



Multicultural Islamic Education as Strategy for Strengthening Social Cohesion in Islamic School

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Abstract

Issues of social cohesion and interfaith tolerance are crucial in the context of diverse societies, including Bali, Indonesia, and Southern Thailand, which have experienced conflicts related to religious and cultural differences. This study aims to explore the role of multicultural Islamic education in strengthening social cohesion at Bali Bina Insani Islamic School (SI-BBI) and Phatnawitya School (PS). Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, this research employs in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation with school principals and teachers at both schools as primary data sources, which are then analyzed using descriptive-qualitative methods. The findings reveal that multicultural Islamic education at SI-BBI is implemented through the integration of local cultural values into the curriculum, such as the use of the Balinese language and the recruitment of Hindu teachers, as a form of acculturation that fosters social cohesion among the Muslim minority and Hindu majority in Bali. Meanwhile, at PS, multicultural Islamic education is applied with the inclusive principle of *rahmatan lil alamin*, incorporating cross-cultural learning and reinforcing tolerance values for students in the Muslim-majority but locally cultural region of Southern Thailand. These findings expand the understanding of Social Identity Theory from Henri Tajfel and John Turner, by demonstrating that multicultural education can reduce identity conflicts and strengthen social integration through learning that respects diversity. The implications of this research emphasize the need for educational policies that are friendly to religious and cultural diversity, which support the integration of multicultural values in the education system in areas with potential for conflict. The multicultural Islamic education models in these two schools offer strategic frameworks for application in contexts of cultural and religious diversity, aiming to create sustainable social cohesion.

Keywords: Multicultural Islamic education, social cohesion, interfaith tolerance, identity conflict, social integration.

Abstrak

Permasalahan kohesi sosial dan toleransi antaragama menjadi krusial dalam konteks keberagaman masyarakat, termasuk di Bali, Indonesia, dan Thailand Selatan yang pernah mengalami konflik terkait perbedaan agama dan budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran pendidikan Islam multikultural dalam memperkuat kohesi sosial di Sekolah Islam Bali Bina Insani (SI-BBI) dan Phatnavitya School (PS). Dengan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini memanfaatkan wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi terhadap kepala sekolah dan guru di kedua sekolah tersebut sebagai sumber data primer, yang kemudian dianalisis menggunakan metode deskriptif-kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan Islam multikultural di SI-BBI diterapkan melalui integrasi nilai-nilai budaya local kedalam kurikulum, seperti penggunaan bahasa Bali dan perekrutan guru-guru beragama Hindu, sebagai bentuk akulturasi yang mendukung kohesi sosial di kalangan minoritas Muslim dan mayoritas Hindu di Bali. Sementara itu, di PS, pendidikan Islam multikultural diterapkan dengan prinsip rahmatan lil alamin, dengan pembelajaran lintas budaya dan penguatan nilai toleransi bagi siswa di wilayah mayoritas Muslim namun berbudaya local di Thailand Selatan. Temuan ini memperluas pemahaman tentang Social Identity Theory dari Henri Tajfel dan John Turner, dengan membuktikan bahwa pendidikan multikultural dapat mereduksi konflik identitas dan memperkuat integrasi sosial melalui pembelajaran yang menghormati keberagaman. Implikasi penelitian ini menegaskan perlunya kebijakan pendidikan yang ramah terhadap keberagaman agama dan budaya, yang mendukung integrasi nilai-nilai multikultural dalam sistem pendidikan di wilayah-wilayah dengan potensi konflik. Pendidikan Islam multikultural di kedua sekolah ini menawarkan model strategis untuk diterapkan dalam konteks keberagaman budaya dan agama, untuk menciptakan kohesi sosial yang berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Islam multikultural, kohesi sosial, toleransi antaragama, konflik identitas, integrasi sosial.

INTRODUCTION

Studies on social cohesion and interfaith peace are crucial topics, especially given the social context of countries with a long history of efforts to maintain peace. This is particularly relevant to Bali, which has faced terrorism and bombings (Arianti, 2022), and Southern Thailand, which has experienced conflicts between Thai-Buddhists and Malay-Muslims (Scupin & Joll, 2020). The 2002 Bali bombings were driven by the extremist ideology of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) group, which sought to establish an Islamic state in Southeast Asia and chose Bali as a target due to the large number of Western tourists (Tatara & Retnaningsih, 2022). Meanwhile, the conflict in Southern Thailand, particularly in the provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, involves an ethnic Malay-Muslim insurgency resisting assimilation with the predominantly Buddhist Thai state (Scupin & Joll, 2020). The roots of this conflict trace back to the Anglo-Siam Treaty of 1909, which incorporated the Sultanate of Patani into Thailand. Forced assimilation policies, political marginalization, and economic disparities between Muslim and Buddhist communities are the main causes of tension. Discussions about social cohesion and harmony in Bali and Southern Thailand represent efforts to learn from past conflicts in order to sustain and nurture the ongoing peace processes in these regions.

Efforts to build an open-minded society can be achieved by implementing multicultural education (Goyette, 2019). J. A. Banks states that multicultural education teaches respect, acceptance, and understanding of the diversity of social, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds within the learning process (Banks, 2019). The goal is for students to gain a broader understanding of the world, appreciate differences, reduce stereotypes, and develop

skills to live and participate in an increasingly diverse society (Ali & Bagley, 2015). Through multicultural education, teachers convey knowledge about religious, ethical, intellectual, and social diversity, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of human situations (Haslami, 2020). Multicultural education promotes tolerance and appreciation for diversity within society to create harmony in social relations (Hamdan et al., 2022). It rejects any untested, biased, and incorrect assumptions about human differences and similarities; its aim is to reduce ethnocentrism, stereotypes, cultural prejudices, and misinformation between cultures. This form of education fosters better intercultural communication and encourages fairer, more productive interactions regarding cultural differences (Ibrahim, 2015). If the younger generation is not taught to respect and understand diverse views, cultures, and religions, the risk of conflict increases significantly (Pelupessy et al., 2022).

