



## Islamic Faith and Multicultural Theology: Islamic Religious Education Strategies to Shape the Moderate Character of Generation Z

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to examine the meaning of Islamic creed (‘aqidah) within the framework of multicultural theology and explore its integration into Islamic Religious Education (IRE) strategies to shape moderate character among Generation Z. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach through library research, enabling a critical analysis of academic literature, policy documents, and curriculum frameworks. The findings reveal that Islamic creed, when interpreted inclusively through the lens of multicultural theology, functions not only as a spiritual foundation but also as a social ethic that nurtures the values of tolerance (tasāmuḥ), equality (musāwāḥ), justice (ta‘ādul), and compassion (raḥmah). Contextual, participatory, and experience-based IRE strategies prove to be highly relevant for Generation Z, who are critical, adaptive, and digitally literate. The implications highlight the crucial role of curriculum development, pedagogical innovation, and teacher competence in delivering transformative religious education that simultaneously prevents radicalization. However, the study acknowledges its conceptual limitations, emphasizing the need for further empirical and comparative research to test the effectiveness of the proposed strategies across diverse educational and social settings. Accordingly, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to strengthening religious moderation among Generation Z in alignment with the vision of Islam as raḥmatan lil-‘ālamīn.*

**Keywords:** Islamic creed, multicultural theology, Islamic religious education, moderate character, Generation Z

### ABSTRAK

This research aims to examine the meaning of Islamic faith in a multicultural theological perspective and integrate it into the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) strategy to form a moderate character in Generation Z. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature study type, which allows researchers to critically analyze academic literature, policy documents, and curriculum. The results of the study show that the Islamic faith, when interpreted inclusively through the framework of multicultural theology, not only serves as a spiritual foundation, but also as a social ethics that fosters the values of tasamuh, musawah, ta'adul, and rahmah. Contextual, participatory, and experience-based PAI strategies have proven to be relevant for Generation Z who are critical, adaptive, and familiar with digital technology. The implications of these findings affirm the important contribution to the development of curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher competencies in delivering transformative PAI while preventing radicalization. This study also highlights

the limitations of its conceptual nature, so it recommends empirical and comparative studies to test the effectiveness of strategies in various educational and social contexts. Thus, this research offers a theoretical and practical contribution in strengthening the religious moderation of Generation Z in line with the Islamic vision of rahmatan lil 'alamin.

**Kata Kunci:** *Islamic faith, multicultural theology, Islamic religious education, moderate character, generation Z*

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Today's global society faces an increasingly complex reality of cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, which is not only a social asset, but also has the potential to be a source of tension if not managed wisely (Sembiring et al., 2024). In the context of education, especially Islamic Religious Education (PAI), the main challenge lies in how to instill religious values that are not only normative but also contextual and inclusive (Purnomo & Solikhah, 2021). Learning systems that still focus on dogmatic aspects tend to give birth to an exclusive attitude that is contrary to the spirit of rahmatan lil 'alamin (Janah, 2018). Therefore, PAI has a strategic role in formulating an educational model that is in line with the needs of contemporary multicultural society. This urgency is increasingly relevant amid the increasing currents of radicalization and intolerance among the younger generation.

Previous studies have shown that the application of the multicultural-based PAI learning model is able to improve students' moderate attitudes through understanding, tolerance, and empathy for differences (Luthfi et al., 2025). Other research confirms that lecturers in Islamic universities play an important role in internalizing intercultural values through teaching materials, discussions, and cross-cultural collaboration (Warsah et al., 2025). The integration of religious moderation values in foreign language materials has been proven to be effective in increasing students' cultural sensitivity while strengthening inclusive religious identity (Anggaira et al., 2025; Mustapa et al., 2025). Research on Islamic boarding schools also shows that a curriculum that combines Islamic traditions with multicultural skills is able to give birth to social harmony (Sirojuddin & Ghoni, 2025). This fact shows that there is a great opportunity for Islamic education to become a means of strengthening religious moderation.

