

Multicultural Islamic Education at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara: Strategies for Fostering Children's Critical Reasoning and Tolerance

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural Islamic education has the potential to develop both students' critical reasoning and tolerance, yet these outcomes are often examined separately in elementary education. This study investigated how multicultural Islamic education was implemented at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara and how its pedagogical strategies fostered students' critical reasoning and tolerance. A qualitative case study was conducted involving 23 participants: five Islamic Religious Education teachers, 15 students, and three parents. Data were collected through eight participatory observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of five lesson plans, teaching materials, and student work. The data were analyzed thematically using inductive-deductive coding with NVivo 12, supported by source and method triangulation, member checking, peer review, and an audit trail. The findings showed that multicultural integration remained uneven. Three of five lesson plans did not explicitly formulate multicultural objectives, while classroom activities were frequently teacher-centered and textbook-based. However, open-ended questioning, teacher scaffolding, social-media analysis, show-and-tell activities, role-play, collaborative projects, and reflection on Islamic values created stronger opportunities for perspective-taking, critical evaluation, and respectful interaction. Students demonstrated increased willingness to develop cross-religious friendships and greater empathy toward minority peers, while some students also critically examined incomplete media information and inconsistencies between religious principles and social practices. The study proposes a critical-relational perspective in which Islamic values provide ethical orientation, multicultural encounters provide contextual experience, teacher scaffolding enables critical inquiry, and respectful interaction supports tolerance. Future research should examine this framework longitudinally and across more diverse school contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism has become an important concern in contemporary education because schools increasingly bring together students with different religious, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and social backgrounds. In such contexts, education is expected not only to transmit academic knowledge but also to help students understand differences, develop respectful relationships, and participate constructively in diverse communities. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) has particular

potential in this regard because its ethical and social dimensions can be connected with values of respect, tolerance, solidarity, peace, and dialogue. Evidence from Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, shows that IRE can contribute to intercultural values in pluralistic societies by promoting diversity, tolerance, solidarity, peace, and dialogue (Sijamhodžić-Nadarević, 2023). Similarly, multicultural religious education in Poso demonstrates that the contextualization of religious learning and social activities can support cooperation across religious and ethnic differences and contribute to sustainable peace (Mashuri et al., 2024).

These international concerns are highly relevant to Indonesia, a country characterized by substantial religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. At the elementary-school level, multicultural education can help children recognize diversity as part of everyday social life while appreciating cultural values within their local environment (Noor & Sugito, 2019). Islamic education also has an important role in internalizing tolerance by connecting religious learning with respect for differences, harmonious coexistence, and social responsibility (Nugroho, 2018). Religious moderation at the elementary level similarly requires learning experiences that cultivate peace, respect for differences, awareness of diversity, and tolerance in everyday behavior (Sunarti & Sari, 2021). The integration of local wisdom can further strengthen this process because cultural values embedded in local communities can become meaningful resources for developing religious moderation and harmonious social relations (Harahap et al., 2024; Hasanuddin & Rusydy, 2024).

However, multicultural education should not be limited to the development of tolerant attitudes. Children also need the capacity to examine information, consider different perspectives, provide reasons, evaluate arguments, and respond to social issues thoughtfully. Critical reasoning is therefore an important complementary outcome of multicultural Islamic education. Research at the primary-school level indicates that critical thinking can be developed through learning activities that require students to interpret, analyze, evaluate, explain, and reach conclusions (Kusuma et al., 2018). Reflective learning likewise provides opportunities for students to develop ideas, evaluate their own and others' arguments, participate in discussion, and collaboratively solve problems (Suntiah, 2021). In Islamic Religious Education, the Think Talk Write strategy has also been associated with critical-thinking development among elementary students (Wandira et al., 2024). Thus, multicultural Islamic education can be understood not simply as teaching students to "accept differences," but as creating learning conditions in which students learn to reason about differences responsibly.

This perspective requires teachers and schools to move beyond the transmission of multicultural concepts toward the development of an inclusive learning culture. Previous studies show that multicultural values are more likely to become institutionalized when they are reflected not only in instructional materials but also in school policies, interactions, and the broader school culture (Ma'rifah & Sibawaihi, 2023). Teachers are particularly important because their understanding of multicultural education influences how diversity is interpreted and practiced in the classroom. Wahyono et al. (2022) found that elementary-school teachers' understandings of multicultural education varied, with some remaining essentialist while others demonstrated more constructivist or anti-essentialist orientations. This finding indicates that multicultural education requires not only appropriate curriculum content but also teacher practices that encourage dialogue, participation, reflection, and respect for different perspectives. The role of PAI teachers is similarly emphasized in developing religious moderation through modeling, habituation, discussion, and inclusive learning environments (Sayekti, 2023).

Previous research provides important foundations for understanding these relationships. Barsihanor et al. (2021) demonstrated that multicultural education in a public elementary school

can be implemented through equal treatment, respect for religious identity, and institutional practices that support tolerance. Nawawi (2023) showed that PAI can provide a context for developing tolerance and social concern through interactive and participatory learning. Yolanda (2024) directly connected critical thinking and tolerance in elementary PAI through a question-and-answer strategy, while Susari et al. (2024) identified curriculum integration, teacher modeling, learning materials, and school activities as important components of interreligious-tolerance education. Hamid and Wahyuni (2024) further demonstrated that multicultural PAI curriculum development can be directed toward tolerant, moderate, and socially responsive learners. More recently, Kholida et al. (2025) showed that Islamic values such as *tasamuh*, *ukhuwah*, and justice can be integrated with collaborative learning, storytelling, local wisdom, and reflective discussion to foster intercultural tolerance in Indonesian primary schools.

Other studies strengthen this evidence from complementary perspectives. Educational storybooks containing tolerance values can introduce multicultural education to elementary students through accessible and contextual learning experiences (Fatmawati et al., 2018). Local wisdom can function as a foundation for multicultural education because it connects cultural identity with students' everyday experiences (Noor & Sugito, 2019). Character education can also be strengthened through the combination of formal learning, religious activities, habituation, teacher modeling, extracurricular activities, and parental involvement (Mansur & Sholeh, 2024). Similarly, integrating Bugis local wisdom into Islamic education has been shown to provide opportunities for developing tolerance among primary-school students (Darwis et al., 2025), while local cultural values can also enrich Islamic education and tolerance-oriented learning in other educational settings (Hasanuddin & Rusydi, 2024). Tolerance can further be internalized through consistent modeling, habituation, attention, and advice so that respect for differences becomes part of students' everyday behavior (Salman, 2017).

Despite these contributions, an important gap remains. Although previous studies have examined multicultural education, religious tolerance, Islamic education, critical thinking, local wisdom, and teacher practices, they have largely investigated these dimensions separately or emphasized one primary outcome. Studies have examined multicultural implementation and tolerance (Barsihanor et al., 2021), teacher understanding (Wahyono et al., 2022), tolerance through PAI (Nawawi, 2023), critical thinking and tolerance through specific instructional techniques (Yolanda, 2024), and multicultural curriculum development (Hamid & Wahyuni, 2024). Other studies have emphasized multicultural religious education in specific social contexts, including Poso (Malla & Pettalongi, 2019; Mashuri et al., 2024). Although these studies establish the importance of multicultural Islamic education, they leave insufficiently understood how multicultural Islamic education simultaneously develops critical reasoning and tolerance through classroom interaction, teacher mediation, curriculum/document practices, and students' experiences within a public elementary school in a religiously and culturally diverse setting. This limitation matters because tolerance without critical reasoning may remain superficial, while critical reasoning without ethical and intercultural orientation may not necessarily produce respectful social relationships.

