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STRENGTHENING TOLERANCE BASED ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION THROUGH MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract
This research aims to analyze and develop a strategy for strengthening tolerance based on religious education through a multicultural communication approach in Primary Schools. In the context of Indonesia's diverse society, religious education plays a crucial role in fostering mutual respect and reinforcing the values of togetherness among students. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to explore the relationship between religious instruction, tolerance, and intercultural communication in schools. Quantitative data were obtained through student surveys to measure their level of tolerance, while qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and students to understand the dynamics of multicultural communication in religious teaching. The research findings indicate that the integration of tolerance values into religious subject matter, supported by effective multicultural communication, can enhance students' understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity within the school environment. Furthermore, this study also reveals that inclusive communication strategies and multicultural-based teaching materials have a positive impact on students' attitudes towards differences. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for developing religious education programs that not only build students' spiritual depth but also strengthen harmony and social solidarity in a pluralistic society.
Keywords: Tolerance, Religious Education, Multicultural Communication, Multicultural Education

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with vast cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, making it one of the most pluralistic societies in the world (Arfan, 2022). In this context, education plays a significant role in instilling values of tolerance and appreciation for differences among the younger generation. Religious education, particularly in Primary Schools, can function as a medium to strengthen students' understanding and acceptance of diversity, as well as build mutual respect among them (Salimi et al., 2021). However, despite various efforts to integrate tolerance values into the religious education curriculum, challenges still exist in effective classroom implementation, especially concerning intercultural communication and the support of relevant teaching materials (Pajarianto et al., 2022).

A number of previous studies have examined the role of religious education in shaping tolerant attitudes among students. Pajarianto et al. (2022) found that religious education in Yogyakarta was able to strengthen students' tolerance towards differences in beliefs. Meanwhile, Wahyudi et al. study (2020) highlighted the importance of multicultural

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communication in schools in addressing the challenges of cultural diversity in Indonesia. Further research by Judijanto et al. (2024) showed that the implementation of tolerance values in the educational environment can strengthen social cohesion and encourage integration among students from various backgrounds. However, most of these studies still focus on the normative aspects of religious education without deeply exploring how multicultural communication can play a role in reinforcing these values.

Furthermore, Feriyansyah et al. (2021) developed multicultural-based teaching materials to support religious education in Primary Schools. This research found that subject matter containing multicultural values had a significant influence on students' attitudes in dealing with cultural diversity. An additional study by Murray (2022) on social interaction in multicultural schools emphasized the importance of inclusive language and communication in creating a harmonious environment. In the context of religious education, Desky's findings are relevant as they show that effective language and communication form the basis for students' acceptance and understanding of diversity.

Although various studies have been conducted to understand the relationship between religious education and tolerance, as well as the importance of multicultural communication, research specifically examining the integration of these two aspects in Primary Schools remains limited. This gap lies in the lack of an integrated approach that holistically combines religious education with multicultural communication to address diversity issues within the educational context. No study has yet investigated in depth how teaching methods based on multicultural communication in religious education can directly contribute to strengthening tolerance among students.

This research offers a new contribution by developing a multicultural communication-based approach to religious education in Primary Schools. By utilizing a mixed-methods approach, this study will not only quantitatively measure students' tolerance levels but also qualitatively explore how intercultural communication in religious classes can reinforce tolerant attitudes. This approach is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the role of multicultural communication as a key component in religious education for creating an inclusive and harmonious learning environment.

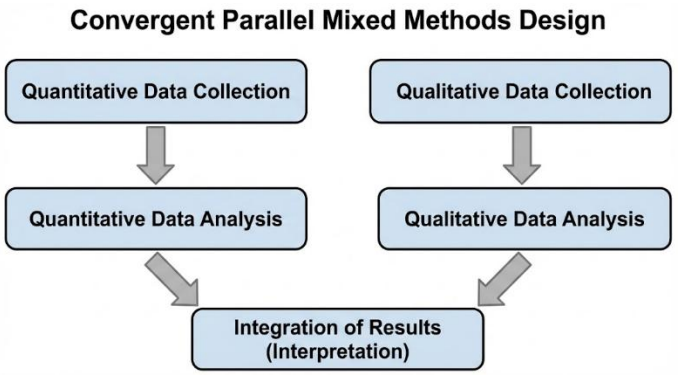
METHOD

This research employs a mixed methods approach with a convergent parallel design (see Figure 1): This approach allows for the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, which are then analyzed and merged to provide a more comprehensive understanding of strengthening tolerance through religious education and multicultural communication in Primary Schools. The convergent parallel design was chosen so that the results from both approaches could be compared and integrated in the final stage of the research, allowing for data triangulation to enhance the validity of the findings.

