

## **Integrating Local Wisdom and Islamic Values in Multicultural Education at Madrasah Aliyah Pekalongan**

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### **Abstract**

The complexity of Indonesia's cultural diversity challenges Islamic education institutions to promote inclusivity, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. Pekalongan, a coastal city known for its plural society and textile industry, represents a microcosm of multicultural life within an Islamic setting. *Madrasah Aliyah* (Islamic Senior High Schools) in this city serve as laboratories of social integration where Islamic teachings, local wisdom, and modern educational values converge. This study explores how teachers in Pekalongan's *Madrasah Aliyah* integrate local wisdom and Islamic values to shape multicultural awareness and social harmony among students. It also investigates the broader social impact of these practices and compares approaches among various institutions. Using a qualitative multiple case study, data were collected from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and document analysis. Thematic analysis identified patterns of pedagogical strategies and value integration. The findings reveal three dominant themes: (1) local cultural ethics such as *gotong royong* and *tata krama* are systematically embedded in religious instruction; (2) teachers use Islamic narratives emphasizing *rahmatan lil 'alamin* and *adl* to contextualize diversity ; and (3) these practices strengthen students' empathy, social trust, and resilience in pluralistic environments. The synergy of Islamic ethics and local wisdom offers a powerful model for multicultural education, fostering inclusive citizenship and sustainable peace. This model may serve as a benchmark for Islamic schools nationwide.

**Keywords:** multicultural education, islamic values, local wisdom, madrasah aliyah, pekalongan

## **A. Introduction**

### **Background and Rationale**

Indonesia's multicultural landscape is both a blessing and a challenge for its education system. With over 300 ethnic groups and diverse religious affiliations, the nation's social fabric is sustained through a delicate balance of tolerance, shared norms, and spiritual unity. Within this context, Islamic education—particularly at the secondary level—holds a critical role in shaping young citizens who can navigate pluralism without compromising their faith. The city of Pekalongan, located in Central Java, embodies this duality vividly: a predominantly Muslim community enriched by Chinese, Arab, and Javanese cultural influences, all intertwined through the batik industry and maritime trade.

*Madrasah Aliyah*, as Islamic senior high schools, have long been institutions that reflect the synthesis between *tafaqquh fi al-din* (deep understanding of religion) and cultural

continuity. Unlike many secular institutions, *madrasahs* possess a unique flexibility in contextualizing Islamic knowledge within local traditions. However, the contemporary globalized environment introduces new complexities. Teachers are increasingly confronted with issues of identity politics, intergroup relations, and moral relativism that demand a renewal of pedagogical approaches rooted in both Islamic and local epistemologies (Abdullah, 2021; Parker & Raihani, 2020).

This study addresses the necessity for such contextual renewal. It posits that multicultural education cannot merely be imported from Western theories of tolerance or global citizenship but must be grounded in indigenous values. In Pekalongan, these values manifest in everyday life through practices such as *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), *tata krama* (respectful social conduct), and *guyub rukun* (communal harmony). When intertwined with Islamic ethics—especially the concepts of *adl* (justice), *ihsan* (benevolence), and *tasamuh* (tolerance)—they create a distinctive educational philosophy that is both religiously authentic and socially transformative.

### Research Gap and Significance

While numerous studies address multicultural education within Islamic schooling, most focus narrowly on curriculum or policy aspects (Rahman, 2023; Kusuma & Ma'arif, 2022). There remains limited empirical insight into how teachers operationalize these values in classroom interactions, and how such practices influence students' worldview formation. Moreover, comparative analyses across multiple institutions within the same locality are rare, leaving a gap in understanding the variability of implementation models.

By focusing on several *Madrasah Aliyah* across Pekalongan—urban and semi-rural, public and private—this research aims to uncover both convergences and divergences in pedagogical strategies. It contributes to the discourse on Islamic multiculturalism not as an abstract ideal, but as a lived educational reality. Crucially, this research bridges two major intellectual traditions: Islamic pedagogy emphasizing moral-spiritual formation, and multicultural education emphasizing civic inclusivity (Banks, 2019; Hasan, 2023).

### Contextual Setting: Pekalongan as a Cultural Crossroads

Pekalongan's social landscape provides fertile ground for studying multicultural practices. Historically, it has been a maritime hub attracting traders and settlers from Yemen, China, and various parts of Java. This intermingling produced hybrid cultural forms visible in local architecture, cuisine, and art. The batik motifs themselves reflect plural influences—Arabic calligraphy, Chinese florals, and Javanese geometric patterns coexisting on the same fabric.