Research on multicultural education has been conducted previously; however, this study brings a fresh perspective that distinguishes it from prior research. Generally, past studies have only described multicultural education in a theoretical and/or descriptive-empirical manner. In contrast, this research presents multicultural education from a pragmatic-functional approach, positioning it as a strategy to strengthen social cohesion within society. Among previous studies relevant to this research are those by S.R. Saleh & C.P. Doni, which assert that multicultural education in universities provides opportunities for lecturers, students, and the surrounding community to embrace all forms of diversity (Saleh & Doni, 2018). Additionally, M.A. Nuruzzaman et al. highlight the role of Islamic education as an effective means for shaping students' harmonious and tolerant character, while fostering a multicultural society (Nuruzzaman et al., 2023). Furthermore, M. Fahmi et al. indicate that multicultural education in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) has become a strategic model for adapting to the predominantly Hindu community surrounding the pesantren (Fahmi et al., 2020).

Another study on multicultural education is by S. Janakiraman et al., which examines a professor at a U.S. university who teaches multicultural education, ensures educational equity in the classroom, and fosters multicultural attitudes among students (Janakiraman et al., 2019). Additionally, Y.H. Erbas's study explores multiculturalism and multicultural education as part of globalization efforts, presenting it as the most suitable approach for Turkey's education system, which aims to form a cultural synthesis and facilitate diverse groups in building interactive dialogue with others regardless of local, national, transnational, or international status (Erbas, 2019). Previous studies on multicultural education have generally focused on a single context (either majority or minority alone). In this research, however, multicultural Islamic education is pragmatically positioned as a strategy to build social cohesion, not merely as a means to enhance cultural understanding or tolerance. This study is unique as it highlights the role of multicultural Islamic education within a post-conflict recovery context, an area that has been largely unexplored in prior research.

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the role of multicultural Islamic education as an instrument for building social cohesion within communities, using case studies from two distinct locations: Bali Bina Insani Islamic School (SI-BBI) in Bali, Indonesia, and Phatnawitya School (PS) in Yala, Thailand. The urgency of this research lies in understanding how multicultural Islamic education can function as a tool to strengthen social cohesion, mitigate potential conflicts, and support conflict resolution in ethnically and religiously diverse contexts,

such as in Bali and Southern Thailand. The findings of this study can reinforce social cohesion theory by highlighting the role of multicultural Islamic education, while also clarifying assumptions within social conflict theory related to identity differences, which can be managed through education. Furthermore, the study can contribute to multicultural education theory by emphasizing its function as a form of social cohesion capital. Additionally, it may expand Social Identity Theory by demonstrating how multicultural education can alleviate conflicts between social identities. This research also aims to develop a new approach that views education as a tool for conflict resolution, social peace, and community integration.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative case study model (Dumez, 2015). A case study is an appropriate approach here, as the research focuses on an in-depth analysis of the role of multicultural Islamic education in building social cohesion (Paulson, 2015) in two schools: Bali Bina Insani (BBI) and Phatnawitya School (PS). These locations were chosen based on specific conditions: BBI faces challenges in fostering tolerance between the Muslim minority and Hindu majority, while PS contends with a longstanding conflict between the Malay-Muslim ethnic community and the predominantly Buddhist Thai government. The case study approach provides an opportunity to explore phenomena within real-life contexts in a thorough and comprehensive manner (Yin, 2018), making it essential for understanding the dynamics of multicultural education in regions with distinct socio-political characteristics.

This research utilizes two data sources: primary and secondary. Several methods are employed for data collection, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Using purposive sampling and a snowball approach, 11 informants were selected, consisting of school principals and teachers at both research locations. To ensure data credibility and validity, this study applies triangulation techniques (Takona, 2024), involving check and recheck processes from various aspects, such as information sources, theories, and data collection methods.

The collected data is processed and analyzed descriptively-qualitatively. Data analysis is carried out through a scheme of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Schoch, 2020). The data analysis process is conducted systematically, flexibly, and with validity (Jurczyk, 2022). This approach is suitable for qualitative research that aims to present a comprehensive report on multicultural Islamic education as a strategy to strengthen social cohesion in Islamic schools.

RESULTS

Multicultural Islamic Education and Social Cohesion at BBI Islamic School

Bali Bina Insani Islamic School (SI-BBI) has implemented the principles of multicultural Islamic education. This practice is marked by diversity in human resources, activities, and curriculum. The multicultural Islamic education practices align with SI-BBI's mission, which substantively focuses on creating an inclusive educational environment that values diversity, allowing teachers and students from different backgrounds to experience the learning process together harmoniously (Azkiya, Ws, & Hayati, 2024; Ok, Al-Farabi, & Firmansyah, 2022; Ratnah, Shah, & Alam, 2024; Rohmah, Rena, Pahrurraji, & Syarif, 2023).

At SI-BBI, the inclusion of the Balinese language as a subject and Hindu teachers demonstrates that this school is an inclusive model that genuinely implements multicultural Islamic education. The application of multicultural Islamic education values at SI-BBI is not merely a slogan but is actively and dynamically practiced. This is further evidenced by the school's policy of giving holidays to students and teachers during the Nyepi holiday, with the aim of respecting the celebration and preventing potential conflicts (Bahri, 2022).