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Picture 1



The population of this study consisted of students and teachers from Primary Schools in Yogyakarta that have religious education programs. Sampling was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, where respondents were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives. Students' participation was necessary to evaluate their level of tolerance and their perception of diversity, while teachers were included to provide in-depth insights into the practice of multicultural communication within the religious classroom.

The instruments (see Table 1) used in this research consisted of questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and observation. The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale to measure students' attitudes toward tolerance and their perception of the effectiveness of multicultural communication in the religious education environment. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, aimed at exploring their experiences in managing diversity and creating an inclusive atmosphere through religious instruction. Furthermore, direct observation was carried out to monitor the interactions between students and teachers during religious lessons, thereby obtaining qualitative data regarding the dynamics of multicultural communication in the classroom.

Table 1: Instruments and Respondents

Instrument	Description	Respondents
Questionnaire	Likert scale to measure tolerance and perception	Primary school Student
In-depth Interview	Semi-structured questions about teachers' experiences	Religious education teacher
Observation	Direct observation of learning activities	Students and teachers in religious education classes

Data collection was conducted in several stages. First, questionnaires were distributed to students to collect quantitative data regarding their level of tolerance and their views on intercultural communication. Next, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the religious teaching methods they implement, as well as the challenges they face in teaching the values of tolerance. Finally, observation was carried out in religious classes to identify effective multicultural communication practices and how students respond to situations involving elements of diversity.

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to describe students' general perceptions and identify patterns

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related to their level of tolerance. Meanwhile, the qualitative data from the interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which allowed the researcher to identify key themes regarding intercultural communication and acceptance of diversity within the school environment. The results of both analyses were then integrated in the final stage to provide comprehensive conclusions, which are expected to offer insights into the role of multicultural communication in strengthening religious education as a means of developing tolerant attitudes among Primary School students.

DATA ANALYSIS

This research utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods approach to integrate quantitative and qualitative results in understanding the role of multicultural communication-based religious education in enhancing tolerance among Primary School students. Based on questionnaire data, interviews with teachers, and field observations, several key findings were obtained and presented across major indicators: attitude toward tolerance of diversity, students' perception of multicultural communication, and the effectiveness of religious education in developing tolerant attitudes.

1. Attitude toward Tolerance of Diversity

   The quantitative results indicate that students possess a positive attitude toward diversity, with the average score reaching 4.2 on the aspects of comfort, respect, and cooperation in a multicultural environment, as shown in Table 2. A total of 40% of students stated "Strongly Agree" and another 45% stated "Agree" that they feel comfortable working with friends from different religious backgrounds (Table 3). This demonstrates that religious education has a significant influence in fostering a tolerant attitude toward diversity among students.

Table 2: Average Score per Indicator

Indicator	Average Score (1-5)	Interpretation
Attitude of Tolerance towards Diversity	4.2	High tolerance
Perceptions of Multicultural Communication in Religious Education	4.1	Positive perceptions of multicultural communication
The Effectiveness of Religious Education in Developing Tolerance	4.3	The effectiveness of higher religious education in promoting tolerance

This table shows that all indicators have high average scores, with the Effectiveness of Religious Education in Developing Tolerance having the highest value at a score of 4.3, followed by the Attitude toward Tolerance of Diversity at 4.2, and the Perception of Multicultural Communication in Religious Education at a score of 4.1. The data interpretation indicates the high effectiveness of religious education in enhancing tolerant attitudes and positive perceptions toward diversity.