The present study addresses this gap by drawing on multicultural education theory, particularly Banks' framework of content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 2017). The framework is complemented by the sociocultural perspective of Vygotsky (1978), particularly the importance of social interaction and teacher scaffolding in supporting students' learning within heterogeneous environments. The study also considers Islamic educational values associated with

ta'dib, equality, cooperation, and respectful social relations (Abdullah, 2019), while the Indonesian context of Islamic educational practice provides an additional normative foundation through Aswaja An-Nahdliyah values (Tim Aswaja NU, 2020). The approach is also consistent with evidence that multicultural religious education can foster tolerance and broader social values such as justice, solidarity, responsibility, cooperation, and mutual trust (Malla & Pettalangi, 2019), while discussion of controversial issues can provide opportunities for students to encounter different perspectives and develop tolerant responses (Mansur & Fadlilah, 2021; Syamsuar et al., 2021).

The novelty of this study therefore lies in its integrative and contextual perspective. Rather than examining tolerance or critical reasoning as isolated outcomes, this study investigates how multicultural Islamic education connects the two through classroom practices, teacher scaffolding, curriculum-related documents, and everyday interaction. Its empirical novelty is situated at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara, while its methodological contribution comes from triangulating observation, interviews, and curriculum-document analysis. Its conceptual contribution is the interpretation of multicultural Islamic education as a pedagogical process that simultaneously develops students' capacity to reason about diversity and their capacity to respect differences. This focus is particularly significant because previous research has demonstrated the value of multicultural education, local wisdom, religious moderation, and critical learning, but has not sufficiently explained their integration as a coherent pedagogical strategy in this specific context.

Accordingly, this study focuses on investigating the strategies used to implement multicultural Islamic education in Grade 6 at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara and examining how these strategies foster children's critical reasoning and tolerance. Through a qualitative case-study approach, the study seeks to understand the roles of teachers, classroom practices, curriculum-related documents, and student interactions in constructing multicultural learning experiences. The study ultimately aims to contribute an empirically grounded understanding of how Islamic values and multicultural pedagogy can be integrated to develop elementary students who are able to reason critically about diversity while engaging with others respectfully and tolerantly.

METHODS

1. Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the implementation of multicultural Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand educational practices, classroom interactions, teacher perspectives, and students' experiences within their natural school context. The case was bounded by the implementation of multicultural IRE at one public elementary school, with particular attention to strategies for fostering students' critical reasoning and tolerance. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that qualitative inquiry is appropriate when researchers seek to explore meanings and processes within particular social contexts, while case study research enables an in-depth examination of a bounded case. Similarly, Sugiyono (2022) emphasized that qualitative research is appropriate for exploring phenomena in natural settings by examining meanings, interactions, and processes from the perspectives of participants.

The case study focused specifically on how multicultural values were incorporated into IRE planning and classroom practice and how these practices were associated with the development of students' critical reasoning and tolerance. The study did not seek statistical generalization; instead, it aimed to provide a contextual and detailed understanding of the phenomenon. The case study

design was therefore considered appropriate because the research examined a contemporary educational process within its real-life institutional setting (Yin, 2018).

2. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara, a public elementary school in Cakranegara, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The school was selected purposively because its predominantly Muslim student population also included a small Hindu minority, providing a relevant context for examining multicultural Islamic education, religious diversity, and classroom interaction. The school had 288 students, consisting of 140 boys and 148 girls. Approximately 99.3% of the students were Muslim and 0.7% were Hindu. In terms of ethnicity, approximately 85% were Sasak, 10% Javanese, and 5% Balinese.

Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the implementation or experience of multicultural IRE. The participants consisted of five IRE teachers, 15 students, and three parents, resulting in 23 participants. The teachers provided information about instructional planning, pedagogical strategies, and challenges in implementing multicultural education. The students provided information concerning their learning experiences, perceptions of religious differences, tolerance, and critical reasoning. Parents provided complementary perspectives on students' experiences and the school's multicultural practices.

Participant selection followed the principle of relevance to the research questions rather than statistical representativeness. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that qualitative sampling commonly emphasizes participants who can provide information-rich accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. Herdiansyah (2019) similarly emphasized the importance of selecting qualitative research participants according to their relevance to the phenomenon and their ability to provide meaningful information. Accordingly, the participants in this study were selected because they were directly connected to the implementation and experience of multicultural IRE at the school.

3. Instruments and Data Sources

The researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by three complementary data sources: observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. This combination was designed to capture both the implementation of multicultural IRE and the perspectives of individuals involved in the learning process.

The observation instrument focused on classroom interaction, teacher questioning, student participation, discussion of religious and cultural differences, teacher scaffolding, collaborative activities, and students' responses to multicultural issues. The interview guide addressed teachers' instructional strategies, students' experiences and perceptions, parental perspectives, challenges, and supporting factors. The document-analysis guide was used to examine five lesson plans (RPP), teaching materials, and students' written work. Particular attention was given to multicultural learning objectives, references to religious diversity, local wisdom, Islamic values, learning activities, and opportunities for critical reasoning.

The use of multiple sources was intended to strengthen the depth and contextual richness of the findings. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized the importance of using appropriate qualitative data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. In the Indonesian qualitative research tradition, Afrizal (2019) also stressed that qualitative data should be obtained systematically and sufficiently so that researchers can construct a well-grounded interpretation of social and educational phenomena.

4. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through eight participatory observation sessions, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The observation sessions were conducted during

IRE learning activities and focused on the ways teachers introduced multicultural issues, facilitated classroom dialogue, responded to students' questions, and encouraged students to consider different perspectives. Particular attention was given to open-ended questioning, teacher scaffolding, collaborative learning, *show-and-tell* activities, discussion of religious differences, and students' responses to potentially sensitive issues.

Following the observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the five teachers, 15 students, and three parents. The interviews allowed participants to describe their experiences and interpretations in their own words while enabling the researcher to maintain a consistent focus on multicultural learning, tolerance, and critical reasoning. Interview questions were adjusted according to the participant category. Teacher interviews emphasized instructional planning and implementation, student interviews focused on learning experiences and perceptions of religious diversity, and parent interviews addressed family responses to multicultural activities.

Document analysis was conducted concurrently with observation and interviews. Five RPP documents, teaching materials, and students' written work were examined to identify evidence of multicultural objectives, Islamic values, contextual learning, critical-thinking activities, and tolerance-related content. Yin (2018) highlighted the value of combining different sources of evidence in case study research because multiple forms of evidence can strengthen the interpretation of a bounded case. Similarly, Bungin (2021) described qualitative data collection as a process that can integrate interviews, observations, documents, and other forms of evidence to obtain a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena.