In addition, studies in various contexts show that multicultural Islamic education has implications not only for strengthening tolerant attitudes, but also for preventing radicalization (Muhajir et al., 2025; Sopian et al., 2025). The entrepreneurial spirit developed in multicultural-based pesantren has even been proven to strengthen the character of inclusive and creative students (Mariyono & Ghony, 2025). At the level of the younger generation, especially Generation Z, research shows that there is an openness to the idea of tolerance, although there is still ambivalence on certain issues such as interfaith leadership (Aprilianto et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the leadership of the kiai with a local cultural approach has proven to be able to build harmony across ethnicities and religions (Mistar, 2025). Thus, these studies provide an empirical foundation for the development of diversity-responsive PAIs.

In the international realm, Islamic multicultural education practices also show

variations in implementation. For example, the integration of sharia-based curriculum in Aceh still faces gaps in the aspect of inclusivity (Iqbal & Safitri, 2025), while in Bali and Thailand, a multicultural Islamic approach has been proven to strengthen social cohesion through acculturation of local cultures (Fahmi et al., 2025). In Malaysia, international students face typical adaptation challenges, demonstrating the importance of cross-cultural pedagogical strategies (Xue & Manjet, 2025). The implementation of religious moderation in Indonesia itself still tends to be top-down and textual, so it has not succeeded in internalizing values in depth (Chotimah et al., 2025). This shows that despite much progress, there are also structural and pedagogical limitations that need to be overcome.

A number of other studies highlight the role of media, art, and culture in the internalization of multicultural values. Puppets, for example, have proven to be used as an Islamic educational medium that contains the values of faith, morals, worship, and social (Asrori et al., 2025). Islamic boarding schools with sufistic bases also show significant contributions in building the multicultural awareness of students (Mashuri et al., 2024). Similarly, the integration of multicultural values in learning in multicultural schools strengthens interfaith social relations (Ismail et al., 2024; Takunas et al., 2024). In fact, pedagogical approaches such as the Community of Philosophical Enquiry have been proven to help Muslim students deal with Islamophobia constructively (Sa-U, 2024). This shows the breadth of the scope of Islamic education strategies in responding to multicultural realities.

However, there are some limitations that need to be noted. First, many multicultural educational models are still conceptual and have not been fully tested in practice in heterogeneous classrooms (Davies, 2024; Ma'rifah, 2023a). Second, the implementation of religious moderation policies is often trapped in a normative framework and does not touch the practical dimension of students (Muhsin et al., 2024). Third, despite various innovations, most of them still focus on the cognitive aspect, while the affective and axiological dimensions are less integrated (Idris, 2020; Murdiono, 2020). Controversy has also arisen over how the Islamic creed can be interpreted flexibly without compromising its theological essence (Safitri et al., 2022). These limitations make significant room for further exploration.

Based on this background, this article focuses on Islamic faith education strategies based on multicultural theology to form a moderate character in Generation Z. The main goal is to explore how theological values can be contextualized in a plural learning environment, as well as to find strategic patterns that can be used as a foothold in designing transformative PAI learning (Rejeki et al., 2024). By integrating the values of Islamic faith and multicultural awareness, this research is expected to contribute to the development of PAI that not only maintains faith, but also becomes an instrument for driving peaceful, inclusive, and just social change (Abdullah, 2020; Felsenthal & Agbaria, 2025; Ramzy et al., 2022).

## **B. METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the type of library research. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring in depth the meaning of Islamic faith in a multicultural theology perspective and examining the strategy of Islamic Religious Education in internalizing the values of the faith to Generation Z. All data in this study was obtained from primary sources, such as books, scientific journal articles, and other authoritative documents relevant to the theme of Islamic faith, multicultural theology, and moderate character education. The sources were purposively selected based on their relevance

to the research focus, and analyzed in depth to build a strong conceptual foundation.