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Table 2 (*Correction/Continuation*): Frequency of Student Responses for Each Indicator

Indikator	Strongly Agree (SS)	Agree (Y)	Netral (N)	Disagree (DS)	Strongly Disagree (STD)
Attitude of Tolerance towards Diversity	40%	45%	10%	3%	2%
Perceptions of Multicultural Communication	35%	50%	8%	5%	2%
Effectiveness of Religious Education	45%	40%	10%	3%	2%

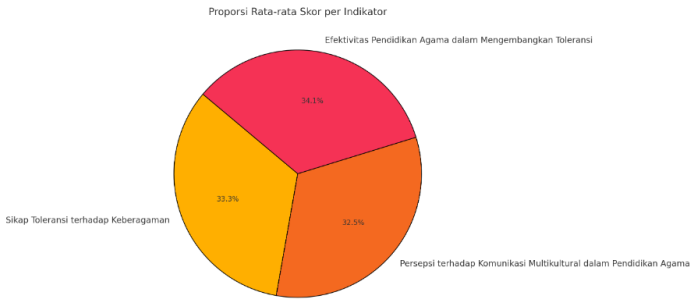
This table shows that the majority of students gave "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses for every indicator, particularly regarding the Effectiveness of Religious Education, where 85% of students agreed that religious education plays an important role in developing tolerance. Neutral and negative responses were very low, indicating a highly positive perception among students.

In the field observations, students were seen actively participating in class discussions that covered topics of religious diversity. When carrying out group assignments, students also appeared to cooperate regardless of their different religious backgrounds. Teachers reported that diversity topics discussed in religious classes made students more open to accepting differences. This finding is consistent with Susanti's (2015) finding, which mentioned that religious education can enhance tolerance and appreciation for differences in the school environment.

Based on the qualitative data from teacher interviews, there are challenges in encouraging students to be completely open, especially when students hold more conservative views. Teachers mentioned that students who are less accustomed to differences often take longer to accept different viewpoints. However, with the support of inclusive religious education, students gradually demonstrated a more appreciative attitude towards differences in perspective.

The integration of this quantitative and qualitative data reinforces the finding that religious education emphasizing the importance of tolerance and intercultural communication can build a more harmonious environment. As seen in Figure 2, the high score on the tolerance attitude indicator shows that students feel the positive influence of religious education in fostering appreciation for diversity, consistent with the goals of multicultural education.

Figure 1: Proportion of Average Scores



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2. Perception of Multicultural Communication in Religious Education

   Students' perception of multicultural communication implemented in religious classes showed positive results, with an average score of 4.1 (Table 1). The majority of students felt that teachers provided a safe space for them to discuss religion and culture without discrimination. Data from Table 2 shows that 35% of students strongly agreed and another 50% agreed that teachers encourage dialogue among students from different backgrounds, indicating a positive perception of acceptance and openness in the classroom.

   In interviews with teachers, it was revealed that they actively promote cross-cultural and religious dialogue in class. Teachers expressed that discussions on diversity help students better understand their peers' perspectives. As facilitators, teachers play a crucial role in creating an inclusive atmosphere where every student feels heard regardless of their background. This aligns with Affandi's findings (2024), which emphasize that multicultural communication in schools can address the challenges of cultural diversity.

   Field observations support the quantitative results, where students appeared comfortable expressing their views, whether aligned or divergent. Teachers allocated time for students to share their religious and cultural experiences, enriching collective understanding in the class. These findings demonstrate that multicultural communication in religious education plays a vital role in shaping tolerant and mutually respectful attitudes among students.

   The integration of quantitative and qualitative results indicates that a positive perception of multicultural communication in religious classes encourages students to be more open to different viewpoints. This is reflected in Figure 2, which shows that intercultural communication contributes significantly to strengthening students' tolerance, consistent with the concepts of multicultural education applied in the learning environment.

3. Effectiveness of Religious Education in Developing Tolerance

   The effectiveness of religious education in developing tolerance among students is clearly reflected in the integrated quantitative and qualitative data. Table 1 shows that this indicator has the highest average score, at 4.3, with 45% of students stating "Strongly Agree" and another 40% stating "Agree" that religious education helps them understand the importance of tolerance. This data indicates that religious education plays a major role in fostering tolerant attitudes towards differences among students.