5. Data Analysis, Trustworthiness, and Ethical Considerations

The collected data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 12. The analysis followed an inductive–deductive coding process. First, interview transcripts, observation notes, lesson plans, teaching materials, and student work were organized and familiarized. Second, initial codes were developed from both the research questions and emerging evidence. Deductive codes included multicultural education, Islamic values, critical reasoning, tolerance, teacher scaffolding, local wisdom, and classroom interaction, while inductive codes were added when new patterns emerged from the data. Third, related codes were grouped into broader categories and themes. Finally, the themes were reviewed and compared across data sources to identify converging and contrasting patterns.

The thematic analysis followed a systematic process of coding, categorizing, reviewing, and interpreting patterns in the data. Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasized that thematic analysis involves the systematic development and refinement of themes rather than merely grouping similar statements. Saldaña (2021) similarly described qualitative coding as an iterative process in which researchers move from initial codes toward more meaningful patterns and categories. These principles guided the analysis of classroom observations, interview accounts, and documentary evidence in the present study.

Data interpretation was further supported by source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Information obtained from teachers, students, and parents was compared, while interview findings were compared with observation and documentary evidence. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through member checking, in which relevant interpretations were returned to participants for confirmation, and peer review, in which the analytical process and emerging interpretations were discussed with a research peer. The study also maintained an audit trail documenting data collection, coding decisions, category development, and thematic interpretation. Prolonged engagement with the research setting was used to improve contextual understanding and reduce reliance on isolated observations. Miles et al. (2019) emphasized the

importance of systematic data reduction, display, and conclusion verification in qualitative analysis, while Emzir (2018) highlighted the importance of systematic qualitative analysis and the use of computer-assisted tools such as NVivo to support the organization and analysis of qualitative data.

Ethical procedures were applied throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from adult participants and from parents or guardians for student participation. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of the collected information for research purposes. Participant identities were protected through anonymization and the use of codes rather than personal names in the research report. Data were handled confidentially, and information that could directly identify individual participants was excluded from the reporting of findings.

RESULTS

1. Socio-Demographic Context of the School

Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara is characterized by a predominantly Muslim and Sasak student population, creating a specific context for the implementation of multicultural Islamic Religious Education (IRE). The school had 288 students, consisting of 140 male and 148 female students. In terms of religious affiliation, approximately 99.3% of students were Muslim and 0.7% were Hindu. Ethnically, 85% of students were Sasak, 10% were Javanese, and 5% were Balinese. This demographic composition created a relatively homogeneous majority environment while placing particular pedagogical importance on the inclusion and recognition of the two Hindu students as members of a religious minority.

The school occupied approximately 2,835 m² of land and had relatively limited facilities, primarily consisting of a library and a prayer room. Consequently, inclusive learning activities required teachers to optimize available classroom and open spaces. The demographic and institutional conditions indicated that multicultural education at the school was not primarily concerned with managing a highly heterogeneous student population, but rather with ensuring that minority identities were recognized and respected within a predominantly Muslim environment.

2. Implementation of Multicultural Approaches in Islamic Religious Education

2.1. Curriculum and Lesson-Plan Integration

Analysis of five lesson plans (RPP) revealed that multicultural elements had not yet been systematically integrated into Islamic Religious Education. Three of the five lesson plans (60%) did not explicitly formulate multicultural learning objectives, particularly objectives related to respecting differences in religious beliefs. Approximately 20% of the lesson plans incorporated Aswaja-related values, while another 20% employed a controversial-issues discussion model. This distribution indicates that multicultural education was present but remained unevenly incorporated into formal instructional planning.

The analysis also showed that learning materials concerning Muslim–non-Muslim relations were frequently presented through doctrinal narratives. For example, discussions of religious differences sometimes relied primarily on Qur'anic references such as Surah Al-Kafirun without sufficient contextualization of contemporary social relationships. Such an approach provided students with religious foundations but offered limited opportunities to examine how Islamic principles could be applied to concrete situations involving religious diversity.

Nevertheless, one lesson plan demonstrated a more contextual and dialogical approach. The lesson incorporated a controversial-issues discussion model (Mansur & Fadlilah, 2021) using a case of Muslim–Hindu cooperation in community mutual assistance in Lombok. The activity connected Islamic values with students' social experiences and encouraged them to examine diversity through concrete examples.

One innovative lesson plan instructed students to analyze a video depicting interreligious conflict on social media and subsequently write a reflection based on the Islamic value of *al-ta'awun* (cooperation), referring to Qur'an 5:2. This activity represented a shift from merely transmitting religious concepts toward encouraging students to interpret social issues, evaluate information, and connect religious principles with contemporary situations.

2.2. Classroom Interaction and Teacher Scaffolding

Observation of eight learning sessions showed that teacher–student interaction remained predominantly one-directional, with approximately 65% of observed interactions characterized by teacher explanation and student reception. In addition, approximately 80% of instructional activities relied heavily on textbooks. These patterns indicate that opportunities for sustained dialogue and student-led inquiry remained limited.

However, several teachers employed scaffolding strategies consistent with a sociocultural approach to learning. Open-ended questions were used to encourage students to consider alternative perspectives and formulate reasons. For example, a teacher asked, “*What do you think if your Hindu friend does not participate in Ramadan fasting?*” Rather than providing an immediate answer, the question invited students to consider religious differences and construct their own responses.

The findings also showed variation among teachers. Two of the five teachers tended to avoid sensitive issues, such as interfaith marriage, because they were concerned that such discussions could generate tension among students. This practice suggests that teachers recognized the sensitivity of religious issues but did not always have sufficient pedagogical strategies for transforming potentially controversial topics into constructive learning opportunities.

Another strategy observed was *show-and-tell*. Students were invited to present information about religious and cultural practices, including Nyepi. This activity increased the participation of non-Muslim students and provided opportunities for students from the majority group to learn directly from minority experiences.

Despite these positive practices, subtle forms of religious bias were still identified. For example, some students used the term *kaafir* when referring to non-Muslims in classroom interactions. This finding indicates that exposure to multicultural activities did not automatically eliminate prejudice and that explicit prejudice-reduction strategies remained necessary.

3. Development of Students' Tolerance

The findings indicated positive changes in students' attitudes toward religious differences. Interview data showed that 12 of the 15 students expressed agreement that having friends from different religious backgrounds was not a problem, compared with eight students in the earlier assessment. In the broader pretest–posttest measurement, willingness to establish friendships across religious differences increased from 53% to 80%, while empathy toward minority students increased from 35% to 72%.

Students who participated in collaborative activities demonstrated particularly visible changes in their understanding of religious differences. Activities included shared social projects involving food and cultural practices associated with different religious communities. Such experiences provided students with direct opportunities to encounter differences through cooperation rather than through abstract classroom explanations.

One Muslim student explained:

“I now understand that in Bali, my Hindu friends also have fasting during Nyepi. It is just different in the way they do it.” (Muslim Student, S12)

This statement illustrates a shift from viewing religious practices primarily through the framework of one's own tradition toward recognizing differences as legitimate expressions of

religious identity. The finding suggests that direct interaction and contextualized learning contributed to students' understanding of diversity.

The role of parents was also evident. A Hindu parent expressed appreciation for the school's willingness to introduce students to religious and cultural environments outside the dominant Muslim context:

"I am happy that my child was invited to the temple." (Hindu Parent, O2)

This response suggests that parental support, particularly from minority families, functioned as an enabling condition for multicultural learning.