SI-BBI also has a policy of integrating multicultural values into the learning curriculum. This policy includes teaching based on universal values such as tolerance, cooperation, and respect for differences. Another policy involves collaborating with religious leaders from diverse backgrounds to provide students with an inclusive perspective. The integration of multicultural values is implemented within subjects such as Religious Studies, Islamic Cultural History, and Citizenship Education. According to Bahri, each subject incorporates aspects of tolerance, social justice, and respect for both local and global cultures (Djamal, 2022). This description is supported by Usbuni, who states:

As a teacher at SI-BBI, I integrate multicultural values into every lesson, especially in Islamic Studies and Citizenship Education. I often use discussion methods to explore Islam's teachings on tolerance towards various religions and cultures. Additionally, I provide real-life examples from daily life in Bali, a region with a multicultural society, to illustrate the importance of mutual respect for differences. Classroom activities also frequently involve understanding how Islam can coexist harmoniously with local religions and cultures (Usbuni, 2022).

Teachers at SI-BBI also arrange students into study groups that are intentionally made heterogeneous based on cultural backgrounds. In extracurricular activities, students are encouraged to participate in cross-cultural programs such as "Culture Week," where students from diverse backgrounds can learn about each other's cultures. Every student has an equal opportunity to participate in these activities (Sulaiman, 2022). This approach is also implemented by Setiyowati in her class, as she states:

In my classroom, I work with students from various cultural and social backgrounds. To manage this, I ensure that all students feel valued and included in every learning activity. I facilitate inclusive discussions where students are free to share their views, as long as they respect differences. I also encourage students to learn from each other's experiences and cultures, for example, by asking them to share stories about religious celebrations or customs practiced in their homes (Setiyowati, 2022).

SI-BBI also organizes activities such as "Culture Week," where students are introduced to various local cultures and participate in diversity-themed competitions. Cross-cultural and social activities involving communities of different religions and/or cultures are also held. For instance, in 2017, there was a visit from the Forum of Culture and Democracy (FBD), consisting of people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, including ambassadors from across Asia. SI-BBI also maintains good relationships with the local community, particularly with religious leaders and prominent community figures. This approach not only strengthens the practice of multicultural Islamic education but also fosters harmonious relationships between students and the surrounding community (Bahri, 2022).

The harmony between SI-BBI and the Hindu community is evident in the positive response from the latter towards SI-BBI's presence. This positive response is reflected in the attendance of Hindu religious leaders at every event organized by the school. Thus, the implementation of multicultural Islamic education at SI-BBI has had a positive impact, enabling Muslim and Hindu educators to collaborate effectively. The surrounding community also responds positively, showing willingness to cooperate in mutually beneficial ways (Sulaiman, 2022).

The implementation of multicultural Islamic education at SI-BBI has also had a positive impact on social relationships among students. At SI-BBI, students come from various cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds. With the approach of multicultural Islamic education, students become more open and appreciative of the differences among them. The interactions within the school become more harmonious, and students are able to collaborate in various activities regardless of their different backgrounds. This encourages the creation of a strong sense of brotherhood and togetherness among the students (Suardani, 2022).

SI-BBI implements adaptive, acculturative, and tolerant strategies to maintain its existence in providing education. The attitudes of tolerance, inclusivity, and acceptance of differences are the main assets of SI-BBI. It applies multicultural Islamic education as a strategy to strengthen social cohesion in the Muslim minority area of Tabanan, Bali (Observation on May 15, 2022). As Bahri stated: "The impact of multicultural Islamic education on strengthening social cohesion is evident. This is because multicultural Islamic education teaches equality and respect for differences (Bahri, 2022)."

The values of multicultural Islamic education at SI-BBI have shaped inclusive religious behavior among the students. As expressed by KH. Ketut Imaduddin Djamal: "One sign that multicultural Islamic education can strengthen social cohesion in Muslim minority areas is the growth of MTs. and MA BBI in non-Muslim regions. The community is willing to cooperate with the school to meet its needs. In fact, the Hindu community even monitors the presence of the students. There was an incident where a student left the school without permission, and due to suspicious behavior, the community asked for an explanation and returned the student to the school (Djamal, 2022)."

Many Hindu teachers teach at SI-BBI. The diversity at SI-BBI serves as an important foundation for mutual respect and maintaining harmony among each other. The Hindu teachers feel comfortable teaching at SI-BBI. The mutual respect between them is clearly visible. This becomes even more apparent during religious holiday celebrations. There has never been a conflict of interest between Muslim and Hindu educators. Despite their differences, they continue to collaborate professionally (Usbuni, 2022).

Strengthening social cohesion between SI-BBI and the surrounding community is always a priority. School representatives are always involved in village community service activities. Made Suardani (a Hindu teacher at SI-BBI) stated that: "The activities at SI-BBI are educational activities with the same goal as education in general, which is to enlighten the nation's children. With the acceptance of Hindu employees and teachers as educators at the school, the surrounding community is impressed (Suardani, 2022)." Multicultural Islamic education at SI-BBI is indeed aimed at efforts to create a tolerant society.



Figure 1. Hindu Teachers Teaching at SI-BBI

When SI-BBI accepted Hindu teachers into its institution, the goal was to strengthen social cohesion with the surrounding community, which is predominantly Hindu. Over time, SI-BBI has gained many benefits from the presence of Hindu teachers in the institution. Among the Hindu teachers, some have been entrusted with important roles, such as Made Suardani, who serves as the assistant principal for facilities and infrastructure. She has also obtained a teacher certification with Madrasah Tsanawiyah BBI as her home base (Bahri, 2022).