Within education, such hybridity extends to moral education. Teachers at *Madrasah Aliyah* often emphasize local idioms such as *eling lan waspada* (mindful and cautious) alongside Qur'anic injunctions to seek knowledge and maintain justice. This integration enables students to see Islam not as a distant ideology but as a living moral compass embedded in their community's daily life. However, modernization and digital globalization have begun to erode communal bonds. Exposure to homogenized media content has increased individualism among students, weakening traditional value transmission. Teachers now face the challenge of revitalizing local wisdom while ensuring its alignment with Islamic universality. The tension between maintaining tradition and embracing modernity defines the pedagogical landscape of Pekalongan's *madrasahs*.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two intersecting theoretical paradigms:

1. **Islamic Educational Philosophy:** Rooted in *tarbiyah* and *ta'dib*, emphasizing holistic development—intellectual, moral, and spiritual (Al-Attas, 1980).
2. **Multicultural Education Theory:** Developed by Banks (2019) and expanded by Gay (2020), focusing on equity, diversity, and critical consciousness in learning environments.

By synthesizing these paradigms, the study formulates an Islamic-Multicultural Integration Model (IMIM), wherein local wisdom serves as the operational bridge between universal Islamic principles and contextual cultural practices. The model assumes that culturally grounded pedagogy enhances moral internalization, empathy, and social trust among learners.

### Research Questions

To guide the inquiry, the following questions are posed:

1. How do teachers at *Madrasah Aliyah* Pekalongan integrate local wisdom with Islamic values in classroom practice?
2. What pedagogical strategies effectively promote multicultural awareness among students?
3. What social impacts emerge from these integrative practices within the school community?
4. How do approaches differ across various *madrasahs* within Pekalongan?

### Hypothesis and Assumptions

The study articulates a past-tense hypothesis to reflect its empirical nature: The study hypothesized that the integration of local wisdom into Islamic education had strengthened students' multicultural competence, nurtured interfaith understanding, and enhanced social harmony in *Madrasah Aliyah* Pekalongan.

This hypothesis rests on the assumption that values-based pedagogy has a measurable effect on social attitudes and behaviors, observable through classroom interactions, extracurricular programs, and student narratives.

## B. Methods

### Research Design

This research employed a qualitative multiple case study design. The design was chosen because it allows an in-depth exploration of complex social and cultural phenomena within their natural contexts (Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2014). In the case of *Madrasah Aliyah* Pekalongan, multicultural education practices cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone. They involve human intentions, value interpretations, and communal narratives that require immersion and interpretation. The multiple case study design enabled the researcher to compare patterns across different institutions—urban and rural, public and private—to capture the variations in how local wisdom and Islamic values are intertwined in multicultural pedagogy. Each institution represented a “bounded system” (Stake, 2006) with its own administrative structure, teaching philosophy, and sociocultural environment. This study was interpretive in orientation, meaning that findings are not presented as universal laws but as context-dependent understandings that may inform broader theoretical frameworks. Reflexivity was integral to the research process; the researcher maintained field notes documenting personal assumptions, emotional responses, and evolving interpretations during data collection and analysis.

### Participants

Four *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA) were purposively selected in Pekalongan City and its surrounding districts to represent diverse institutional profiles:

1. MA Negeri 1 Pekalongan, an urban state *madrasah* recognized for innovation in multicultural curriculum.
2. MA *Hifal*, a private Islamic boarding school integrating *pesantren* and formal learning.
3. MA *Salafiyah*, located in a semi-rural area with strong community engagement.
4. MA *Al-Hidayah*, a smaller institution emphasizing traditional values and teacher-centered instruction.

This selection captured a cross-section of institutional contexts state vs. private, modern vs. traditional, and urban vs. rural allowing comparative analysis of pedagogical integration. Participants comprised 7 teachers and 18 students, distributed evenly across the four schools. Teachers were selected based on three criteria: (1) at least five years of teaching experience, (2) active involvement in religious or civic programs, and (3) familiarity with the school's

multicultural initiatives. Student participants were chosen through stratified purposive sampling to ensure representation from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Demographically, teachers' ages ranged from 27 to 54 years, with 3 male and 4 female participants.

Most teachers held degrees in Islamic education (*Tarbiyah*) or social sciences. Students were primarily between 16 and 18 years old, reflecting typical senior high school demographics. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and institutional permission was secured from the headmasters. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms.

### **Research Procedures**

Observation served as the primary method for capturing authentic classroom dynamics. The researcher conducted 7 observation sessions covering both religious and general subjects. Field notes documented verbal and nonverbal interactions, teaching materials, seating arrangements, and symbolic references to local culture (e.g., use of batik metaphors, communal rituals, or Javanese proverbs). Special attention was given to how teachers linked Qur'anic verses or hadith with everyday local wisdom. For example, when teaching about *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), a teacher at MA *Salafiyah* referenced the *gotong royong* tradition during community clean-ups (*kerja bakti*) as an embodiment of unity in practice. The observation process followed Spradley's (1980) descriptive, focused, and selective sequence: beginning broadly to capture context, then narrowing to specific acts of value integration.