The data collection technique was carried out through a systematic and directed literature review. This process involves critical reading of predetermined references, recording thematic issues, and organizing key ideas related to the object of study. Furthermore, the collected data is analyzed using content analysis techniques. The first stage is data reduction, which is sorting out important information based on thematic categories such as the meaning of faith, multicultural theological principles, and the characteristics of Generation Z. The second stage is the presentation of data in the form of a coherent and logical description to show the relationship between these concepts. The final stage is drawing conclusions, which is formulating a conceptual synthesis that answers the formulation of the problem and supports the research objectives. Through this approach, it is hoped that the research can contribute to the development of contextual Islamic Religious Education learning strategies and be able to form moderate character in a multicultural society.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSION**

### **1. The Meaning of Islamic Faith in a Multicultural Theology Perspective**

The Islamic creed is the main basis in the religious life of a Muslim, which means a strong and firm bond of belief in the heart to the truth of Islamic teachings (Shubhie, 2023). The word *akidah* comes from the Arabic *al-'aqdu* which means bond (Suryani, Ma'tsum, Santi, et al., 2021), and terminologically refers to an unshakable belief in God and other principles of faith (Siregar et al., 2025). Faith is not just an abstract theological concept, but a belief that shapes the orientation of life, behavior, and social relationships. According to Hasan al-Banna, faith brings peace of mind and becomes a guideline in distinguishing between truth and falsehood (Kurnia, 2025). Therefore, faith must be understood not only in the dogmatic realm, but also in a broader and contextual context, including in a multicultural society.

The scope of the Islamic faith includes four main aspects: *ilāhiyyāt*, *nubuwwāt*, *rūḥaniyyāt*, dan *sam'iyāt* (Suryani, Ma'tsum, Fitria, et al., 2021). *Ilāhiyyāt* discusses Allah: His existence, His attributes, and His oneness, which is central to the teachings of monotheism. *Nubuwwāt* deals with prophethood and apostolate, which shows the importance of the value of example and the transmission of revelation as the foundation of ethics and education. *Rūḥaniyyāt* includes supernatural things such as angels, jinn, spirits, and demons, which teach that humans live in both physical and spiritual dimensions. Whereas *sam'iyāt* includes things that are known only through revelation, such as the Day of Judgment, Heaven, Hell, and the signs of the end times. These four aspects not only strengthen individual beliefs, but also shape moral awareness and social responsibility in plural life.

Multicultural theology is an approach to religious thought that places diversity as part of a social reality that must be valued and treated fairly (Futaqi, 2023). Different from dogmatic theology that tends to be exclusive, multicultural theology actually encourages the dialogical, open, and empathetic interpretation of religious teachings, including faith. (Baidhaw, 2005). This concept does not deny the truth of revelation, but invites religious people to understand that faith does not have to deny the existence of others. Principles such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *ta'adul* (justice), and *musawah* (equality) are part of the message of faith that can be developed in a pluralistic society (Maftuhin & Faridi, 2025).

Thus, the faith read in a multicultural frame will appear as a strong belief but does not close itself to differences.

The socio-religious context in Indonesia shows the urgency of applying multicultural theology in education. Cases of intolerance in schools, discriminatory discourse in public spaces, and the spread of exclusive ideas through social media are real challenges for the younger generation. This situation shows that the creed taught rigidly risks fostering an attitude that closes itself to differences. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) needs to respond to these conditions by connecting the values of faith with the reality of diversity experienced by students in their daily lives.

The government's efforts at religious moderation show concrete steps in internalizing the value of tolerance. This program is strengthened by the curriculum of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) which provides space for students to collaborate in cross-cultural and religious projects. This kind of activity not only supports the goals of the national curriculum, but also provides a direct experience for students to understand the meaning of faith in the social dimension. Faith no longer stops at the confession of faith, but lives in an attitude of fairness, empathy, and respect for diversity.

