the classroom. This transformation aligns with the Islamic principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for all creation), underscoring that genuine religiosity must manifest in inclusive and compassionate behavior toward others. By linking doctrinal teachings to social realities, IRE

becomes not only an academic subject but also a moral compass for students navigating pluralistic societies.

In practical classroom settings, teachers actively relate Qur'anic and Hadith teachings to students' lived experiences. For instance, discussions on *Surah Al-Hujurat* [49]:13 "O mankind, We created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another" are used as an entry point to emphasize that diversity is a divine design (*sunnatullah*), not a threat. Teachers encourage students to interpret this verse beyond the literal meaning, guiding them to appreciate diversity as a foundation for cooperation, understanding, and peaceful coexistence. Through collaborative learning activities, reflective dialogue, and group debates, students are invited to analyze social issues critically, linking religious ethics to real-world contexts such as intergroup tolerance, environmental stewardship, and digital ethics.

Furthermore, this revitalization process integrates multiple pedagogical methods that reinforce tolerance as a lived value rather than an abstract concept. Project-based learning encourages students to collaborate across different backgrounds, while reflective journaling and classroom discussions cultivate empathy and self-awareness. Teachers also design simulation activities, such as conflict resolution scenarios, to help students internalize the practice of forgiveness and mutual respect. These approaches prove effective in transforming students' perceptions of religion from being exclusive and doctrinal toward being inclusive and humanitarian (Syafi'i, 2020).

Another key aspect identified in this study is the emphasis on teacher exemplarity. Students tend to model their moral behavior based on teachers' actions and attitudes. Teachers who demonstrate patience, fairness, and openness in their interactions become living examples of *akhlak al-karimah* (noble character), thereby making the learning process both affective and transformative. The teacher's role as a role model embodies what Al-Ghazali conceptualized as *ta'dib* education that refines the soul through example and ethical discipline. In this sense, the success of tolerance education depends not only on the curriculum but also on the teacher's integrity and consistency in embodying the values being taught.

The revitalization of tolerance values within IRE learning thus represents a holistic educational movement encompassing the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of character formation. It situates Islamic education within the broader framework of multiculturalism and civic responsibility, where faith and humanity intersect. Ultimately, by adopting reflective and inclusive pedagogy, IRE contributes significantly to developing students who are intellectually grounded, emotionally intelligent, and socially empathetic individuals capable of upholding the principles of justice, peace, and unity in Indonesia's diverse society.

### ***Challenges in Implementing Tolerance in Multicultural Environments***

However, the implementation of tolerance values in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning is not without challenges. Field findings and interviews reveal that

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difficulties often arise from the social environment, family background, and unequal levels of religious literacy among students. Many learners bring pre-existing exclusive or rigid interpretations of religion, often shaped by their upbringing, community influences, or digital media exposure that promotes polarization and misinterpretation of religious texts. This observation aligns with data from the Wahid Foundation (2017), which identified a concerning tendency toward intolerance among Indonesian students, particularly in responding to groups of different faiths and beliefs. Such external influences contribute to the persistence of stereotypes and resistance to pluralistic discourse within classroom interactions. The social media environment has further amplified these challenges. The digital sphere frequently becomes a space for misinformation and religious sensationalism that reinforce exclusivist narratives. Students exposed to such content often find it difficult to differentiate between authentic religious teachings and ideological distortions. As a result, teachers are confronted with the dual task of not only teaching religious values but also developing students' digital and ethical literacy. Addressing these issues requires an educational approach that is reflective, dialogical, and emancipatory rather than doctrinal or authoritarian.

To respond to these conditions, IRE teachers in this study adopted persuasive and reflective pedagogical strategies. Instead of emphasizing rigid dogmatic transmission, they encouraged students to engage in open dialogue, critical reflection, and inter-perspective discussions that promote empathy and understanding. This approach corresponds to Paulo Freire's (2005) concept of *liberating education*, which centers on *conscientization* the process of developing critical awareness that empowers learners to recognize and transform social realities through ethical and humane action. Teachers who practice this model tend to transform their classrooms into safe dialogical spaces where students can explore differences constructively and express opinions respectfully.