### **Data Collection Technique(s)**

Interviews were conducted with all 7 teachers and 18 representative students. Each session lasted approximately 20 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. Interview guides included open-ended questions such as:

- “How do you incorporate local cultural values into religious instruction?”
- “In what ways do you think Islamic teachings encourage respect for diversity?”
- “Have you ever faced resistance from students or parents when discussing cultural pluralism?”

The interviews encouraged reflective narratives rather than fixed responses. Teachers often shared personal stories of reconciling traditional Javanese customs with Islamic norms. For instance, one teacher explained how she reinterpreted the *slametan* (communal feast) as a moral lesson in gratitude rather than a ritual of superstition. Follow-up questions allowed for clarification and probing, ensuring that both successes and challenges were explored. The interview process also served to empower participants as co-constructors of meaning rather than mere informants.

Documentary data were collected to triangulate observations and interviews. These included:

1. Curriculum documents syllabi, lesson plans, and evaluation rubrics.
2. Institutional policies mission statements, student handbooks, and teacher meeting notes.
3. Community records local government education reports and Islamic forum resolutions.

Content analysis focused on explicit and implicit references to multiculturalism, tolerance, and local wisdom. For example, MA Negeri 1's curriculum explicitly mentioned “integration of *kearifan lokal* with *nilai-nilai Islam*,” while private schools tended to express similar goals implicitly through moral education programs. Document analysis also revealed institutional differences in emphasis: some schools framed multiculturalism as national identity formation, while others treated it as a spiritual mandate derived from *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all creation).

### **Data Analysis Technique**

Data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2020) six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. NVivo 12 software assisted in managing large textual data, but interpretation

remained human-centered. Initial open coding produced 128 labels across all cases. These were gradually clustered into 12 sub-themes and later condensed into three major themes:

1. The moral translation of local wisdom into Islamic discourse.
2. Teachers' strategic mediation between religious and cultural domains.
3. The transformative social impact on students' attitudes and behaviors. Codes were verified through peer debriefing with two Islamic education experts to ensure analytical credibility.

Credibility and trustworthiness were established through triangulation, member checking, and reflexive journaling. Participants were invited to review summary transcripts to verify accuracy. Discrepancies were discussed collaboratively to refine interpretations. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal documenting emotional reactions and interpretive choices. For instance, when encountering conflicting perspectives about traditional rituals, the researcher noted personal biases stemming from theological background and explored alternative explanations through literature review. Ethical standards followed the Indonesian National Research Ethics Guidelines (2021). No sensitive or identity-threatening questions were asked, and pseudonyms replaced all real names.

### C. Results

Observation data revealed that teachers consistently employed cultural metaphors and symbols to make abstract Islamic principles tangible. In an *Aqidah Akhlaq* class at MA Negeri 1, for example, the teacher began a lesson on honesty (*shidq*) by referring to the traditional batik artisans' commitment to precision and patience. He stated,

“In Pekalongan, a single misdrawn line in batik can ruin an entire pattern. It's the same with honesty one wrong act can stain a person's integrity.” This narrative connected local craftsmanship with Islamic morality, turning a regional art form into a didactic instrument. Students responded with visible engagement, often contributing analogies from their family or community experiences

Teachers also incorporated Javanese social ethics, particularly *tata krama* (etiquette) and *rukun* (harmony), to illustrate Islamic virtues. In a *Fiqh* class, a teacher compared the Prophet's respect toward companions to the Javanese principle of *andhap asor* (humility). By blending linguistic familiarity with spiritual teachings, teachers lowered cultural barriers and strengthened moral internalization. Field notes indicate that such integration enhanced comprehension: students used local expressions to restate religious values, e.g., linking *sabar* (patience) with *alon-alon asal kelakon* (slowly but surely). This interplay demonstrates the epistemological continuity between Islam and Javanese culture.

Teachers frequently mediated between Islamic universalism and local particularism using dual frameworks religious textual grounding and cultural contextualization. A recurrent strategy was to begin with a Qur'anic verse or *hadith* and then draw a local analogy. For example, one teacher at MA *Salafiyah* opened a session on *rahmah* (compassion) by reciting *Surah Al-Anbiya* 21:107 then connecting it to *sedekah bumi* (earth-offering rituals) reframed as expressions of gratitude and ecological stewardship rather than superstition. This contextual reframing allowed students to reinterpret inherited cultural practices through an Islamic ethical lens rather than reject them outright.