4. Development of Students' Critical Reasoning

The analysis of students' written work showed emerging critical reasoning abilities, although the level of development varied among students. Two broad levels were identified.

At the basic level, seven students demonstrated the ability to identify bias or incomplete information in media content. For example, one student wrote:

"This news only mentions the riot at the church, but it does not explain the cause."

This response demonstrates an initial capacity to distinguish between the information presented in a media report and information that may be missing from the report. Students at this level were beginning to question the completeness and neutrality of information rather than accepting media narratives without examination.

At the more complex level, three students were able to connect Islamic values with broader principles of human rights and religious freedom. One student questioned an apparent contradiction between religious teachings and discriminatory behavior:

"If according to the hadith 'Lakum dinukum wa liya din,' why do some people get angry when Christians worship? This is not consistent." (Student S5)

This response demonstrates a more advanced form of reasoning because the student compared a religious principle with observed social behavior and identified an inconsistency between the two. The student did not merely reproduce a religious quotation but used it as a basis for evaluating a social phenomenon.

These findings indicate that multicultural Islamic education created opportunities for students to move from recognition of diversity toward critical examination of information, religious claims, and social practices.

5. Supporting and Constraining Factors

Several factors supported the implementation of multicultural Islamic education. One important factor was teachers' commitment to Islamic moderation and Aswaja values. One teacher stated:

"In NU, we always teach moderation." (Teacher G3)

This commitment provided an ideological and pedagogical foundation for integrating tolerance and respect for diversity into classroom activities.

Parental support, particularly among minority families, was another supporting factor. The positive response from the Hindu parent demonstrated that families could contribute to the development of an inclusive learning environment by supporting children's participation in intercultural and interreligious activities.

The main constraints were related to teacher preparation and students' exposure to digital content. Only two of the five PAI teachers had received multicultural education training. One teacher acknowledged:

"I am confused about how to teach tolerance without practical examples." (Teacher G1)

This statement indicates that teachers may recognize the importance of tolerance but still require concrete pedagogical models for translating the concept into classroom practice.

Digital media exposure constituted another challenge. Approximately 45% of students were identified as having been exposed to potentially radical or intolerant religious content through digital media. One teacher reported:

“There was a student who said, ‘Non-Muslims will go to hell’ after watching a video from a religious preacher on social media.” (Teacher G4)

This finding highlights the tension between school-based multicultural education and external sources of religious information. Students may encounter simplified or exclusive religious narratives outside school, requiring teachers to strengthen students' media literacy, critical reasoning, and ability to evaluate religious information.

6. Emerging Pedagogical Strategies

The findings identified several strategies that were associated with more active multicultural learning. These included contextual discussion of Muslim–Hindu relations, analysis of social-media content, *show-and-tell* activities concerning religious celebrations, role-play activities such as *Being a Minority*, collaborative projects, and reflection based on Islamic values. Activities based on local contexts, including Muslim–Hindu cooperation and Lombok cultural traditions, provided students with concrete experiences through which religious diversity could be discussed.

The findings also indicate the potential value of local wisdom as a pedagogical resource. Teachers could further develop lesson plans around local traditions such as Bau Nyale and other cultural practices that provide opportunities to discuss cooperation, respect, social responsibility, and religious diversity. The proposed *Multicultural Corner* and *A Day in Their Shoes* activities similarly provide possible spaces for students to experience and reflect on perspectives different from their own.

A further example was the *Honesty Canteen* project, which was associated with a reported 45% increase in cross-religious interaction. Such activities suggest that multicultural education can extend beyond formal PAI lessons and become part of students' everyday social experiences.

7. Three-Year Development Roadmap

The findings also identified a three-stage development roadmap for strengthening multicultural Islamic education at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara. The first stage, planned for 2024, focused on teacher training and the development of multicultural learning modules. The second stage, planned for 2025, emphasized curriculum revision and stronger integration of multicultural values into instructional planning. The third stage, planned for 2026, positioned the school as a potential model for multicultural elementary education.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that multicultural Islamic education at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara was already emerging through teacher practices, contextual learning activities, student collaboration, and religious and cultural dialogue, but its implementation remained uneven. The strongest practices were characterized by contextualization, student participation, open-ended questioning, interaction with minority experiences, and connections between Islamic values and everyday social issues. At the same time, limitations in teacher training, textbook dependence, one-way classroom interaction, avoidance of sensitive issues, and students' exposure to intolerant digital content constrained more systematic implementation. The combined findings suggest that the development of critical reasoning and tolerance requires multicultural Islamic education to move beyond doctrinal transmission toward dialogical, contextual, reflective, and socially engaged learning.

DISCUSSION

1. Results Analysis

This study examined how multicultural Islamic Religious Education (IRE) was implemented at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara and how its pedagogical practices contributed to the development of students' critical reasoning and tolerance. The findings indicate that multicultural Islamic education was already emerging in the school through contextual discussions, teacher questioning, student presentations, collaborative activities, religious-cultural encounters, and reflection on Islamic values. However, these practices had not yet developed into a consistently structured pedagogical system. The central finding is therefore not simply that multicultural education was present, but that its effectiveness depended on the extent to which religious values were transformed from doctrinal knowledge into opportunities for dialogue, perspective-taking, critical inquiry, and social interaction. In this sense, the development of tolerance and critical reasoning appeared to be interconnected rather than independent outcomes.

a. From Multicultural Content to Multicultural Learning Processes

The first research question concerned the strategies through which multicultural Islamic education was implemented. The findings suggest that implementation occurred at different levels of depth. At the formal curriculum level, multicultural integration remained limited: three of five lesson plans did not explicitly formulate multicultural objectives, while multicultural elements appeared more clearly in only a small proportion of instructional plans. This indicates that multicultural education was not yet fully institutionalized within instructional planning. Nevertheless, classroom practices sometimes went beyond what was explicitly formulated in lesson plans, particularly when teachers used Muslim–Hindu relations, local cultural practices, social-media content, and religious celebrations as learning contexts.

This distinction is analytically important because it demonstrates that multicultural education cannot be understood solely through the presence or absence of multicultural content in curriculum documents. The same religious topic can produce substantially different learning experiences depending on how it is taught. A doctrinal presentation of Surah Al-Kafirun, for example, may provide students with religious knowledge concerning religious difference, but it does not necessarily require them to examine perspectives, evaluate social situations, or reason through concrete intergroup relationships. By contrast, asking students to interpret a Muslim–Hindu cooperation case or to evaluate a social-media representation of religious conflict transforms religious knowledge into an object of inquiry.

This finding is consistent with Banks' (2017) conceptualization of multicultural education as extending beyond content integration to include knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture. The findings particularly demonstrate the difference between adding multicultural content and constructing a multicultural learning process. The former introduces information about differences, whereas the latter enables students to investigate how perspectives are formed, how assumptions operate, and how social relationships can be negotiated. Thus, the relatively limited curricular integration identified in this study does not mean that multicultural learning was absent; rather, it indicates that its strongest expression occurred through pedagogical enactment rather than systematic curriculum design.

b. Teacher Scaffolding as the Connecting Mechanism Between Islamic Values and Critical Reasoning

The second major finding concerns the role of teachers in transforming multicultural and Islamic values into critical learning experiences. Although approximately 65% of observed interactions remained teacher-directed and approximately 80% of activities relied heavily on textbooks, several teachers used open-ended questioning, contextual examples, show-and-tell, and

guided discussion to encourage students to consider alternative perspectives. These practices are particularly significant because they reveal that teacher mediation functioned as the mechanism connecting religious knowledge with students' reasoning processes.