   Interview data with teachers support this result, where teachers reported that religious education provides students with a deep understanding of the importance of accepting differences and living harmoniously. Teachers stated that students often apply tolerance values outside the classroom, for example, by dealing with differences in opinion with their friends peacefully. This is consistent with Yanuarti's findings (2021), which showed that multicultural education through religion has a positive impact on building tolerant student character.

   Observations show that students not only understand the value of tolerance but also apply it in daily interactions. On several occasions, students were seen resolving disagreements without conflict and prioritizing peaceful discussion. Teachers played an important role in facilitating this understanding by providing examples and teaching values relevant to multicultural life.

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The combination of quantitative and qualitative data reveals that effective religious education can shape students' character to be more tolerant and appreciative of diversity. Figure 2 shows that the religious education effectiveness indicator has the highest score, confirming that religious education is a powerful tool for developing tolerant attitudes in a multicultural learning environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research indicates that religious education with a multicultural approach plays a significant role in enhancing student tolerance and promoting inclusive intercultural communication. These findings are consistent with various previous theories and studies emphasizing the role of multicultural education in developing attitudes that appreciate diversity, particularly in the context of religious education. This discussion integrates previous theories and research with the results of this study, as well as its practical and theoretical implications for strengthening multicultural education in Primary Schools.

1. Attitude toward Tolerance of Diversity

   Students' attitudes towards diversity tolerance showed positive results with an average score of 4.2 in terms of comfort, appreciation, and cooperation in a multicultural environment. These results confirm that multicultural awareness needs to be built from an early age, as emphasised in studies on early childhood education which show that introducing diversity from an early age forms the foundation for strong social acceptance. This positive attitude does not arise in a vacuum, but is the result of an educational process that touches on the cognitive and affective aspects of students, in line with the view that multicultural education must be able to transform students' perspectives in viewing "the other" as an integral part of society. In the context of a diverse Indonesia, these findings are an important indicator that primary schools have succeeded in becoming early incubators for tolerance.

   Furthermore, these high tolerance scores reflect the successful internalisation of diversity values in religious-based school environments. Research by Feriyansyah et al. (2021) confirms that instilling the concept of diversity in religious-based primary schools is crucial to preventing exclusivism. When students feel comfortable working with friends of different religions, it signals the breakdown of prejudicial barriers. This phenomenon is also supported by Kelly (2018) findings, which state that the formation of tolerance through multicultural education is a continuous process that requires a conducive environment. Students at these schools are not only taught to "know" differences, but to "feel" and "live" in those differences.

   From a broader perspective, the students' tolerant attitudes contribute directly to social cohesion. Mawardi (2024), in his study on the dynamics of multiculturalism and religious pluralism, highlights that strategies for building social cohesion in Indonesia are highly dependent on how educational institutions manage diversity. The high score on the cooperation indicator in this study proves that students have the social capital to interact in a pluralistic society. This is also relevant to Modood (2019)) argument about secular and religious multiculturalism, where recognition of group identities in public spaces—including schools—actually strengthens national integration rather than dividing it.

   The importance of fostering this attitude of tolerance is also closely related to the prevention of future conflicts. Latifah et al. (2022) remind us that as a multicultural country, Indonesia has a high urgency to instil tolerance in school-age children in

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order to reduce the potential for social friction. The research data showing that 85% of students have a positive attitude towards diversity provides optimistic hope. This is in line with Shachar (2001) concept of "Multicultural Jurisdictions," which emphasises the protection of cultural rights within a framework of fair institutions, where schools play a major role in accommodating these differences without sacrificing the individual rights of students.

In addition, the formation of tolerance is also influenced by the appropriate psychological approach in education. The American Psychological Association (2017) in its multicultural guidelines emphasises an ecological approach to context, identity, and intersectionality. In this study, students are not viewed as single entities, but rather as individuals with complex backgrounds that are valued. This approach allows students to develop a healthy "multicultural identity." Banks and Banks' (2004) study also reinforces this by stating that multicultural education should help students understand how knowledge is constructed and how cultural biases influence their perceptions.