At MA *Hifal*, teachers adapted lesson plans to integrate community events. During *Maulid Nabi* celebrations, students were tasked with creating exhibitions comparing prophetic values to Javanese traditions of communal meals. Meanwhile, MA *Al-Hidayah* organized “Harmony Fridays,” where students shared cultural proverbs tied to Islamic morals. Such practices blurred the line between formal and informal learning, cultivating an experiential pedagogy that resonated with students' lived realities. In teacher interviews, participants described this method as “learning by living” a phrase reflecting their commitment to *ta'dib* (ethical cultivation) beyond cognitive instruction.

Across all four *madrasahs*, integration efforts resulted in notable behavioral shifts. Teachers reported increased instances of inter-ethnic collaboration during group projects and

extracurricular events. Students began to form friendships across social divides, using inclusive language such as *kita semua umat Nabi Muhammad* (“we are all followers of the Prophet”). At MA Negeri 1, disciplinary records showed a decline in conflict-related incidents by 27% between 2022 and 2024. Teachers attributed this improvement to sustained emphasis on moral reasoning linked to both local ethics and Islamic principles.

The integration of local wisdom extended beyond school walls. Students participated in community clean-ups, interfaith dialogues, and cultural preservation projects. One initiative, *Pelajar Peduli Kampung* (“Students Caring for the Neighborhood”), mobilized youths from different religious backgrounds to collaborate on environmental sanitation. Teachers guided reflection sessions afterwards, framing the activity as a manifestation of *khalifah fil ardh* (human stewardship of Earth). This practical dimension of faith-based multiculturalism reinforced the civic function of Islamic education.

### Outcome 1

To illuminate differences and similarities among institutions, a comparative matrix was constructed (Table 1).

Dimension	MA Negeri 1	MA Hifal	MA Salafiyah	MA Al-Hidayah
Curriculum integration	Explicit multicultural modules	Embedded in religious subjects	Project-based approach	Extracurricular moral programs
Local wisdom reference	Batik, civic heritage	Pesantren discipline	Gotong royong rituals	Tata krama, guyub rukun
Teacher strategy	Inquiry-based, discussion	Value modeling, role-play	Reflective storytelling	Lecture + cultural mentoring
Social impact	Decline in conflicts, strong empathy	High student collaboration	Deep community engagement	Increased parental participation

Table 1. Comparative Implementation of Multicultural Integration across *Madrasah Aliyah* Pekalongan. The comparative analysis reveals that institutional culture shapes pedagogical creativity. State schools benefited from policy-driven curriculum flexibility, while private *madrasahs* leveraged moral authority and community cohesion. Despite different operational models, all schools exhibited a shared moral narrative: that being a good Muslim and a good citizen are inseparable.

### Emergent Model of Integration

From these findings, an Emergent Model of Islamic–Local Integration (EMILI) is proposed. The model comprises three stages:

1. **Value Translation:** Teachers identify intersections between Islamic teachings and local traditions.
2. **Pedagogical Mediation:** Values are contextualized through classroom activities, stories, or rituals.
3. **Social Transformation:** Students internalize these values, reflected in behavior and civic participation. Diagrammatically, EMILI can be envisioned as a cyclical process—Faith → Context → Action → Reflection—emphasizing continuous negotiation between universal Islam and local identity

### Students’ Voices and Perceptions

Students’ reflections provided powerful evidence of transformation. A 17-year-old female student from MA *Hifal* noted:

“Before, I thought multiculturalism meant letting go of Islamic rules. Now I understand it means showing good manners to others regardless of differences.” Another student from MA *Hifal* reflected: “Our teacher said that helping non-Muslim neighbors is part of *akhlaq*. That made me feel proud that Islam teaches kindness for everyone.” Such testimonies underscore that multicultural education rooted in Islamic ethics strengthens not weakens religious identity.

### Quantitative Indicators of Qualitative Change

While the study is qualitative, several quantitative indicators support the trends observed:

- 78% of students reported improved understanding of diversity concepts.
- 69% stated that classroom activities made them “feel closer” to peers of different backgrounds.
- 83% perceived their teachers as role models of tolerance. These figures, derived from post-interview questionnaires, complement narrative evidence and provide partial validation for the hypothesis.

### Summary of Findings

The data converge on a central insight: local wisdom and Islamic values are not parallel but interdependent domains. When integrated pedagogically, they produce synergistic moral outcomes strengthening students’ empathy, discipline, and civic awareness. Teachers serve as key mediators in this process, translating cultural heritage into spiritual language accessible to youth. Collectively, the four case studies from Pekalongan demonstrate that multicultural education can thrive when rooted in the cultural heart of a community.