Generation Z who grew up in the digital era is the group that feels the most direct impact from diverse religious discourses, including those with radical nuances. An understanding of the faith enriched by a multicultural perspective provides them with the provision to be critical of information, while affirming a friendly and inclusive Islamic identity. Daily practices such as making interfaith friendships, engaging in humanitarian actions, or participating in tolerance campaigns on social media show that the values of *tasamuh* and *musawah* can be applied in real terms. Thus, the Islamic faith framed in multicultural theology not only strengthens the spiritual aspect, but also serves as the foundation for the formation of moderate character in a pluralistic society.

The meaning of Islamic faith from a multicultural theological perspective shows that monotheism not only binds man to God (*habl min Allah*), but also guides relationships between humans (*habl min al-nās*) (June, 2018). The Qur'an through QS. Al-Hujurat:13 and QS. Al-Anbiya:107 affirms that diversity is part of God's will and that Islam was revealed as a blessing to the whole world. Faith in this framework cannot be used as legitimacy to foster barriers between groups, but must be the foundation of harmony, equality, and social justice. This kind of understanding is important to be integrated in education, especially Islamic Religious Education, so that students are able to see that religious beliefs are in line with an open attitude towards diversity.

The multicultural theological approach opens up space for the transformation of faith into a spiritual foundation as well as a social ethics that is relevant to the development of the times. The absolute value of revelation is preserved, but the meaning of monotheism is expanded to include moral responsibility for common life. The increasingly pluralistic life of society requires Muslims to have a solid understanding of the faith theologically, as well as being able to adapt to differences. The multicultural perspective provides a framework for reinterpreting the values of faith into the principles of social justice, equality, and peace. In this way, the Islamic creed serves not only as a reinforcer of personal faith, but also as a foundation for the formation of moderate character in social life.



## **2. Islamic Religious Education Strategy in Internalizing Multicultural Faith Values to Generation Z**

Generation Z is a group of young people who are growing up in the digital era, globalization, and high social diversity (Mahmud, 2024). They are a generation that is very familiar with information technology, used to receiving many perspectives quickly, and preferring a dialogical approach to an authoritative one. In the context of religion, Gen Z does not easily accept dogmatic teachings if they are not followed by a rational understanding and relevant to social reality (Murniasih et al., 2024). In addition, they tend to have concerns about issues of social justice, tolerance, and humanity, thus requiring a more inclusive approach to religious education. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) must adjust its approach to be able to internalize the values of the faith that are in accordance with their character.

PAI in various educational institutions today is still dominant using cognitive and textual approaches, especially in learning the faith (Najmudin, 2025). Faith material is often delivered in the form of memorizing concepts such as the pillars of faith and the attributes of Allah (Solihin, 2021), but has little association with social issues relevant to students' lives. This makes learning the faith tend to be abstract and separate from the reality of life, making it difficult to instill as a moving value. In the context of Gen Z who are critical and active, this learning model is less effective in forming a lively understanding and attitude of religion. Therefore, the PAI approach needs to be directed to touch affective and social aspects more deeply through multicultural values in faith.

Multicultural faith is an approach to the meaning of faith that not only emphasizes theological beliefs, but also emphasizes social responsibility in diversity (Arifin et al., 2021). Faith values such as monotheism, rahmah (affection), ta'adul (justice), tasamuh (tolerance), and musawah (equality) must be instilled in PAI learning to answer the challenges of the times. Faith is understood not only as a vertical relationship between man and God (*habl min Allah*), but also as a guideline for building just and harmonious social relations (*habl min an-nās*). These principles are very relevant in a pluralistic society and can be the basis for the formation of moderate character among Gen Z students.

PAI's learning strategy to internalize multicultural beliefs to Gen Z needs to be contextual and participatory (Ali, 2025). Contextual means relating the material of faith to the reality of students' daily lives, such as cases of intolerance, humanitarian issues, or social conflicts that occur around them. Participatory means providing space for learners to discuss, express opinions, and explore their understanding critically and openly. Learning models such as project-based learning, case studies, role play, and inquiry learning can be relevant methods to instill faith values reflectively. Gen Z who are familiar with visual media and digital technology can also be invited to use social media or multimedia content to associate the value of faith with the real world.