Multicultural Islamic Education and Social Cohesion at Phatnawitya School

The implementation of multicultural Islamic education at Phatnawitya School (PS) is carried out through the learning process in the classroom, where teachers provide material to the students that Islam teaches the concept and practice of *rahmatan lil alamin* (a mercy to all the worlds). This becomes a guiding principle for Muslims to live their social lives with compassion towards fellow human beings as well as the entire universe. The concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* is used as an ethical foundation for Muslims in their attitudes and behaviors in daily life (Awaeding, 2023).

Phatnawitya School, located in an area with a Muslim majority but situated in a country dominated by Buddhist religion and culture, has the mission of producing graduates who are faithful, pious, and have a deep understanding of cultural diversity. The school aims to integrate Islamic religious education with social values that respect differences, with the goal of creating students who are tolerant and capable of interacting in a multicultural society (Zubaidah, 2023).

The implementation of multicultural Islamic education at PS has had an impact on harmonious social relationships among students. At PS, all the students are Muslim, but they are taught by both Muslim and Christian teachers. PS is located in a country where the majority of the population practices Buddhism. Buddhism is the dominant religion in Thailand. Multicultural Islamic education has made students more open and able to interact without the barriers of religion or culture. As Wan Anita Ha'sa said: "We see that students can learn together more harmoniously, without any conflicts caused by differences in background (Ha'sa, 2023)."

In practice, the teachers at PS teach local cultural values to their students. As stated by Muhammad Zakaria Awaeding:

As a teacher at Phatnawitya, I integrate Islamic teachings with the local cultural values of Thailand, especially Buddhism, which dominates the surrounding community. In class, I often teach the concept of social harmony taught by Islam and how it can be applied in a predominantly non-Muslim society like Thailand. I also encourage students to understand Islamic teachings that promote peace and tolerance, and I invite them to respect the differences in beliefs around them (Ibrahim, 2023).

The social skills taught in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum are also outlined in a specific chapter that focuses on this topic, namely the chapter "Islam, a Complete Guide to Living Life." This material contains teachings about Islam as a guideline for interacting with Allah SWT, fellow humans, and the environment. Muslims live to seek the pleasure of Allah by worshipping Him, treating others with justice and compassion, as well as taking care of animals, plants, and the environment (Observation on November 16, 2023).

Phatnawitya School implements policies to support multicultural education by introducing students to local and international cultural values. These policies include learning about Thai culture, as well as introducing the history and values of Buddhism as part of the national culture. Students are encouraged to learn to appreciate differences, not only through the curriculum but also in their daily interactions (Mangkachi, 2023). The students at Phatnawitya come from various ethnic backgrounds. In managing this diversity, teachers use an inclusive approach to learning. All perspectives are valued and discussed openly. Teachers also encourage collaboration among students of different beliefs and cultures through group tasks, which allow them to learn about each other through direct interaction (Observation on November 16, 2023).

Multicultural values in Islamic religious education are manifested through the introduction of inclusive Islamic teachings to students, providing an understanding that differences among humans are *sunnatullah* (part of Allah's) will and an inevitable reality that must be addressed wisely. Similarly, differences among religious groups or within the same religious community should be approached with an open mind and mutual respect. Exclusivity in interactions between communities will only foster truth claims and may lead to intolerance and radicalism (Ha'sa, 2023).

The curriculum at Phatnawitya is designed to accommodate aspects of multiculturalism by incorporating material that introduces students to religious and cultural pluralism in Thailand. Islamic religious education is paired with an understanding of Thailand's history and culture, particularly in the context of the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the region. Additionally, the curriculum also includes material that discusses the importance of peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society (Mangkachi, 2023). The belief that Islam is the only true religion and that other religions are wrong is a personal conviction of each Muslim. This belief is a form of faith that must be embedded in the soul of every Muslim. However, when addressing religious differences with others, the attitude to be shown is openness, maintaining good social interactions without questioning the truth or falsehood of any religion (Ha'sa, 2023).

At PS, multicultural Islamic education is not only taught through conceptual understanding. Practically, multicultural awareness is implemented using several methods, such as value-based learning through storytelling activities. For example, in the subject of *tarikh* or Islamic Civilization History, the story of the life of Prophet Muhammad SAW is shared, particularly how he united the warring tribes in the placement of the "*Hajar Aswad*" (Black Stone). The story recounts how the Black Stone was placed on a cloth and a representative from each tribe was asked to hold the edges of the cloth. Through this method, the Black Stone was placed peacefully and justly. This event demonstrates that Prophet Muhammad SAW was a wise and tolerant leader. He was able to resolve disputes in a fair manner, acceptable to all parties, without causing harm to anyone (Ha'sa, 2023).

Phatnawitya has a program called "Thai-Islamic Culture Day," where students learn more about the local traditions and culture of Thailand while appreciating the influence of Islam in the local community. The school also organizes student exchange programs with schools in predominantly non-Muslim areas to broaden the students' perspectives. Additionally, the school actively conducts social activities such as interfaith community service projects that involve the local community (Ibrahim, 2023).

Educators play a central role in the continuity of the education and teaching process in schools, especially in Islamic religious education, which focuses more on the affective domain. What educators say will be recorded and even practiced by students, as they observe the behavior of their teachers both inside and outside the classroom. In promoting attitudes and behaviors of tolerance to students, the modeling method is practiced by educators at PS. They demonstrate good behavior and treat others, including students, well, without differentiating based on cultural background or social status (Mangkachi, 2023). There are several non-Muslim educators and staff at Phatnawitya School. In both classroom and extracurricular activities, students are taught and supported by non-Muslim educators. They directly practice how to build good relationships and demonstrate tolerance, even with differing religions. Every morning, students are accustomed to greeting and hugging (same gender) their educators without questioning their religion (Ibrahim, 2023).