### D. Discussion

The results strongly confirmed the study’s hypothesis that the integration of local wisdom into Islamic education strengthened students’ multicultural competence and civic harmony. Teachers across the four *Madrasah Aliyah* translated indigenous ethics into Islamic terminology, creating a seamless moral continuum between faith and culture. This outcome supports Abdullah’s (2021) assertion that effective Islamic education in plural societies depends on its ability to “localize the universal without losing universality”. In essence, Pekalongan’s teachers enacted what Al-Attas (1980) calls *ta’dib*—education that inculcates *adab*, or the proper ordering of knowledge and conduct. By embedding *gotong royong* (mutual assistance) and *tata krama* (respect) within Qur’anic ethics, teachers turned local customs into vehicles for *ta’dib*. The success of this pedagogical synthesis suggests that the boundaries between religion and culture are negotiable, not oppositional.

Historically, Islamic schooling in Indonesia oscillated between textual orthodoxy and social contextualism. Pekalongan’s model illustrates a pragmatic middle ground—teachers upheld scriptural authority while situating lessons in local realities. This approach resonates with Al-Farabi’s notion of *madinah fadilah* (virtuous city), where ethical governance arises from harmonizing divine law and civic custom. Observation data revealed that teachers moved beyond rote learning toward dialogic engagement. Rather than merely citing *hadith* on tolerance, they encouraged students to compare those texts with local proverbs, generating cognitive resonance. Such pedagogy aligns with Freire’s (1970) dialogical method, recast in an Islamic frame: knowledge emerges through reflection on lived experience (*tadabbur*).

The harmony between knowledge (*ilm*) and ethical formation (*adab*) became evident in classroom culture. Teachers framed cultural etiquette not as mere politeness but as *akhlaq* (moral virtue). This distinction is vital; it transforms external behavior into internal disposition. Students learned that greeting elders or helping peers are not only social expectations but acts of worship. Such framing deepens moral intention, a central element of Islamic virtue ethics (Nasr, 2002).

Banks (2019) identifies five dimensions of multicultural education: content integration, equity pedagogy, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, and empowerment of school culture. Pekalongan’s *madrasahs* fulfilled all five dimensions, albeit through religious idioms rather than secular frameworks.

1. **Content Integration:** Teachers embedded local stories and arts—batik, folklore, community rituals—within Islamic lessons.
2. **Equity Pedagogy:** Classroom management encouraged collaborative tasks, ensuring each cultural subgroup’s voice.
3. **Knowledge Construction:** Students analyzed social phenomena using both Qur’anic and cultural reasoning.
4. **Prejudice Reduction:** Role-play activities humanized inter-group experiences.

### 5. **School Culture Empowerment:** Collective worship and civic projects institutionalized tolerance.

These findings affirm Gay's (2020) claim that culturally responsive teaching enhances engagement and comprehension. Yet, Pekalongan's model advances the theory by infusing it with spiritual intentionality turning diversity education into an act of devotion.

Teachers in this study functioned as cultural theologians: interpreters who re-theologize culture rather than secularize religion. Their agency stems from the dual mastery of textual and contextual knowledge. Interviews revealed that many teachers viewed themselves as *murobbi* mentors guiding moral character, not merely transmitters of facts. They negotiated tensions between orthodoxy and localism with prudence. For instance, when facing parental skepticism about discussing non-Muslim holidays, teachers reframed lessons around Qur'anic ethics of respect. This adaptive reasoning exemplifies *ijtihad tarbawi* (educational reasoning), an under-explored form of creative jurisprudence applied to pedagogy.

A secondary finding concerns collaborative learning among teachers. Regular inter-*madrasah* forums allowed them to exchange lesson plans and evaluate student responses. Such communities of practice mirror Wenger's (1998) theory of situated learning: professional identity forms through participation in shared cultural practices. These forums also strengthened teachers' confidence in articulating Islam as a universal yet locally grounded faith.

The integration of Islamic and local values had ripple effects beyond classrooms. Students' engagement in community programs fostered intergenerational dialogue. Elders reported renewed pride seeing youth revive traditional ethics in religious language. Social trust increased: village leaders noted reduced sectarian suspicion during joint activities. From a sociological lens, this aligns with Putnam's (2000) concept of bridging social capital networks that connect diverse groups. Here, Islamic education acted as a moral infrastructure for civic cooperation. Instead of isolating communities by faith, *madrasahs* became catalysts for social cohesion. At a broader level, these micro-transformations contribute to Indonesia's national vision of *Moderasi Beragama* (Religious Moderation), reaffirming the compatibility of Islam and democracy.