The question, *"What do you think if your Hindu friend does not participate in Ramadan fasting?"*, illustrates this mechanism. The teacher did not remove the religious norm from the learning process, but instead created an intellectual space in which students had to distinguish between their own religious practice and another person's religious obligation. The pedagogical significance lies in the movement from knowing a rule to reasoning about difference. Students were required to interpret a social situation, consider another person's position, and formulate a response rather than merely reproduce a predetermined answer.

This finding can be interpreted through Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, in which learning develops through interaction and mediated participation. In the present context, teacher scaffolding did not simply support academic comprehension; it mediated students' movement from potentially unexamined assumptions toward more reflective interpretations of religious diversity. The teacher therefore occupied a dual role: transmitting Islamic knowledge and organizing the social conditions through which students could critically interpret that knowledge.

The finding also helps explain why teacher preparation emerged as an important constraint. Only two of the five IRE teachers had received multicultural education training, and one teacher explicitly expressed uncertainty about how to teach tolerance through practical examples. This suggests that the limitation was not necessarily a lack of commitment to tolerance, but a gap between normative commitment and pedagogical capacity. Teachers may support moderation and respect for difference while still requiring practical strategies for facilitating controversial discussions, identifying implicit bias, managing disagreement, and connecting religious principles with concrete social situations.

c. Tolerance Developed Through Contact, Recognition, and Perspective-Taking

The findings concerning tolerance demonstrate that students' attitudes were more strongly connected to direct social and learning experiences than to abstract statements about tolerance alone. The increase in willingness to establish friendships across religious differences from 53% to 80%, together with the increase in empathy toward minority students from 35% to 72%, indicates a positive shift in students' reported orientations toward religious diversity. These changes should not be interpreted as evidence of a simple causal effect because the study was qualitative and did not employ a controlled experimental design. Rather, they provide contextual evidence that multicultural interaction and collaborative learning coincided with more inclusive student responses.

The Muslim student's reflection that Hindu students also experience fasting during Nyepi, although in a different form, is particularly revealing. The significance of this statement lies not merely in recognizing that another religious tradition has a practice resembling fasting. More importantly, the student demonstrated comparative perspective-taking: an unfamiliar practice was interpreted by relating it to a familiar religious experience while simultaneously acknowledging its difference. This represents a more sophisticated form of tolerance than passive acceptance because it involves cognitive recognition of another group's religious practice.

The findings therefore suggest that tolerance developed through a sequence of encounter → recognition → perspective-taking → relational acceptance. Collaborative activities, show-and-tell, invitations to religious-cultural sites, and shared social projects created encounters with difference. These encounters provided students with information that could challenge simplified assumptions.

Teacher mediation then helped students interpret the experience, while repeated interaction created opportunities for more respectful relationships.

This interpretation reinforces previous findings that multicultural education can support tolerance when it is embedded in equal treatment, respect for religious identity, interactive learning, and school-wide practices (Barsihanor et al., 2021; Nawawi, 2023; Susari et al., 2024). It also corresponds with research emphasizing local wisdom, contextual learning, and religious moderation as resources for developing harmonious relationships in Indonesian educational settings (Harahap et al., 2024; Hasanuddin & Rusydi, 2024; Kholida et al., 2025). The present findings extend this perspective by showing that the pedagogical value of such experiences depends on whether students are given opportunities not merely to encounter difference but also to interpret and reason about it.

d. Critical Reasoning Emerged When Students Were Asked to Examine Information and Inconsistency

The development of critical reasoning represents another central finding. Students did not demonstrate a uniform level of critical reasoning. Seven students showed an emerging ability to identify incomplete or potentially biased information, while three demonstrated more complex reasoning by connecting Islamic principles with broader questions of discrimination, religious freedom, and social behavior.

The response, *"This news only mentions the riot at the church, but it does not explain the cause,"* illustrates an initial level of critical media reasoning. The student recognized that information can be selective and that the absence of contextual information may affect interpretation. The more advanced response concerning the principle *"Lakum dinukum wa liya din"* represents a further level of reasoning because the student compared a religious principle with observed social behavior and identified a contradiction.

These findings indicate that critical reasoning developed most visibly when students were confronted with problems requiring interpretation rather than recall. In other words, the pedagogical value of multicultural Islamic education was greatest when Islamic teachings became analytical resources for examining real social questions. This supports previous research showing that critical thinking among elementary students develops through activities involving interpretation, analysis, evaluation, explanation, and conclusion formation (Kusuma et al., 2018). It also extends findings concerning reflective learning and Think Talk Write strategies in elementary Islamic Religious Education, which emphasize discussion, argumentation, and student participation (Suntiah, 2021; Wandira et al., 2024).

An important analytical implication is that critical reasoning and tolerance should not be treated as two unrelated educational objectives. In this study, reasoning provided students with a cognitive mechanism for questioning stereotypes and evaluating information, while tolerance provided an ethical and relational orientation for using that reasoning. A student who questions incomplete media reporting is developing epistemic caution; a student who then considers how such reporting affects perceptions of another religious group is extending that reasoning into an intercultural domain. Thus, critical reasoning can function as a cognitive protection against prejudice, while tolerance provides a social-ethical direction for that reasoning.

e. The Relationship Between Critical Reasoning and Tolerance Is Mediated by Context

A particularly important finding is that multicultural exposure alone did not automatically eliminate prejudice. The continued use of the term *kafir* by some students and the avoidance of sensitive topics by two teachers demonstrate that positive multicultural activities can coexist with

residual religious bias. This finding prevents an overly linear interpretation in which exposure to diversity is assumed to produce tolerance automatically.

Instead, the findings suggest that the relationship can be represented as:

Multicultural exposure → teacher mediation → critical interpretation → perspective-taking → tolerance-oriented interaction.

If the mediation stage is weak, exposure to difference may remain superficial. Students may participate in multicultural activities without questioning pre-existing assumptions. Similarly, if teachers avoid difficult topics entirely, students may receive little opportunity to examine the social meanings attached to religious categories. Consequently, prejudice reduction requires more than positive interaction; it requires structured pedagogical reflection.

This interpretation strengthens the application of Banks' (2017) framework in the present context. The five dimensions should not be viewed as isolated components. Content integration provides the material for encountering difference; knowledge construction enables students to question how perspectives and assumptions are formed; prejudice reduction addresses attitudes toward others; equity pedagogy creates participation opportunities; and an empowering school culture sustains these practices beyond individual lessons. The findings suggest that these dimensions operate most effectively as an interconnected process rather than as separate curricular features.

f. Islamic Values Functioned as an Ethical Framework for Critical Engagement

Another significant finding is the distinctive role of Islamic values. The study did not show that multicultural education required reducing the religious identity of IRE. Instead, Islamic values such as *al-ta'awun* (cooperation), moderation, and respect for human dignity were used as normative resources for engaging with diversity. This is important in the Indonesian context because multicultural education can be interpreted not as an alternative to religious education but as a pedagogical orientation that can be articulated through religious values.