Another significant challenge lies in curricular and institutional limitations. The current national education curriculum does not explicitly emphasize competencies related to interreligious dialogue or multicultural sensitivity. Consequently, IRE teachers often face a structural gap between curricular objectives and real-world diversity in classrooms. To address this gap, many educators implement what is known as the "hidden curriculum" an informal set of learning experiences that transmit values implicitly through daily interactions, routines, and classroom culture. Teachers embed the values of moderation (*wasathiyah*), peace (*salam*), and mutual respect (*ihitiram*) into learning activities such as group collaboration, community service, and reflective writing assignments.

This creative adaptation highlights teachers' pedagogical innovation and cultural intelligence in contextualizing religious learning. By adjusting instructional materials and examples to reflect students' socio-cultural realities, they help bridge the gap between theological theory and practical ethics. Such efforts also demonstrate that tolerance education cannot be reduced to a mere theoretical subject but must be experienced, practiced, and modeled consistently in every dimension of school life.

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Despite these challenges, the study finds that many IRE teachers successfully cultivate inclusive learning environments through persistence and creativity. They recognize that tolerance education is a continuous process requiring emotional intelligence, moral integrity, and institutional support. The findings therefore underline the need for ongoing teacher training, policy reinforcement, and curriculum reform that explicitly incorporate multicultural competencies and interreligious understanding. In doing so, IRE can better fulfill its transformative role as an educational instrument that nurtures students to become open-minded, compassionate, and responsible citizens capable of maintaining harmony in a pluralistic society.

### ***Strategies for Revitalizing Tolerance Values***

In response to the various challenges identified, this study highlights several strategic efforts undertaken by Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers and institutions to revitalize the values of tolerance within the learning process. These strategies are multidimensional, combining curricular, cultural, and moral aspects that together create a comprehensive framework for nurturing inclusivity and mutual respect among students. The revitalization of tolerance values is not merely a theoretical reform but a systematic process of transforming both the structure and the spirit of education so that Islamic learning becomes more responsive to contemporary social realities.

First, curriculum strengthening plays a central role in ensuring that tolerance is embedded into the core competencies and learning outcomes of IRE. Teachers deliberately integrate themes such as interfaith dialogue, empathy, cooperation, and respect for diverse perspectives into lesson plans and classroom activities. By linking doctrinal materials with issues of social coexistence, justice, and peace, students are encouraged to see religion as a constructive force in society. Instructional materials are redesigned to promote critical thinking and reflective discussions that allow students to explore different interpretations within Islam and beyond. This approach ensures that tolerance is not treated as an additional topic but as a foundational competency integral to the IRE curriculum.

Second, the development of school culture serves as a crucial medium for grounding tolerance in students' daily experiences. Schools that prioritize inclusivity consciously create environments that celebrate diversity through interfaith collaborations, cultural exchanges, and community service projects. Such initiatives allow students from different religious or ethnic backgrounds to interact, work together, and understand each other's perspectives in practical contexts. These activities embody Ki Hadjar Dewantara's (1935) educational philosophy, which asserts that genuine education extends beyond formal instruction to the formation of character through shared social life and active participation in community engagement. In this way, tolerance becomes a lived experience rather than an abstract moral concept, transforming schools into microcosms of harmonious pluralism.

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Third, teacher exemplarity emerges as the most decisive factor in the successful revitalization of tolerance values. Teachers' attitudes, words, and behaviors serve as a mirror through which students internalize ethical and spiritual values. Teachers who consistently demonstrate openness, patience, fairness, and respect for others become moral exemplars who model the principles they teach. This aligns with Al-Ghazali's concept (as cited in Al-Attas, 1980) that moral virtues are not effectively transmitted through verbal instruction alone but through habitual practice and the influence of exemplary figures. Within this framework, IRE teachers carry both pedagogical and spiritual responsibilities acting as *murabbi* (mentors) who educate not only the intellect but also the heart.