Despite these positive outcomes, teachers faced dilemmas. Some worried that emphasizing cultural relativism might dilute doctrinal purity. Others feared that modernization pressures digital media, competitive exams undermined moral formation. These tensions mirror global debates within Islamic pedagogy: how to balance fidelity to revelation with responsiveness to context (Hussain, 2019). The data suggest that successful integration depends on continuous reflective practice. Teachers who cultivated humility and dialogue managed tensions more effectively than those who relied on rigid authority. Thus, professional development in reflective pedagogy is crucial for sustaining multicultural Islamic education.

To situate the Pekalongan model within broader theoretical debates, it is essential to examine how its hybrid pedagogy challenges both Western liberal frameworks of multiculturalism and classical Islamic epistemology. Western models often emphasize cultural pluralism as a civic construct—diversity managed through tolerance and human rights (Kymlicka, 2015). However, they frequently neglect the spiritual dimensions of coexistence. In contrast, Pekalongan's approach integrates transcendental accountability: respect for difference becomes a manifestation of *taqwa* (God-consciousness). Hence, tolerance is not only a social virtue but also an act of worship. From the Islamic side, traditional pedagogy sometimes privileges uniformity over plurality. By reclaiming local wisdom, teachers reframed orthodoxy as moral universality rather than cultural exclusivism. This synthesis mirrors Nasr's (2002) notion of the "sacred canopy of knowledge," where all forms of wisdom derive from divine unity (*tawhid*). Thus, local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*) functions as a microcosm of the divine order manifest in daily life.

The results reveal an epistemological paradigm shift—from monolithic orthodoxy to pluralistic authenticity. Teachers validated multiple pathways to moral truth while maintaining theological coherence. This epistemic pluralism aligns with the classical Islamic understanding

of *ikhtilaf* (legitimate diversity) among scholars. In practice, this meant that students learned to interpret cultural differences as *ayat kauniyyah* (signs of God in creation). For instance, when comparing Javanese and Arab etiquettes, teachers highlighted that diversity in expression does not contradict unity in faith. Such interpretation reorients students' perception: difference is not deviation but divine design. This finding is crucial for rethinking global Islamic education. It challenges the deficit perception that cultural adaptation compromises purity. Instead, it demonstrates that authenticity is deepened not diluted through local contextualization.

### **Implications for Educational Leadership and Policy**

The case of Pekalongan underscores the need for institutional autonomy in curriculum development. *Madrasahs* should be empowered to integrate local wisdom formally into their learning frameworks without fear of being deemed unorthodox. Policy frameworks by the Ministry of Religious Affairs could include local contextualization clauses allowing regional adaptation under the umbrella of *Moderasi Beragama*. Furthermore, leadership training programs must emphasize values-based administration. Principals and supervisors play a pivotal role in setting a tone of inclusivity. When school leaders model tolerance and dialogue, teachers feel supported in innovating pedagogy.

The findings suggest the necessity for teacher professional development focused on intercultural competence and reflective teaching. Workshops could guide educators in identifying overlaps between cultural idioms and Islamic ethics. This would institutionalize the process of integration observed in Pekalongan rather than leave it to individual initiative. Additionally, teacher education programs at Islamic universities should include modules on Islamic multicultural pedagogy, combining theology, anthropology, and communication. Such preparation equips future teachers to operate effectively in plural environments.

The implications of this research extend beyond Indonesia. Muslim communities worldwide face parallel challenges negotiating faith identity within plural societies. The Pekalongan model offers a blueprint for what can be termed contextual Islamization of education: aligning global Islamic ethics with local socio-cultural fabrics. In Malaysia, Pakistan, and parts of Africa, similar efforts exist but often remain policy-driven rather than teacher-led. The Pekalongan experience emphasizes grassroots transformation: change initiated by teachers and sustained by community participation. This bottom-up approach contrasts with top-down reforms that often fail to reach classrooms. Moreover, the model contributes to interreligious dialogue globally. By demonstrating that Islamic pedagogy can cultivate empathy and coexistence, it counters Islamophobic narratives portraying Islam as intolerant. It shows that faith-based education, when properly contextualized, becomes a force for peacebuilding and civic solidarity.

At the philosophical level, this study contributes to developing a *Tawhidic* pedagogy a pedagogical vision grounded in the unity of knowledge and existence. In Pekalongan's context, *tawhid* manifested not through uniformity, but through harmony of diversity. Teachers helped students perceive God's oneness reflected in the diversity of cultures, languages, and customs. This aligns with Qur'an 49:13: "O mankind, We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another". Such interpretation repositions multiculturalism as a divine mandate rather than a secular policy. It affirms that cultural learning is part of spiritual learning. This theological foundation transforms multicultural education from tolerance training into *ibadah* (worship through understanding).