The use of *al-ta'awun* in students' reflection on interreligious conflict demonstrates this possibility. Islamic teaching became a framework for evaluating a social issue rather than merely an object of memorization. Similarly, the teacher commitment to moderation and Aswaja values provided an internal religious rationale for encouraging respectful relations. This finding is consistent with studies showing that Islamic education can contribute to tolerance when religious learning is connected with social responsibility, respectful coexistence, and inclusive pedagogical practices (Nugroho, 2018; Sayekti, 2023). It also corresponds with recent work demonstrating that values such as *tasamuh*, *ukhuwah*, and justice can be connected with collaborative and reflective learning to foster intercultural tolerance (Kholida et al., 2025).

The theoretical implication is that Islamic values functioned as a normative bridge between critical inquiry and social responsibility. Critical reasoning alone does not determine how students should relate to others, while tolerance without critical examination may become passive or superficial. Islamic values provided an ethical orientation through which students could evaluate differences while maintaining respectful interpersonal relations.

g. A New Integrative Synthesis: From Doctrinal Knowledge to Critical-Relational Multicultural Learning

Taken together, the findings support a more integrated interpretation of multicultural Islamic education. The evidence suggests that its pedagogical process can be understood as a five-stage movement:

Islamic and multicultural knowledge → contextual encounter with difference → teacher-mediated critical inquiry → perspective-taking and ethical evaluation → tolerant social interaction.

This synthesis constitutes the main analytical contribution of the Results Analysis. It explains why some multicultural practices generated deeper learning than others. When multicultural education remained at the level of doctrinal transmission or textbook-based explanation, students primarily received information. When teachers introduced concrete social situations, encouraged questions, and facilitated multiple perspectives, students moved toward critical interpretation. When these cognitive processes were combined with direct interaction and Islamic ethical principles, students demonstrated greater capacity for perspective-taking and tolerance.

The model also suggests a reciprocal relationship rather than a one-way process. Tolerant interaction can provide students with safer conditions for asking difficult questions, while critical reasoning can help students evaluate stereotypes and intolerant claims. In turn, repeated respectful interaction can reinforce Islamic values such as cooperation and moderation. Multicultural Islamic education can therefore be conceptualized as a critical-relational pedagogy, in which cognitive development and intercultural disposition are developed simultaneously through mediated social experience.

This interpretation moves beyond the conventional distinction between “teaching tolerance” and “teaching critical thinking.” The findings suggest that the two outcomes are mutually reinforcing when learning is organized around authentic diversity-related problems. In this model, the teacher is not merely a transmitter of religious knowledge but a mediator who connects religious principles, social diversity, critical inquiry, and interpersonal experience. Curriculum documents provide the formal structure, classroom interaction activates the learning process, and school-community relationships provide the social context in which the resulting values can be practiced.

Accordingly, the findings answer the central objective of the study by showing that multicultural Islamic education at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara was most meaningful when it moved from content integration toward knowledge construction, from knowledge construction toward prejudice reduction, and from classroom practice toward an inclusive social culture. The unevenness of implementation simultaneously demonstrates that such development requires systematic curriculum integration, teacher preparation, dialogical pedagogy, and sustained opportunities for students to encounter and reflect upon religious and cultural differences. Rather than treating tolerance as a final behavioral outcome, the findings position tolerance as part of a continuing learning process in which students learn to recognize difference, question assumptions, reason with evidence and values, understand other perspectives, and interact respectfully.

2. Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study broadly converge with previous research showing that multicultural Islamic education can contribute to tolerance, respectful interaction, and students’ understanding of religious diversity. However, the present findings also extend this body of research by demonstrating that the development of tolerance is closely connected with students’ opportunities to question information, compare perspectives, and construct reasoned interpretations of diversity. The comparison therefore indicates that multicultural Islamic education should be understood not only as a mechanism for transmitting tolerant values but also as a pedagogical process through which students learn to interpret differences critically and ethically.

The finding that contextualized Islamic learning can foster greater acceptance of religious differences is consistent with Barsihanor et al. (2021), who found that multicultural education in a public elementary-school context could be implemented through equal treatment, recognition of religious identity, and institutional practices supporting tolerance. The present study similarly

identified the importance of recognizing minority students and providing opportunities for them to share their religious and cultural experiences. The *show-and-tell* activity concerning Nyepi, for example, created a classroom space in which minority experience became a legitimate source of knowledge rather than merely an object of explanation by the majority.

The findings also correspond with Nawawi (2023), who demonstrated that PAI can support tolerance and social concern when learning is implemented through interactive and participatory approaches. The present study provides further evidence for this relationship, particularly through collaborative activities, contextual discussions, and student participation. However, the present findings add an important qualification: participation alone does not necessarily produce tolerance. The strongest evidence of perspective-taking appeared when participation was accompanied by teacher questioning, contextualization, and reflection.

This distinction is important when compared with research emphasizing habituation and teacher modeling. Salman (2017) showed that tolerance can be internalized through consistent modeling, habituation, attention, and advice. Mansur and Sholeh (2024) similarly emphasized the combined role of formal learning, religious activities, habituation, teacher modeling, extracurricular activities, and parental involvement in character development. The current findings support these perspectives but suggest that habituation should be supplemented by opportunities for students to reason about the values being habituated. Repeated respectful behavior may establish social norms, but critical dialogue helps students understand why those norms matter and how they should be applied in unfamiliar situations.

The present findings are also consistent with studies linking Islamic education, religious moderation, and local cultural contexts. Nugroho (2018) emphasized the role of Islamic education in internalizing tolerance through respect for differences, harmonious coexistence, and social responsibility. Similarly, Sayekti (2023) identified modeling, habituation, discussion, and inclusive learning environments as important dimensions of religious moderation in PAI. These findings parallel the present study, particularly in relation to teacher modeling, classroom discussion, and the use of Islamic values to guide students' relationships with religious minorities.

The role of local and contextual experiences identified in this study is also consistent with Noor and Sugito (2019), who argued that multicultural education becomes meaningful when it is connected with children's everyday cultural environments. Harahap et al. (2024) and Hasanuddin and Rusydi (2024) likewise demonstrated the relevance of local wisdom for strengthening religious moderation, cultural understanding, and harmonious social relations. The present study confirms the value of this contextual approach through examples such as Muslim–Hindu cooperation and Lombok cultural practices. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that local wisdom should not be treated merely as cultural content. Its pedagogical value increases when students are encouraged to interpret the values contained within local practices and relate them to contemporary questions of diversity.

The finding concerning the potential use of Bau Nyale and other local traditions therefore expands the role of local wisdom from an identity-preservation resource into a critical pedagogical resource. Rather than simply introducing students to local traditions, teachers can use these traditions as cases through which students examine cooperation, social responsibility, cultural difference, and the negotiation of shared community life. This extends previous research by connecting cultural contextualization with critical reasoning rather than limiting its function to cultural recognition.

The development of students' critical reasoning is consistent with previous elementary-education research emphasizing analysis, interpretation, evaluation, explanation, and conclusion

formation. Kusuma et al. (2018) showed that critical thinking can be developed when students engage in learning activities that require them to interpret and evaluate information. The present study similarly found that students demonstrated stronger reasoning when they were asked to analyze social-media content, identify incomplete information, compare religious principles with social behavior, and formulate explanations.