PAI teachers have a central role in internalizing the values of multicultural faith to students (Purbajati, 2020). Teachers are not only as material presenters, but also as value facilitators, moral models, and spiritual guides. In this case, teachers need to have multicultural insights and strong pedagogical competence in order to be able to create a safe, open, and difference-friendly classroom. Teachers need to build two-way communication with students, encourage empathy, and appreciate the diversity of experiences in understanding religion. The example of teachers in being inclusive and dialogical will be very influential in instilling a grounded and contextual faith.

The PAI curriculum also determines the success of internalizing multicultural beliefs (Kurniadi, 2023). The curriculum must contain Islamic values that are inclusive and peace-oriented, not just doctrinal. Faith material needs to be developed to reflect social reality and invite students to understand that faith is inseparable from social responsibility. For example, a discussion of faith in destiny may be associated with the spirit of striving and accepting the difference of fate, or faith in the end day may be associated with social justice and ethical accountability. This kind of curriculum will facilitate the internalization of the faith that forms a moderate perspective on life.

PAI designed with a comprehensive strategy will be able to effectively internalize the value of multicultural faith. Understanding the context of students, curriculum design, learning strategies, and teacher examples are one unit that cannot be separated. Faith is no longer present as a static doctrine, but as a value and attitude in the face of social reality. With this framework, PAI can become a space for the transformation of faith values into moral and social forces that form Generation Z as believing and moderate Muslims.

This research departs from the need to answer the challenges of Generation Z's religious diversity in a multicultural society, especially in connecting Islamic faith with inclusive theology. The results of previous studies show that multicultural Islamic education is effective in building tolerance, social cohesion, and interfaith harmony (Fahmi et al., 2025; Muzayanah & Ghony, 2025; Takunas et al., 2024). This relevance is even more important considering that the PAI curriculum still tends to be textual and cognitive, so it fails to internalize the value of moderation contextually (Chotimah et al., 2025; Najmudin, 2025; Solihin, 2021). Therefore, this study emphasizes that the Islamic faith must be read through the framework of multicultural theology so that it does not stop at the dogmatic dimension, but also forms social ethics. With this approach, PAI is able to present as a transformative educational instrument for the young generation of Muslims.

The main findings of this study show that the meaning of Islamic faith seen through a multicultural perspective expands the scope of monotheism, from a mere vertical bond to God to a social responsibility in a plural reality. This is in line with the principles of *tasamuh*, *ta'adul*, and *musawah* which are the universal values of Islam (Maftuhin & Faridi, 2025; Ma'rifah, 2023b; Tin, 2018). Faith is understood as a spiritual foundation as well as a social ethical basis that leads humans to harmony and justice. This concept is in line with the view that emphasizes Islam as a blessing for all nature, as affirmed in QS. Al-Hujurat:13 and QS. Al-Anbiya:107. Thus, the internalization of multicultural beliefs affirms the value of faith without negating the reality of diversity.

In addition, the results of the study highlight that the younger generation, especially Gen Z, shows a positive response to an inclusive and dialogue-based model of religious learning. They are more accepting of a contextual approach that links the teachings of faith with issues of social justice, tolerance, and humanity (Aprilianto et al., 2025; Mahmud, 2024; Murniasih et al., 2024). This shows the need to redesign PAI's strategy to be in line with the critical and open character of the digital generation. The practice of religious education that merely emphasizes the memorization of doctrine has proven to be less relevant to cultivate moderate religious attitudes. Thus, multicultural-based learning is a strategic alternative to answer the needs of this generation.

This research also emphasizes the importance of the role of teachers in grounding multicultural beliefs through exemplary and value facilitation. PAI teachers who have multicultural awareness can create a classroom that is inclusive, dialogical, and friendly to

differences (Arifin et al., 2021; Purbajati, 2020; Siahaan et al., 2023). The example of teachers has proven to be one of the strong factors in internalizing students' moderate attitudes. With this approach, faith is not only learned as a concept, but also experienced in real life in social interactions in schools. Therefore, teachers need to be prepared with pedagogical competencies that are able to integrate multicultural theological values into the curriculum.