Finally, the success of instilling this attitude of tolerance cannot be separated from the integration of local wisdom into the curriculum. Harmoni et al. (2023) found that a local wisdom-based multicultural education model in Islamic boarding schools was able to create strong harmony. Although this research was conducted in primary schools, the same principle applies: when tolerance is linked to the noble values of the local culture, students' acceptance becomes more natural and profound. This proves that students' attitudes of tolerance are the result of synergy between universal religious values and particular local cultural values.

2. Perception of Multicultural Communication in Religious Education

Students' perceptions of multicultural communication in religious education classes showed positive results with an average score of 4.1. These findings underscore the importance of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in modern Islamic education. Ardhy (2024) explains that intercultural communication competence is key to uncovering misunderstandings and building bridges for dialogue in Islamic education. In this study, students felt that teachers provided a safe space for discussion, which is a key prerequisite for effective multicultural communication. Teachers no longer position themselves as the sole source of truth, but rather as facilitators of democratic dialogue.

The dynamics of communication in the classroom can also be seen in how students manage their interactions. Zhang (2023), in his study on multicultural group work, notes that students often use a "middle ground" strategy or even silence as a way to manage potential conflicts. However, in this study, the high positive perception indicates that students tend to be more active and expressive than passive. This is likely driven by the teacher's use of inclusive language, as explained by Desky (2017) that language functions as a crucial symbol of status and social interaction in multicultural schools. The use of non-discriminatory language makes students from minority backgrounds feel equal.

The role of teachers in designing this communication is vital. Kim & Connelly (2019) highlight that teachers' multicultural teaching efficacy is highly dependent on their own intercultural attitudes and sensitivity. The teachers in this study appear to have good pedagogical design capacity for multicultural curricula, a competency that Brown & Livstrom (2020) consider essential for science and religion teachers in

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diverse environments. They are able to translate abstract theological concepts into classroom discussions that are relevant to students' everyday cultural experiences, creating what Bruna & Gomez (2008) refer to as "the work of language" in multicultural classrooms.

Furthermore, the strategies of Islamic religious education teachers in implementing multiculturalism-based education, as researched by Padil et al. (2021), have proven to be effective here. Teachers use a dialogical approach to discuss sensitive issues, turning potential conflicts into learning opportunities. This approach is relevant to the findings of Kaplan Toren & Schwartz (2025) regarding teacher professional development in multilingual and multicultural contexts, which emphasise the importance of adaptability in communication strategies. In religious classes, this means the ability of teachers to explain religious principles with interpretations that are friendly to diversity, so that the communication that is built is embracing.

The effectiveness of this communication also has an impact on deradicalisation efforts. Setiawan & Amal (2016) found that multicultural and multi-religious understanding built through good communication is very effective in countering radicalism. In the context of this study, multicultural communication in religious classes serves as an initial filter against exclusive ideologies. According to the Kuningan Faculty of Teacher Training and Education journal (2024), multicultural communication in education is a bulwark against the challenges of cultural diversity. By accustoming students to dialogue, schools break the chain of prejudice that often arises from a lack of communication.

Finally, this positive perception is also supported by relevant teaching materials. Salako & Ojeyibi (2019) suggest a practical approach to teaching social studies from a multicultural perspective for transformation. In the context of PAI, the integration of multicultural values in learning, as occurred in post-conflict areas in Mashuri's (2021) study, shows that communication that heals social wounds can only occur if the learning materials themselves support the narrative of peace. Students in this study perceived communication in the classroom as positive because the material discussed was relevant to their diverse lives..

3. Effectiveness of Religious Education in Developing Tolerance

The indicator of the effectiveness of religious education in developing tolerance showed the highest result with a score of 4.3. This proves that Islamic religious education, if managed with the right approach, is not a barrier to tolerance but rather its main catalyst. Ibrahim (2013) emphasises that the understanding, principles, and relevance of multicultural education are very much in line with the objectives of Islamic education, which is rahmatan lil alamin (a blessing for the universe). This finding refutes the assumption that religious education tends to be dogmatic and exclusive. On the contrary, the model of internalising multicultural values in PAI learning, as found by Arifin et al. (2020) at SMAN 1 Nganjuk, has proven to be effective in building an inclusive character.