The findings also correspond with Suintiah (2021), who emphasized reflective learning as a context for evaluating one's own and others' arguments and collaboratively solving problems. In the present study, students' responses to controversial religious and social issues similarly demonstrated that reflection created opportunities to move beyond factual recall. The findings therefore support the broader proposition that critical reasoning develops through pedagogies requiring students to encounter uncertainty, compare interpretations, and justify conclusions.

A closer comparison can be made with Wandira et al. (2024), who associated the Think Talk Write strategy with critical-thinking development in elementary Islamic Religious Education. While that study emphasizes a particular instructional strategy, the present research identifies a broader pedagogical mechanism: critical reasoning emerged when students were positioned as interpreters of authentic social problems. The strategy was therefore less important than the intellectual demand embedded in the activity. Open-ended questioning, social-media analysis, show-and-tell, and controversial-issues discussion could all support critical reasoning when they required students to explain, compare, evaluate, or justify their positions.

The present findings thus broaden the discussion of critical thinking in PAI from strategy-specific effectiveness toward a more general principle of epistemic engagement. Students require learning situations in which information is incomplete, perspectives differ, or social practices require interpretation. Multicultural issues naturally provide such situations, making diversity itself a potential pedagogical resource for critical-thinking development.

The finding that multicultural implementation varied among teachers strongly corresponds with Wahyono et al. (2022), who found differences in elementary teachers' understandings of multicultural education, ranging from essentialist to more constructivist or anti-essentialist orientations. The present study similarly found variation in teachers' willingness and capacity to address sensitive religious issues. Some teachers employed open-ended questions and contextual discussions, whereas others avoided potentially controversial topics.

This convergence is particularly important because it indicates that the uneven implementation identified in this study is not simply a matter of curriculum availability. Teacher interpretation of multicultural education influences how diversity is transformed into classroom practice. A teacher who conceptualizes tolerance primarily as avoiding conflict may be inclined to avoid controversial questions, whereas a teacher who understands multicultural learning as an opportunity for dialogue may use difficult issues as occasions for guided inquiry.

The findings also complement Ma'rifah and Sibawaihi (2023), who emphasized that multicultural values become more institutionalized when they are reflected in school policies, interactions, and broader school culture rather than remaining confined to instructional materials. In the present study, the limited explicit integration of multicultural objectives in lesson plans, combined with stronger multicultural practices in selected classroom activities, illustrates precisely this institutional gap. Multicultural learning was visible in particular practices but had not yet been consistently embedded across the formal instructional structure.

Thus, the present study supports the argument that teacher capacity and institutionalization are interconnected. Training individual teachers without integrating multicultural objectives into

curriculum planning may produce isolated good practices, while curriculum reform without teacher preparation may result in formal objectives that are not meaningfully enacted.

The findings also relate to research conducted in more explicitly conflict-sensitive or religiously plural contexts. Malla and Pettalongi (2019) showed that multicultural religious education could contribute to values such as justice, solidarity, responsibility, cooperation, and mutual trust. Mashuri et al. (2024), in their study of multicultural religious education in Poso, similarly demonstrated that contextualized religious learning and social activities could support cooperation across religious and ethnic differences and contribute to peace-oriented educational practices.

The present study shares this emphasis on contextualization and social interaction but differs in the character of its setting. Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara was not characterized by a highly heterogeneous student population; rather, it involved a predominantly Muslim majority with a small Hindu minority. Consequently, the multicultural challenge was less about managing extensive demographic diversity and more about ensuring that minority identities remained visible, respected, and included within a majority religious environment.

This contextual difference is analytically significant. In a highly plural or conflict-affected setting, multicultural education may primarily address coexistence, conflict prevention, and social reconciliation. In the present setting, its function also involved preventing majority norms from becoming taken-for-granted standards against which minority practices were judged. The findings therefore suggest that multicultural Islamic education remains relevant even where demographic diversity is relatively limited because minority recognition and equitable participation are pedagogically significant regardless of the numerical size of the minority group.

The present findings provide particularly strong support for research emphasizing controversial issues as opportunities for critical and tolerant learning. Mansur and Fadlilah (2021) and Syamsuar et al. (2021) highlighted the potential of controversial-issues discussion to expose students to different perspectives and develop more tolerant responses. The current study provides an empirical illustration of this mechanism through discussions concerning Muslim–Hindu relations, interreligious cooperation, religious practices, and social-media representations of religious conflict.

However, the findings also reveal an important tension. Two teachers avoided sensitive issues such as interfaith marriage because of concerns about classroom tension. This indicates that the pedagogical potential of controversial issues depends heavily on teachers' ability to manage disagreement and establish a safe discussion environment. Consequently, the presence of controversial content in a lesson plan does not itself guarantee critical or tolerant learning.

The present findings therefore extend previous research by identifying teacher mediation as a boundary condition for controversial-issues pedagogy. Controversy becomes educationally productive when teachers establish clear norms, invite evidence-based reasoning, distinguish personal belief from evaluation of social claims, and ensure that minority students are not positioned as representatives who must defend an entire religious group. Without such mediation, controversial discussion may reproduce stereotypes rather than challenge them.

The findings are also consistent with Hamid and Wahyuni (2024), who argued that multicultural PAI curriculum development can support the formation of tolerant, moderate, and socially responsive learners. Similarly, Susari et al. (2024) identified curriculum integration, teacher modeling, learning materials, and school activities as important components of interreligious-tolerance education. The present study confirms the relevance of these components but reveals an implementation gap between curricular potential and classroom enactment.

The finding that three of five RPP documents lacked explicit multicultural objectives demonstrates that multicultural education had not yet been fully incorporated into formal curriculum planning. At the same time, the classroom evidence showed that some teachers were already implementing multicultural practices through activities not consistently represented in formal planning. This suggests a bottom-up pattern of pedagogical innovation in which individual teachers may develop contextual practices before institutional curriculum structures fully recognize them.

This pattern differs from a purely curriculum-driven model in which implementation follows formally established objectives. It indicates that school-level multicultural development may occur through interaction between formal structures and teacher initiative. Such a finding supports Ma'rifah and Sibawaihi's (2023) emphasis on the importance of school culture while adding that institutionalization may emerge gradually from successful classroom practices that are subsequently incorporated into curriculum planning.

The present study is closely aligned with Kholida et al. (2025), who demonstrated that Islamic values such as *tasamuh*, *ukhuwah*, and justice can be integrated with collaborative learning, storytelling, local wisdom, and reflective discussion to develop intercultural tolerance in Indonesian primary education. The present findings similarly demonstrate that Islamic values become more pedagogically productive when they are connected with interaction and reflection rather than taught exclusively as abstract principles.

At the same time, the current study adds a stronger emphasis on critical reasoning. The use of *al-ta'awun* to interpret an interreligious conflict and the student's comparison between *Lakum dinukum wa liya din* and discriminatory behavior demonstrate that Islamic values can serve not only as behavioral norms but also as interpretive and evaluative resources. This extends the role of Islamic education from character formation toward the development of students' capacity to reason about contemporary social problems through an Islamic ethical framework.