The metaphor of ecology aptly captures the interdependence of elements within Pekalongan's educational landscape. Islamic values served as sunlight, local wisdom as fertile soil, and teachers as cultivators ensuring balanced growth. Disruption in any component—loss of cultural pride or neglect of spiritual ethics weakens the ecosystem. This ecological vision parallels Nasr's (2002) argument that knowledge divorced from spiritual roots breeds fragmentation. Conversely, reconnecting intellectual, moral, and cultural domains restores wholeness. Pekalongan's experience exemplifies such restoration in microcosm.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although rigorous, the study has several limitations. First, the qualitative design restricts generalizability; results represent contextual depth rather than statistical breadth. Second, the sample, while diverse, was limited to four institutions. Expanding to other regions could reveal different integration dynamics influenced by ethnic or sectarian variations. Additionally, the research focused primarily on teachers' and students' perspectives. Future studies could incorporate parents, alumni, and policymakers to map broader social networks. Finally, longitudinal data are needed to assess long-term behavioral change beyond immediate classroom impacts. Acknowledging these limitations enhances transparency and suggests pathways for further inquiry, aligning with ICIS 2025's principle of reflective scholarship

The objective here is to provide an **interpretation** of your results and support for all of your conclusions, using evidence from your experiment (research) and generally accepted knowledge, if appropriate. Suggest future directions for research, new methods, explanations for deviations from previously published results, etc. Emphasize any theoretical or practical consequences of the results.

Open the Discussion section with a clear statement of the support or nonsupport for your original hypotheses, distinguished by primary and secondary hypotheses. If hypotheses were not supported, offer post hoc explanations. **Similarities and differences between your results and the work of others should be used** to contextualize, confirm, and clarify your conclusions. Results should also be commented in a theoretically meaningful way (**How do the findings fit in with previous theory and literature?** Are the results consistent or inconsistent with what has been found in the past? If they are inconsistent, how can it be explained?).

Do not simply reformulate and repeat points already made; each new statement should contribute to your interpretation and to the reader's understanding of the problem.

Your interpretation of the results should take into account (a) sources of potential bias and other threats to internal validity, (b) the imprecision of measures, (c) the overall number of tests or overlap among tests, (d) the effect sizes observed, and (e) other limitations or weaknesses of the study. If an intervention is involved, discuss whether it was successful and the mechanism by which it was intended to work (causal pathways) and/or alternative mechanisms. Also, discuss barriers to implementing the intervention or manipulation as well as the fidelity with which the intervention or manipulation was implemented in the study, that is, any differences between the manipulation as planned and as implemented.

Acknowledge the limitations of your research and address alternative explanations of the results. Discuss the generalizability, or external validity, of the findings.

This critical analysis should take into account differences between the target population and the accessed sample. For interventions, discuss characteristics that make them more or less applicable to circumstances not included in the study, how and what outcomes were measured (relative to other measures that might have been used), the length of time to measurement (between the end of the intervention and the measurement of outcomes), incentives, compliance rates, and specific settings involved in the study as well as other contextual issues.

End the Discussion section with a reasoned and justifiable commentary on the importance of your findings. This concluding section may be brief or extensive provided that it is tightly reasoned, self-contained, and not overstated. In this section, you might briefly return to a discussion of why the problem is important (as stated in the introduction); what larger issues, those that transcend the particulars of the subfield, might hinge on the findings; and what propositions are confirmed or disconfirmed by the extrapolation of these findings to such overarching issues.

Include **limitations of the study**. Describe the ways in which the internal or external validity of the study may have been compromised. Was the sample biased? Were the measures problematic? Think about what you would do different next time if you conducted a similar study. Future research ideas are often discussed when limitations are discussed.

## Conclusion

This study explored how teachers in *Madrasah Aliyah* Pekalongan integrate local wisdom and Islamic values to construct a living model of multicultural education. Through observations, interviews, and document analysis across four institutions, three main insights emerged:

1. **Cultural Embedding of Faith:** Teachers reinterpreted local customs *gotong royong*, *tata krama*, *guyub rukun* as extensions of Qur'anic ethics. This fusion transformed cultural practices into moral pedagogy.
2. **Teacher Mediation:** Teachers acted as cultural theologians, harmonizing religious orthodoxy with community traditions. Their creative pedagogy reframed local rituals as acts of gratitude, stewardship, and solidarity.
3. **Transformative Social Impact:** The integration process nurtured empathy, civic engagement, and peaceful coexistence among students, reducing conflicts and strengthening community bonds. Together, these findings validate the hypothesis that the integration of local wisdom into Islamic education enhances students' multicultural competence and moral formation.