This high effectiveness is also supported by the implementation of an adaptive curriculum. Ramdhan et al. (2023) highlight the role of authentic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum for multicultural PAI. Assessment that focuses not only on memorising arguments but also on the practice of real tolerance encourages students to internalise these values. In addition, the development of a multicultural curriculum analysed by Ramdhan (2019a) from the perspective of the taxonomy of objectives

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and student competencies shows that a well-designed curriculum is the key to successful learning. The schools in this study appear to have effectively applied these curriculum development principles.

Policy support also plays a central role. Bafadhal et al. (2024) show that Islamic education policies have a significant influence on the implementation of multiculturalism in educational foundations. The high effectiveness in this study indicates the existence of "political will" on the part of the school to mainstream tolerance. This is in line with the study by Hamdan et al. (2022) at Darul Muhajirin Praya, where the multicultural PAI implementation model was successful due to strong structural support. Religious education is effective because it does not run alone but is supported by the school ecosystem and conducive policies.

In addition to the curriculum and policy aspects, varied learning methods also contributed to this effectiveness. Ramdhan & Masuwd (2025) found a relationship between kinesthetic learning styles and elementary school students' PAI learning outcomes. Although the focus of the study was on learning styles, the implication is that religious education that accommodates various learning styles (inclusive) tends to be more accepted by students. Atho et al. (2021) also added that efforts to build student character through multicultural values in PAI require a variety of methods so that these values are truly instilled.

The importance of integration between schools and communities is also a determining factor. Tri Wahyudi Ramdhan (2019) in his writing on "Multicultural-Based Schools and Communities" emphasises that religious education cannot be separated from the social context of the community. The effectiveness of religious education in schools is high because what is taught in class is relevant to the social realities faced by students. DomNwachukwu (2010) refers to this as a movement "from theory to practice" in multicultural education. Students see consistency between religious teachings at school and the need to live harmoniously in society.

Ultimately, this effectiveness is evidence of the success of a comprehensive multicultural curriculum development model. Ramdhan (2019b, 2020), in his various studies on multicultural curriculum development models in Kediri and the implementation of multicultural values, emphasises that religious education must be dynamic. This finding of a score of 4.3 validates Banks (2015) argument about school reform and educational equality, in which multicultural religious education contributes to the creation of equal learning opportunities for all students regardless of their religious background. Religious education has successfully transformed into a powerful instrument of social cohesion.

4. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, these findings support the concept of multicultural education advanced by the theory of inclusivity in education. Religious education that prioritizes tolerance values and multicultural communication strengthens the theory that diversity-oriented learning can address cultural and religious differences among students Gollnick et al. (2025). This research adds empirical evidence that multicultural communication within religious education plays a critical role in creating an inclusive environment, aligning with the research of Zhang (2023) and Khan et al. (2020).

Practically, the results of this study underscore the vital role of teachers in building multicultural communication in religious classes. Teachers trained in multicultural communication are capable of encouraging cross-cultural dialogue that strengthens

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tolerance among students. This aligns with the recommendations of Wu et al. (2021) who emphasized the importance of cross-cultural communication training for teachers to support inclusive education in the school environment. In the Indonesian education context, these findings indicate the necessity of integrating multicultural values into the religious education curriculum as an effort to strengthen social cohesion in the learning environment.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that multicultural communication-based religious education possesses extraordinary power in shaping a generation of students who not only appreciate differences but also utilize diversity as a foundation for harmony in schools. Students exposed to tolerance values within religious education demonstrate more inclusive, open, and willing attitudes to collaborate with peers from different backgrounds.

Teachers play a central role in creating a safe space for dialogue, where students feel valued and free to express their views. The multicultural communication established in religious classes is not merely a means of delivering material but also a platform for fostering deep cross-cultural understanding. Students not only learn spiritual values but also genuinely experience how diversity can enrich their lives.

These findings underscore the importance of religious education as an instrument for character building that can transcend the boundaries of identity and belief. By integrating multicultural values, religious education can become a primary pillar in creating harmony amidst social diversity. The practical implications are relevant not only for the development of school curricula but also as an effort to build social cohesion in a diverse society. With this inclusive approach, religious education is capable of becoming a bridge that connects, rather than separates, every difference among students.

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