This finding also resonates with the broader argument of Malla and Pettalongi (2019) that multicultural religious education can cultivate justice, solidarity, responsibility, cooperation, and mutual trust. However, the present study suggests that these values can be strengthened when students are explicitly invited to examine the relationship between religious principles and actual social practices. The educational process therefore involves both normative formation and critical examination.

Across the literature, several convergences are evident. First, the present study confirms that multicultural education is strengthened by contextual learning, equal recognition, teacher modeling, participation, and interaction across differences (Barsihanor et al., 2021; Noor & Sugito, 2019; Nawawi, 2023). Second, the findings are consistent with research demonstrating the importance of religious moderation and Islamic values in developing respectful interreligious relations (Nugroho, 2018; Sayekti, 2023; Kholida et al., 2025). Third, the findings support evidence that critical reasoning develops through interpretation, discussion, reflection, and evaluation rather than through passive knowledge reception (Kusuma et al., 2018; Suntiah, 2021; Wandira et al., 2024). Fourth, the study confirms that teacher understanding and pedagogical capacity influence the quality and consistency of multicultural implementation (Wahyono et al., 2022).

The distinctive contribution of the present study lies in bringing these strands together. Previous research has frequently examined tolerance, multicultural education, religious moderation, critical thinking, local wisdom, or teacher practices as separate dimensions. The current findings indicate that these dimensions can operate as an interconnected pedagogical system. Multicultural content provides the context, Islamic values provide ethical orientation, teacher scaffolding

provides mediation, critical reasoning provides an interpretive mechanism, and social interaction provides the arena in which tolerance is practiced.

The comparison with previous studies therefore leads to a more specific proposition: multicultural Islamic education becomes most transformative when religious values are used not only to teach students what to believe or how to behave, but also to help them examine information, evaluate social claims, understand alternative perspectives, and make ethically grounded judgments about diversity. This proposition is consistent with the direction of previous scholarship but extends it by explicitly connecting the cognitive and relational dimensions of multicultural learning.

In this respect, the findings support a conceptual shift from multicultural education as value transmission toward multicultural education as critical-relational learning. Such a shift does not diminish the importance of tolerance, religious moderation, or Islamic character formation. Instead, it explains how these outcomes may be strengthened through pedagogical processes that require students to actively interpret, question, discuss, and reflect on diversity. The comparison therefore positions the present study as an extension of existing research rather than a repetition of established claims.

3. Implications of Findings

The findings contribute to multicultural Islamic education by demonstrating that critical reasoning and tolerance can be developed as interconnected outcomes rather than as separate educational objectives. Theoretically, the study extends the application of Banks' (2017) multicultural education framework by showing how content integration and knowledge construction can be connected with teacher scaffolding, perspective-taking, and everyday intercultural interaction. It also reinforces Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective by demonstrating that teacher-mediated dialogue can transform religious and cultural differences into opportunities for students' cognitive and social development. The study therefore proposes a critical-relational perspective of multicultural Islamic education, in which Islamic values provide ethical orientation, multicultural encounters provide contextual experience, teacher scaffolding facilitates critical inquiry, and respectful interaction supports the development of tolerance.

Practically, the findings indicate that schools should move beyond adding multicultural topics to lesson plans and develop structured learning experiences involving open-ended questioning, controversial-issue discussion, media analysis, collaborative activities, show-and-tell, and reflection on local religious and cultural practices. Teacher professional development is particularly important because the findings revealed differences in teachers' preparedness to address sensitive religious issues. Curriculum developers and school leaders can also strengthen multicultural education by explicitly incorporating tolerance, critical reasoning, media literacy, and perspective-taking into learning objectives and assessment. At the classroom level, local cultural contexts can be used as authentic learning resources, while school-family collaboration can provide additional support for inclusive practices. These implications suggest that multicultural Islamic education can function simultaneously as a framework for religious learning, critical reasoning, and preparation for respectful participation in diverse communities.

4. Research Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study was conducted at a single public elementary school with 23 participants and a predominantly Muslim student population with only a small Hindu minority. The findings therefore provide contextual rather than statistically generalizable insights and may not represent schools with different demographic, cultural, or religious compositions. Second, the study relied substantially on

qualitative observations, interviews, and documentary evidence, which may be influenced by researcher interpretation and participant self-reporting. Although source and methodological triangulation, member checking, peer review, and an audit trail were used to strengthen credibility, some interpretive bias cannot be completely excluded. Third, the reported changes in tolerance and empathy were observed within the specific context of the study and were not derived from a controlled longitudinal design; consequently, they should not be interpreted as evidence of direct causal effects of multicultural Islamic education. Finally, students' exposure to external digital content, differences in teacher preparation, and other contextual factors could not be fully controlled. Future research could address these limitations through multi-site studies, longitudinal designs, larger and more religiously diverse samples, and mixed-method approaches combining qualitative evidence with validated measures of critical reasoning and tolerance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how multicultural Islamic education was implemented at Public Elementary School 27 Cakranegara and how its pedagogical strategies contributed to the development of students' critical reasoning and tolerance. The findings indicate that multicultural Islamic education was implemented through curriculum integration, teacher scaffolding, contextual discussion, collaborative learning, religious and cultural sharing, and reflection on Islamic values. However, its implementation remained uneven. Several lesson plans did not explicitly formulate multicultural objectives, classroom interaction was still dominated by teacher explanation and textbook-based activities, and some teachers avoided sensitive interreligious issues. At the same time, more contextual and participatory practices—such as open-ended questioning, social-media analysis, show-and-tell activities, role-play, collaborative projects, and reflection on Islamic values—created opportunities for students to examine differences, consider alternative perspectives, and interact more respectfully across religious boundaries. These findings suggest that critical reasoning and tolerance can develop together when multicultural Islamic education moves beyond the transmission of religious knowledge toward teacher-mediated inquiry and meaningful encounters with diversity.

The study further identifies an emerging critical-relational perspective of multicultural Islamic education, in which Islamic values provide an ethical orientation, multicultural encounters provide authentic contexts for learning, teacher scaffolding facilitates critical inquiry, and respectful interaction supports the development of tolerance. This perspective highlights that tolerance is not simply produced by teaching students to accept differences, but can be strengthened when students are encouraged to question incomplete information, examine social and religious claims, understand the perspectives of others, and relate Islamic principles to everyday social relationships. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the boundaries of the study. The research was conducted in one public elementary school with 23 participants in a predominantly Muslim context with a small Hindu minority; therefore, the findings are contextually informative rather than statistically generalizable. The qualitative design also means that reported changes in tolerance and critical reasoning should not be interpreted as evidence of causal effects. Although observation, interviews, document analysis, triangulation, member checking, peer review, and an audit trail strengthened the credibility of the interpretation, researcher and participant perspectives may still have influenced the findings.

Future research could examine the emerging critical-relational perspective across multiple elementary schools with greater religious and cultural diversity. Longitudinal studies could investigate how critical reasoning and tolerance develop over time through sustained multicultural Islamic education, while mixed-methods research could combine qualitative evidence with

validated measures of students' critical reasoning, tolerance, empathy, and media literacy. Further studies should also examine teacher professional development, digital religious content, and curriculum design as potential conditions shaping the quality of multicultural Islamic education. Such research would help clarify how context-sensitive multicultural Islamic pedagogy can be developed into more systematic and sustainable educational practices while preserving the ethical and religious foundations of Islamic education.

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