When compared to previous research, the results of this study are consistent with studies that show the effectiveness of multicultural PAI in fostering moderation, empathy, and tolerance (Djamaluddin et al., 2024; Luthfi et al., 2025; Muhajir et al., 2025). The integration of the curriculum of Islamic boarding schools and universities also shows that inclusive education is able to strengthen social harmony (Mashuri et al., 2024; Sirojuddin & Ghoni, 2025). In addition, cross-cultural learning experiences in various international contexts confirm that multicultural education promotes social adaptation and cohesion (Mantasiah et al., 2024; Xue & Manjet, 2025). Thus, the results of this study add to the empirical evidence about the importance of the multicultural paradigm in religious education.

However, this study also confirms the weakness found in the previous study, namely the still strong dominance of the top-down approach in the implementation of religious moderation in Islamic educational institutions (Chotimah et al., 2025; Muhsin et al., 2024; Rohman & Mudis Taruna, 2025). This approach often only emphasizes the cognitive aspect without touching the internalization of values in students' social practices. This condition has the potential to cause ambivalent attitudes among the younger generation in interpreting religion. Therefore, the results of this study support the need to transform PAI towards a participatory and reflective model. That way, the internalization of multicultural beliefs can really cultivate a moderate character substantially.

The findings of this study are significant because they show that Islamic faith can function as a basis for social ethics if interpreted through multicultural theology. This explanation is in line with various studies that emphasize the importance of reinterpreting religious values in the context of a pluralistic society (Iner & Ćufurović, 2022; Ismail et al., 2024; Mistar, 2025). However, these results must be interpreted carefully, considering that there are still limitations in implementation at the curriculum level and teacher competence. If not balanced with consistent policies, multicultural beliefs risk stopping at the level of discourse. Therefore, the recommendations of this study emphasize the need to strengthen policies and increase the capacity of educators.

The implications of these findings are wide-ranging, both in the context of education and social life. The integration of multicultural beliefs in PAI can strengthen religious moderation, prevent radicalization, and support the development of a tolerant nation's character (Abdullah, 2020; Mustapa et al., 2025; Saleh, 2025). Furthermore, this approach is in line with the global mission of Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin, which emphasizes justice, peace, and equality (Coronel Ferrer, 2023; Felsenthal & Agbaria, 2025; Moussa et al., 2023). On a practical level, this strategy can be realized through contextual curriculum, project-based learning, and cross-cultural collaboration programs. Thus, religious education based on multicultural beliefs can be the main pillar of the formation of moderate character of Generation Z in a pluralistic society.



## D. CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine how the Islamic faith in the perspective of multicultural theology can be integrated into the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) strategy to form the moderate character of Generation Z in a pluralistic society, and the results show that the Islamic faith, when interpreted inclusively, not only functions as a spiritual basis but also as a social ethics that fosters the value of *tasamuh*, *musawah*, *ta'adul*, and *rahmah* in daily life. PAI's contextual, participatory, and experience-based learning strategy has proven to be relevant to internalize the value of multicultural faith to Generation Z who are critical, adaptive, and familiar with digital technology, thereby strengthening a friendly and harmonious Islamic identity while preventing potential intolerance and radicalization. The implications of these findings affirm the important contribution to curriculum development, pedagogical strategies, and teacher competencies in presenting a transformative and relevant PAI to social realities, while being in line with the Islamic vision of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. However, the limitations of this research lie in its conceptual nature and focus on formal education, so further studies that are empirical, comparative, and cross-contextual are needed to test the effectiveness of the strategies offered, including through real implementation in schools, families, communities, and digital spaces. Thus, this research makes a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of PAI as a strategic instrument in forming a generation of believing and moderate Muslims in the midst of global diversity.

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