Phatnawitya School also collaborates with several universities in Indonesia and Malaysia. Through the student exchange program and teaching practicum at PS, this program allows students to practice and develop interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence by interacting directly with people who are culturally, linguistically, and sometimes religiously different. The positive interactions between students and exchange program participants, and the absence of discrimination in these interactions, are concrete evidence of the success of multicultural Islamic education (Mangkachi, 2023). Phatnawitya School works with the local community, particularly Buddhist and Muslim religious leaders, to organize interfaith activities such as discussions, charity events, and joint programs that promote peace and tolerance. Through these activities, the school helps strengthen relationships among students, teachers, and the surrounding community, creating a strong foundation for social cohesion and appreciation of cultural differences (Ha'sa, 2023).

In the school's monthly activities, students are encouraged to visit local markets, parks, mosques, and museums. This out-of-class learning aims to introduce students to the diversity in their surroundings. Students get the opportunity to directly interact with the local community,

greet them, and observe the life patterns in society. This activity serves as a bridge to reduce negative prejudices and stereotypes between ethnic groups and religions. With continuous positive interactions starting from the school, it can stimulate peace within the community (Zubaidah, 2023).

Multicultural Islamic education at PS not only strengthens relationships among students but also between students and the surrounding community. As Ha'sa stated:

Our school is located in a community where the majority are Buddhist, and through the school programs that involve the community, our students can interact with their surroundings with mutual respect. We often organize interfaith social activities, such as community service programs involving both students and local residents, which greatly help in building better relationships between the school and the community (Ha'sa, 2023).



Figure 2. Christian teachers teach at PS

The implementation of multicultural Islamic education at PS has led to positive changes in students' attitudes and behavior. Students have become more tolerant, open to differences, and more appreciative of others' perspectives. They not only understand that differences are natural, but they also strive to build harmony and social cohesion among various groups with diverse cultural backgrounds. Students have become accustomed to accepting those who are different from them. Moreover, they are able to appreciate differences and work well together in group activities, both inside and outside the classroom (Mangkachi, 2023).

DISCUSSION

Comparative Analysis of Multicultural Islamic Education in BBI and PS

Bali and Southern Thailand are two regions with social and historical backgrounds full of challenges, where issues of social cohesion and multicultural tolerance are crucial to address. Bali, with its history of bombings, and Southern Thailand with its ethnic and religious conflicts, highlight the importance of education in promoting peace and tolerance (Arismunandar, 2019). In this context, multicultural Islamic education can be used as a tool to prevent intolerance and strengthen social cohesion in both regions, which face these social challenges (Fahmi et al., 2022).

Multicultural Islamic education is an effort to integrate Islamic values while respecting cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity (Hifza et al., 2020). Its goal is to create a harmonious and inclusive environment where all students can learn to appreciate and accept differences as part of social life (Ibrahim, 2015). At Bali Bina Insani Islamic School (SI-BBI) and Phatnawitya School (PS) in Southern Thailand, multicultural Islamic education is implemented through the curriculum and school activities that promote diversity and intercultural dialogue (Nuruzzaman et al., 2023).

Multicultural Islamic education at SI-BBI and PS can be compared as presented in Table 1 below. This presentation makes it easier to understand the differences and similarities in the approaches used.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Multicultural Islamic Education in BBI and PS

Aspects	Sekolah Islam Bali Bina Insani (Bali)	Phatnawitya School (Thailand Selatan)
Social Context	Muslim minority in the Hindu majority, a historical experience with bomb terror incidents that escalated inter-religious tensions.	The majority of Muslims in the context of national minorities, ethnic and religious conflicts are prolonged with the Thai-Buddhist community.
Goals of Multicultural Islamic Education	Strengthening the social cohesion of Muslim communities with the Hindu majority, building tolerance and reducing post-terror social tensions.	Strengthening social cohesion, reducing ethnic conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence between the Malay-Muslim and Thai-Buddhist communities.
Educational Strategies	Adoption of Hindu cultural values and elements in the curriculum and school activities as a form of acculturation.	Value-based learning that educates about the principle of "rahmatan lil alamin" as an ethical foothold for inter-human affection.
Curriculum Approach	An integrative curriculum that includes religious and general science lessons in accordance with the national and local curriculum, with an emphasis on tolerance and cooperation.	The curriculum emphasizes an inclusive understanding of Islamic teachings, harmonious social interaction, and openness to cultural diversity.
Learning Methods	A cooperative adaptive strategy, an education that maintains the traditional characteristics of pesantren while integrating intercultural dialogue.	Dialogue and value-based learning methods, historical storytelling that promotes peace and equality, and extracurricular activities.
Impact on Social Cohesion	Strengthening social cohesion in Muslim minority areas, facilitating	Reducing social polarization and strengthening inter-ethnic and religious

	cooperation and mutual cooperation between religions.	ties through education that promotes universal compassion.
Community Initiatives	Active involvement with the Hindu community, inclusive in religious celebrations and activities, Hindu educators and employees in schools.	Involvement in educational activities with universities and student exchange programs involving intense intercultural interaction.
Evaluation and Improvement	Continuous evaluation of curriculum integration and community responses to adapt more inclusive education strategies.	Regular assessment of learning methods and program adaptation according to changing socio-political needs.

Table 1 above shows that both schools implement multicultural Islamic education in different ways, although there are similarities, in accordance with the social context and needs of their respective communities. In Bali, the approach is more focused on integration and coexistence in the context of religious minorities, while in Southern Thailand, the focus is on reducing conflict and promoting tolerance in a historically more conflict-prone context. Both models provide valuable insights into how multicultural Islamic education can be adapted to meet the specific needs of different communities in achieving greater social cohesion.