Beyond these three key dimensions, the success of tolerance revitalization also depends on institutional support and collaboration between teachers, administrators, and policymakers. Schools that cultivate a shared vision of peace and moderation tend to sustain long-term changes more effectively. Moreover, the incorporation of teacher professional development programs focusing on multicultural competence and interreligious understanding further strengthens the sustainability of these efforts. Ultimately, these strategies demonstrate that the revitalization of tolerance in Islamic Religious Education requires a holistic transformation encompassing curriculum design, school ethos, and teacher character. When implemented consistently, this integrated model has the potential to transform IRE into a dynamic educational platform that not only strengthens students' faith but also prepares them to live harmoniously in Indonesia's diverse and multicultural society.

### ***Implications of Tolerance Value Revitalization for Multicultural Education***

The revitalization of tolerance values in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning demonstrates significant implications for the development of students' multicultural character and moderate worldview. The study reveals that students who initially exhibited exclusive or rigid understandings of religion began to display openness, empathy, and respect toward peers of different faiths, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. Through dialogical and reflective learning approaches, students not only learn to tolerate differences but also to appreciate them as divine diversity that enriches social life. This transformation indicates that when Islamic education is conducted within a humanistic framework, it becomes an effective medium for cultivating inclusive and peace-oriented citizenship.

Dialogue-based and experiential learning activities have also been found to strengthen students' critical and ethical reasoning skills. By engaging in discussions about real-world issues such as interfaith relations, digital ethics, and social justice, students learn to analyze differences constructively and to respond with compassion and fairness. Such educational practices shift the focus of IRE from the memorization of religious doctrines toward the cultivation of reflective moral consciousness. In this sense, tolerance is no longer perceived as passive acceptance of others but as an active ethical engagement grounded in understanding, cooperation, and shared humanity.

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The findings of this research affirm that Islamic education managed through contextual, dialogical, and humanistic approaches contributes directly to the promotion of social harmony and national cohesion. This perspective aligns with the Islamic principle of *Wasathiyah* moderation as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), emphasizing the middle path that rejects both extremism and liberal excess (Ali, 2022). *Islam Wasathiyah* serves as a philosophical and moral foundation for education that harmonizes faith with reason, spirituality with humanity, and individuality with social responsibility.

Furthermore, the successful revitalization of tolerance in IRE has broader implications for national education policy and teacher professional development. It underscores the need to include multicultural and interreligious competencies in the national curriculum and teacher training programs. When systematically implemented, these reforms can enhance not only cognitive understanding but also emotional intelligence, empathy, and civic responsibility among students. This aligns with Indonesia's broader educational goals of fostering *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* unity in diversity and preparing future generations to coexist peacefully in pluralistic global societies.

Therefore, the revitalization of tolerance values within IRE is not merely a moral discourse but a strategic educational imperative. It represents a holistic approach to nation-building that strengthens social integration, promotes intercultural dialogue, and nurtures citizens who embody both piety and humanity. Ultimately, such an approach ensures that Islamic education remains relevant, transformative, and capable of contributing to the establishment of a peaceful, just, and civilized society.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that revitalizing tolerance values in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is essential in addressing the challenges of multiculturalism and rising intolerance within Indonesian society. The research successfully answers the main questions by demonstrating that tolerance revitalization can be effectively implemented through curriculum reform, inclusive school culture, and teacher exemplarity as moral and spiritual role models. Using a qualitative library research approach, this study reveals that Islamic values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *'adl* (justice), *ukhuwah insaniyah* (human fraternity), and *ta'adub* (ethics) must be integrated contextually into IRE learning. The findings confirm that IRE teachers play a transformative role, connecting Qur'anic and Hadith principles with students' real-life experiences through reflective dialogue, participatory learning, and interfaith engagement. The research demonstrates that these strategies contribute to building students' multicultural awareness, empathy, and respect for diversity, indicating the success of the revitalization approach. Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly regarding social exclusivity, limited literacy, and curriculum constraints. However, teachers' creative use of hidden curricula and dialogical methods has proven to mitigate these obstacles effectively.

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In conclusion, the study affirms that IRE, when implemented through a humanistic and reflective framework, becomes a medium of social transformation that nurtures peace, justice, and harmony. The revitalization of tolerance is thus not only a moral duty but also a strategic educational effort to strengthen national character and ensure the sustainability of plural coexistence in modern Indonesian society.

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