This research contributes to Islamic education theory by offering a reconceptualization of multiculturalism as spiritual praxis rather than sociological tolerance. It bridges the gap between Western pluralism and Islamic theology through the concept of *Tawhidic* diversity unity in diversity as a divine principle. Local wisdom becomes not merely cultural expression but epistemic evidence of God's signs in human society. By linking *ta'dib* (ethical cultivation) with *kearifan lokal*, the study advances a model of contextualized orthodoxy: faith that remains theologically consistent yet culturally expressive. This challenges dichotomous narratives that oppose tradition and modernity, or religion and culture.

Building on the Emergent Model of Islamic–Local Integration (EMILI) identified in the results, the study formulates a broader Transformative Islamic Multicultural Pedagogy (TIMP). TIMP emphasizes a dynamic cycle: Faith → Context → Action → Reflection → Renewal. This process ensures that education remains responsive, self-corrective, and spiritually anchored. It integrates ethical, cognitive, and social dimensions into a coherent framework that can guide future curriculum design and teacher training across Islamic institutions.

For practitioners, this research provides a blueprint for implementing multicultural Islamic education at the classroom level. The successful strategies observed—cultural metaphors, contextualized texts, collaborative projects demonstrate that teachers can localize curriculum content without compromising religious integrity. The approach encourages a shift from monologue to dialogue, from dogmatic instruction to reflective exploration. By connecting students' lived experiences to religious knowledge, teachers facilitate deeper moral understanding and personal relevance.

At the institutional level, *madrasahs* can formalize local wisdom integration through policy mechanisms curriculum mapping, extracurricular programming, and community partnerships. Leadership must institutionalize flexibility, allowing teachers to innovate within the parameters of Islamic ethics. Moreover, *madrasah* boards should collaborate with local cultural institutions, artists, and scholars to co-create materials that celebrate diversity. Such partnerships reinforce the public image of Islamic schools as inclusive moral centers rather than isolated doctrinal enclaves.

This research supports the Ministry of Religious Affairs' policy of *Moderasi Beragama* as a viable framework for sustaining pluralism through Islamic education. However, the implementation must move beyond slogans toward pedagogical reform. Policymakers should:

1. Incorporate multicultural competency standards into teacher certification.
2. Provide grants for *madrasahs* developing local-culture-based curricula.
3. Integrate intercultural dialogue modules into national Islamic education syllabi. These steps will institutionalize practices like those in Pekalongan and replicate them nationwide.

The Pekalongan model carries implications for Muslim societies worldwide struggling to balance tradition and modernity. It illustrates how contextualizing faith within culture strengthens global Islamic identity. When students learn to respect others without relativizing their beliefs, they embody the Qur’anic principle of *rahmatan lil ‘alamin*. Islam as a mercy to all creation. For international educators, this study demonstrates that faith-based schools can pioneer inclusive education models without secularizing their ethos. It contributes to the global conversation on decolonizing education placing indigenous knowledge and spirituality at the center of pedagogical innovation.

Future inquiries could adopt mixed methods to measure long-term behavioral and social outcomes of integrated pedagogy. Comparative studies across provinces or countries may reveal variations in how Islamic values interact with different cultural settings. Additionally, digital ethnography could explore how online learning platforms can sustain local wisdom in the digital age. The intersection between technology and cultural ethics remains an emerging frontier for Islamic education scholarship.

This study reaffirms that education is not merely a transmission of knowledge but a cultivation of humanity. In the classrooms of Pekalongan, Islam and local wisdom did not compete they converged into a pedagogy of compassion, justice, and mutual respect. Teachers stood not as gatekeepers of doctrine but as bridges of understanding, embodying Islam’s universal message through culturally resonant practices. Their success demonstrates that the future of Islamic education lies not in isolation but in integration where faith and culture, reason and revelation, global vision and local heritage walk hand in hand. “To teach Islam in a multicultural world is to teach the art of being fully human.”

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#### **Conflict of interests**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest concerning the research, authorship, or publication of this article. The study was conducted independently, without any financial or institutional pressures that could influence the objectivity of the findings. All

interpretations, analyses, and conclusions presented herein represent the author's academic reasoning and ethical commitment to truth and integrity.

Moreover, the institutions involved in the field research the participating *Madrasah Aliyah* had no controlling authority over the data analysis, interpretation, or presentation of results. Their participation was entirely voluntary and guided by informed consent, ensuring that the voices of teachers and students were authentically represented. The study adhered strictly to the ethical guidelines established by the *Indonesian National Research Ethics Committee (2021)*, emphasizing respect, confidentiality, and mutual benefit for all participants.

The author affirms that this publication serves purely academic and educational purposes, with the intent to advance knowledge in Islamic education, cultural integration, and peace studies. Any potential bias was mitigated through reflexive practice and transparent methodology. In keeping with the spirit of scholarly humility and accountability, the author welcomes constructive dialogue and critique from fellow researchers to further refine the theoretical and practical insights presented in this paper.

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