In Bali, multicultural Islamic education plays a strategic role in a Muslim minority environment, promoting tolerance and interfaith and intercultural cooperation as a response to isolation and prejudice following the Bali bombings (Arianti, 2022). In Southern Thailand, this education serves as a conflict mitigation tool, teaching students to appreciate diversity and contribute to social stability in a society fragmented by ethnic and religious conflicts (Goodman, 2020).

The findings of this study can serve as a basis for the development of more inclusive and multicultural educational policies. This aligns with the view that the teachings in schools can influence the overall social and cultural structure (Rohinah, 2017). It also strengthens the national strategies in Indonesia and Thailand to support multicultural Islamic education as an effective way to promote peace and social harmony (Adeoye, Baharun, & Munawwaroh, 2025; Erawadi & Setiadi, 2024; Khusaini, Hariri, Pratama, & Rahmatan, 2022). The results of this study offer important insights into multicultural Islamic education, which can serve as a foundation and model for strengthening social cohesion in diverse communities (Abu-Nimer & Nasser, 2017), providing valuable lessons that can be applied in other regions with similar challenges.

After the Bali bombings, the Muslim community in Bali faced prejudice and isolation from the Hindu majority. Multicultural Islamic education at SI-BBI has been used as a tool to rebuild trust and reduce tensions between communities. SI-BBI implements an adaptive strategy that involves integrating local cultural values into the curriculum and school activities as a form of positive acculturation. This has created an educational model that is not only multicultural but also multireligious, supporting stronger social cohesion among diverse communities (Fahmi et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, Southern Thailand has experienced prolonged conflict between the Malay-Muslim and Thai-Buddhist communities, often leading to violence. Multicultural Islamic education at PS serves as a strategy to educate students about the importance of tolerance and cross-cultural cooperation. Education at PS implements a curriculum that emphasizes values of

compassion and universal justice derived from the concept of "*rahmatan lil alamin*" in Islam. This aims to reduce polarization and strengthen peaceful relations between ethnic and religious groups in the region (Nuruzzaman et al., 2023).

In Bali, where Muslims are a minority, multicultural Islamic education acts as a unifying bridge and a means of social integration. In Southern Thailand, where Muslims are a relative majority in certain localities, similar education helps reduce separatist sentiments and teaches peaceful coexistence. The use of inclusive and dialogue-based learning methods (Hidayat & Nuruzzaman, 2024) in both locations has shown improvements in cross-cultural understanding and acceptance. In Bali, this approach involves adopting elements of Hindu culture, while in Southern Thailand, it involves recognizing and respecting the Malay ethnic identity as part of a plural society (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2016).

The findings of this study suggest the need for policies that support the integration of multicultural Islamic education into the national education system. These policies should include teacher training, an inclusive curriculum, and broader community education initiatives. Increased collaboration between schools, local communities, and the government needs to be intensified to ensure that education extends beyond the classroom and has a broader impact on social perceptions and interactions. This strategy should involve active intercultural dialogue and exchange programs that help strengthen understanding and multicultural tolerance in schools and/or communities (Brubaker, 2015).

Strengthening the community foundation for multicultural education by integrating both formal and non-formal educational institutions in developing and practicing a multicultural curriculum is also necessary. Schools (Islamic schools) in Bali and schools in Southern Thailand must adapt their curricula to reflect local diversity (Miftah, 2016). The findings of this study highlight the importance of multicultural Islamic education as a long-term asset in strengthening social cohesion in diverse societies, offering valuable lessons that can be applied in other regions facing similar challenges.

Multicultural Islamic Education as a Strategy to Strengthen Social Cohesion

At SI-BBI, multicultural Islamic education is implemented as a strategy to strengthen social cohesion. The impact has been very positive, as after the implementation of multicultural Islamic education, the presence of SI-BBI (Madrasah Tsanawiyah-MT's. and Madrasah Aliyah-MA) has been accepted by the Tabanan Bali community, which is predominantly Hindu. MT's. and MA BBI have been able to strengthen social cohesion and harmony with the surrounding community, which was initially resistant (Fahmi et al., 2020). The multicultural Islamic education implemented at SI-BBI has had an impact not only within the school environment but also extended to the relationship between students and the surrounding community. The relationship between SI-BBI and the local community, especially with the Hindu community in Bali, has improved because they are able to interact with mutual respect. Moreover, through interfaith social activities, the school and the community can collaborate to strengthen social cohesion.

Multicultural Islamic education, in practice, emphasizes a high regard for human dignity (Syarif et al., 2024). The goal is to create a democratic, equal, free society that accepts diversity (Baharun & Awwaliyah, 2017). By integrating the concept of multiculturalism into Islamic

education, future generations will be able to build a non-sectarian environment that has the potential to prevent conflicts. Multicultural Islamic education at SI-BBI is based on the appreciation of diversity. It also aims to address potential conflicts. Education should indeed be directed towards the development of all human potential while respecting pluralism as a consequence of cultural, ethnic, tribal, and religious diversity (Jackson, 2018). This concept has a broad impact on the world of education, as it is understood as a never-ending process or a lifelong process (Blossfeld & Von Maurice, 2019). Additionally, multicultural Islamic education can be an adaptation strategy for institutions whose communities are minorities in areas where the majority hold different beliefs (Fahmi et al., 2020).

Multicultural Islamic education at SI-BBI incorporates elements of empowerment pedagogy, encouraging individuals to understand their own culture and then use it to develop Indonesian culture within the context of the nation-state. This effort requires a pedagogy of equality among individuals, ethnicities, religions, and various differences (Sismanto et al., 2022). Multicultural Islamic education embodies the core ideas of democracy, humanism, and pluralism (Hidayati, 2016) (Anggraeni & Purnomo, 2023; Apologia, Mas'od, Masykuri, Hidayati, & Putra, 2024). The impact of multicultural Islamic education on strengthening social cohesion is evident in the maintained good relationships between religious communities within the institution, both among educators and with the surrounding community, without conflict.

The practice of multicultural Islamic education – as implemented at SI-BBI – can reduce disintegration and conflicts caused by differences in ethnicity, culture, religion, and other factors. Such practices are important and should be carried out by integrating multicultural values, tolerance, and moderation into the school curriculum (Abidin, Fatawi, & Kausar, 2025; Maarif, Muarofah, Sianipar, Hariyadi, & Kausar, 2024; Sutisna & Khorri, 2024; Suyanta, Saifuddin, & Bahri, 2024). The school curriculum within the national education system carries the mission of national integration, human dignity, spirituality, and the morality of the nation, intelligence, and life skills. These five missions must be realized in all units of the national education system as an effort to project a better future for the nation (Nuha et al., 2021).

Multicultural Islamic education at SI-BBI can serve as a model because it acts as a strategy to avoid conflicts that often use religion as a symbolic trigger. Multicultural values need to be injected into the curriculum in order to strengthen the character of students (Arifin & Kartiko, 2022; Jayadi, Abduh, & Basri, 2022). Multicultural Islamic education can also strengthen relationships among students at school, and even help build better relationships between students and the local community (Baderiah & Munawir, 2024) (Kader, Rofiq, & Ma'arif, 2024; Latif, Ubaidillah, & Mundir, 2023). Thus, multicultural Islamic education should be implemented in Islamic schools, both in areas with Muslim majorities and minorities. When applied in areas with a Muslim minority, it functions as a strategic tool for adaptation. Meanwhile, in areas with a Muslim majority, its role is to protect or accommodate the interests of minorities. The implementation of multicultural Islamic education in both of these conditions can serve as a means to strengthen social cohesion within society (Fahmi et al., 2020).

The implementation of multicultural Islamic education, which emphasizes the importance of doing good to everyone, can prevent students from potential social polarization that leads to tension and division. Belief differences should not be a barrier to connecting and building relationships with one another (Syarif et al., 2024). Social polarization, by categorizing,

separating, and pitting religious and ethnic groups against each other, will only have a negative impact and could trigger discrimination, threatening the social-political stability of a society (Brubaker, 2015). This does not happen at SI-BBI.

Meanwhile, at PS, the implementation of multicultural Islamic education has resulted in positive changes in how students interact. Students participate in class activities with a more open and respectful attitude. With multicultural Islamic education, students develop an inclusive perspective and understand social justice as something that must be realized (Djamaluddin et al., 2024). Multiculturalism is a manifestation of the values of Islamic teachings as a spreader of compassion throughout the world. By integrating the values of multiculturalism into Islamic religious education, students are equipped with an understanding of Islamic teachings that value differences and respect human rights. As a result, students can be spared from harboring hatred towards different groups.

In Southern Thailand, cultural issues between the Malay-Muslim community and Thai-Buddhists have been a complex matter, fueling stereotypes and stigma. Thai-Buddhists often use the term "*kebaek*" to refer to the Malay-Muslim community. This term, which means 'guest' or 'immigrant,' carries a negative and derogatory connotation. It is viewed as an ethnocentric and stereotypical expression. The Malay-Muslim community in Southern Thailand is regarded as second-class citizens and an alien cultural group based on religious and cultural symbols, such as language and dress customs (Arismunandar, 2019). On the other hand, the Malay-Muslim community identifies Thai-Buddhists as infidels and idol worshippers. They perceive Thai-Buddhists as a modern form of ignorance, seen as enemies to be fought based on Islamic law due to their unjust treatment of the Malay community. Ideological conflicts, cultural clashes, and even physical confrontations have marked the relations between the Thai and Malay ethnic groups, including interactions between the Thai government and the Malay ethnic group. The Malay-Muslim community in Southern Thailand feels oppressed by the Thai government and views this relationship as one between colonizers and the colonized. Multicultural Islamic education at PS has been able to bring students together to cooperate in heterogeneous groups.

Multicultural Islamic education at PS has an impact on the relationship between students and the surrounding community, especially the Buddhist community around the school. Through various interfaith programs organized by the school, students interact more positively with local residents, thereby strengthening social cohesion between the school and the community (Syarif et al., 2024). This helps to avoid acts of violence. In the theory of the conflict triangle, there are three types of violence: open violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. Open violence refers to forms of violence that are clearly visible or observable, such as torture, murder, intimidation, physical assault, and acts of terrorism. Structural violence refers to forms of violence that are embedded within contexts and institutions, including actions like discrimination in education or employment, as well as the denial of rights and freedoms. Meanwhile, cultural violence stems from feelings, attitudes, and values such as stereotypes, racism, distrust, fear, and intolerant actions (Alexandra, 2017).

The steps to prevent the emergence of open violence involve addressing forms of violence that are not visible, especially cultural violence such as racism, hatred, stereotypes, and intolerant attitudes. The principle is to change the mindset to become more open. In order to combat or eliminate direct violence (such as murder) and structural violence (such as

discrimination), the development of culture (tolerance) must be the main agent (Merino & Cendejas, 2017). Therefore, fostering and cultivating tolerance among students can be an effective strategy in mitigating conflicts within society. Cultivating tolerance can be done through the habituation of multicultural Islamic education (Sahal et al., 2018).

The attitude of tolerance that needs to be cultivated among students should be active (organic), meaning it is not just passive tolerance, which respects differences and does not disturb other individuals or groups, but does not involve cooperation. The tolerance that is cultivated must be active, understood as an attitude of mutual respect and a willingness to establish communication and cooperation with individuals or groups who are different. Passive tolerance is merely an attitude of trying to avoid conflict without any effort to understand differences more deeply. By evolving into active tolerance, proactive steps are taken to engage directly with individuals or groups with different backgrounds, beliefs, or values. Borrowing Fahmi's term, active tolerance aligns with organic tolerance. This form of tolerance allows differing parties to not only respect differences but also build cooperation in achieving peace and harmony in a professional manner (Fahmi et al., 2022). Cultivating tolerance through multicultural Islamic education can be a long-term solution that is compatible in addressing societal issues.

From the perspective of social identity theory, multicultural Islamic education can help achieve social cohesion. Social Identity Theory was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner. Tajfel and Turner developed social identity theory in the 1970s and 1980s. They argued that an individual's social identity is formed from their membership in a particular social group, and that this social identity influences an individual's behavior and attitudes toward other groups (M. Guan & Jiyeon So, 2022).

Tajfel suggests that individuals not only view themselves as members of a particular social group but also identify themselves based on similarities with that group. Tajfel emphasizes that individuals tend to classify others into certain categories based on social attributes such as race, religion, or social status. Tajfel developed the concept of how individuals tend to prefer members of their group (in-group) compared to individuals who are outside their group (out-group). Tajfel also shows that individuals like to compare their group with other groups to build a sense of social self-esteem. This process can lead to discrimination between groups. Tajfel emphasizes more on the cognitive aspect of social identity, focusing on how individuals form their identities based on the social groups they consider relevant (D. C. Awuor, 2021).

Meanwhile, Turner developed and deepened Tajfel's social identity theory, especially in terms of how social identity functions in everyday social interactions. Turner added a more dynamic dimension to social identity theory with the development of social concepts. Turner further developed an understanding of how social categories are used to facilitate the identification process. He proposed that social categories are how individuals organize and make meaning of their groups and others. Turner also introduced a more complex dimension to the relationship between individuals and groups, proposing that social identity is not just a static process but is also influenced by the dynamics of individual commitment to the group and the ability to change the group in a particular social context. Turner showed how individuals tend to view their group (in-group) as more positive and homogeneous, while the out-group is

more negative and heterogeneous. This is related to the process of discrimination and stereotyping between groups (Michelle Ye, et.al., 2016: 120-137).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) emphasizes that an individual's social identity is formed through their membership in a particular group, which in turn influences how individuals interact with other groups. Individuals tend to categorize themselves into certain social groups based on cultural, ethnic, religious, or linguistic similarities. This grouping creates in-groups and out-groups, which can contribute to a sense of togetherness but also have the potential to trigger prejudice and discrimination if not managed properly. According to social identity theory, a society can build a more inclusive salience identity (Haq, Wasliman, Sauri, Fatkhullah, & Khorl, 2022; Rozaq, Basri, & Indah, 2022; Yani dkk., 2022). SIT states that if differences between groups are overemphasized, the phenomenon of intergroup stereotypes will emerge, where one group tends to perceive other groups negatively in order to strengthen its own group status. In this context, multicultural policies that overemphasize differences without building a broader collective identity can strengthen social segregation and hinder social cohesion (Ma`arif dkk., 2024; Ma`arif, Rofiq, & Sirojuddin, 2022). Therefore, multicultural (Islamic) education needs to emphasize common ground among cultural, class, ethnic, and religious diversity.

In the context of multicultural Islamic education, social identity can help explain how students view themselves and their groups in a broader context. Social identity theory also explains that individuals can have a social identity that is friendly to religious and cultural diversity (inclusive), namely an identity that includes other groups and recognizes differences. An inclusive social identity can help achieve social cohesion by promoting understanding and recognition of differences, building an inclusive social identity, reducing stereotypes and prejudices, and promoting cooperation and collaboration between groups.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study identify the approaches implemented by Sekolah Islam Bali Bina Insani (SI-BBI) in Bali, Indonesia, and Phatnawitya School (PS) in Southern Thailand in building social cohesion through multicultural Islamic education. SI-BBI integrates local cultural values into its curriculum, such as the Nyepi holiday and Balinese language lessons, demonstrating an adaptive-aculturative approach in the context of a Muslim minority. At PS, multicultural Islamic education is applied through teaching the inclusive values of **rahmatan lil alamin** and local cultural interaction programs. The novelty of this study lies in presenting multicultural Islamic education as a functional strategy aimed at strengthening social cohesion in the context of the Muslim minority in Bali and the Muslim majority in Southern Thailand with a dominant Buddhist culture.

This study expands the theory of social cohesion by demonstrating the role of multicultural Islamic education in managing identity conflicts in regions with different social contexts. Furthermore, this study deepens Social Identity Theory by emphasizing the importance of education as a means to reduce identity conflicts through the acceptance of diversity and cross-cultural respect. The theory of multicultural education, functioning as a tool for conflict resolution, is also expanded with an emphasis on the concept of multiculturalism as a resource for social cohesion, where education can alleviate social tensions through interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

The implementation of the findings from this study emphasizes the importance of multicultural Islamic education as a social strategy in regions with sharp religious and cultural differences. At SI-BBI, this strategy successfully fostered harmonious relations with the Hindu community in Bali through intercultural activities and outreach with Hindu religious leaders. At PS, the multicultural Islamic approach, which emphasizes universal compassion, helped create harmonious relationships between Muslim students and the Buddhist community around the school. Therefore, this study suggests the development of more inclusive educational policies and intensive collaboration between educational institutions, the government, and local communities to strengthen social cohesion through active dialogue and cross-cultural learning.

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