ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PLURAL SOCIETIES: ROLES, CHALLENGES, AND STRATEGIES FROM A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Plurality is an unavoidable social reality in Indonesia's diverse society. Religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity pose unique challenges for the education system, especially Islamic Religious Education (IRE), which is responsible for shaping students' character and religious attitudes. This study aims to analyze the role, challenges, and strategies of Islamic Religious Education in dealing with plurality through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. Data were collected from 12 scientific articles indexed by Google Scholar published between 2020 and 2025. The results of the study show that PAI has a strategic role in instilling values of tolerance, religious moderation, and respect for differences. The main challenges faced include resistance to pluralism, a lack of teacher competence in multicultural learning, and a curriculum bias that is still normative. The strategies that emerged include strengthening multicultural education, curriculum innovation, developing teacher competencies, and synergy between educational institutions and the community. These findings confirm that the success of IRE amid plurality depends on the ability to adapt and integrate the values of Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin into inclusive and dialogical educational practices.

INTRODUCTIONS

Diversity in Islam is regarded as a blessing and a manifestation of Allah's greatness, serving as a divine mechanism that encourages humanity to know, understand, and respect one another. In the Indonesian context, diversity is not merely a sociocultural reality but a foundational principle that sustains national harmony. Indonesia, as a country characterized by vast ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity, has long upheld unity through the philosophical values of Pancasila and the national motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity), which emphasize cohesion amid differences. This principle is deeply aligned with Islamic teachings, as explicitly stated in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اِنَّا خَلَقْنٰكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ وَّاُنْثٰى وَجَعَلْنٰكُمْ شُعُوْبًا وَّقَبَاۤئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوْا ۚ اِنَّ اَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ اَتْقٰىكُمْ ۗاِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلِيْمٌ خَبِيْرٌ

"Mankind, indeed We have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing and All-Aware" (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13) (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2022).

This verse affirms that plurality is a divine decree (sunnatullah) intended not to divide humanity, but to cultivate mutual recognition, respect, and moral excellence. Consequently, plurality becomes a social necessity and an inseparable dimension of Indonesian life. Diversity in religion, ethnicity, culture, and language functions simultaneously as a valuable asset and a complex challenge, particularly within the field of education. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holds a strategic role in internalizing moderate, tolerant, and civilized Islamic values. IRE is expected to embody the principle of rahmatan lil 'alamin by fostering peaceful coexistence and harmonious interreligious relations within a pluralistic society. Plurality, derived from the term plural, refers to the existence of multiplicity, while pluralism represents a conceptual framework that acknowledges, respects, and constructively engages with such diversity. Plurality encompasses religious, cultural, and value-based differences that characterize social life and reflect the complex reality of human civilization, where diversity can serve as both a source of enrichment and potential conflict (Yusqi, 2023).

Addressing plurality in education requires deliberate and systematic efforts to equip students with a strong foundation of Islamic values through Islamic character education, particularly during adolescence. Islamic moral character education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals with integrity, ethical awareness, and noble character. The moral values embedded in Islamic teachings serve as a fundamental basis for developing adolescents who are capable of navigating diverse social realities and responding wisely to life's challenges (Sarbini & Khiyarusoleh, 2024). In the era of globalization and rapid advancements in information technology, interactions among religious communities have intensified significantly. While this condition broadens students' religious horizons, it simultaneously presents new challenges when not accompanied by an inclusive and critical understanding of religious diversity. Issues such as intolerance, radicalism, and religious exclusivism remain tangible threats within various educational institutions (Ikhwan, Azhar, Wahyudi, & Alfiyanto, 2023; Sigalingging, 2025). These phenomena highlight the urgent need to strengthen the role of IRE as a transformative educational instrument capable of fostering inclusivity and social cohesion.

Therefore, a systematic and comprehensive re-examination of the role of Islamic Religious Education is necessary within the increasingly complex landscape of social plurality, educational challenges, and pedagogical implementation. Although numerous studies have explored the roles, challenges, and strategies of IRE in responding to pluralism, existing findings tend to be fragmented, context-specific, and partial. To address this gap, the present study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize and integrate previous research, thereby offering a holistic understanding of how IRE can function effectively in pluralistic Indonesian society. This study specifically examines the roles of IRE in addressing pluralism, the key challenges encountered in diverse educational settings, and the strategies implemented to develop adaptive, inclusive, and responsive learning practices. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative synthesis of recent empirical findings (2020–2025) to construct a comprehensive

conceptual framework that positions Islamic Religious Education not merely as a normative subject, but as a strategic agent for cultivating religious moderation and social harmony in Indonesia's pluralistic context.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, which is an approach that aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesize various studies relevant to a topic in a systematic and transparent manner (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). This approach allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of issues related to Islamic Religious Education and plurality based on existing research results.
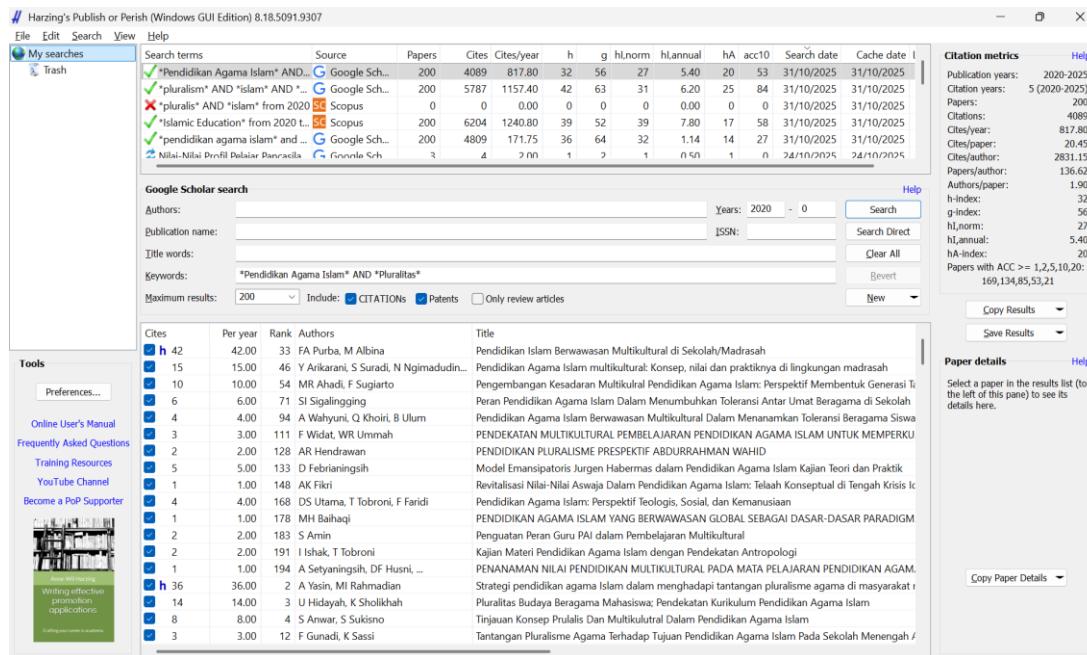
The SLR process is carried out through four main stages: (1) identification, (2) screening, (3) eligibility, and (4) inclusion.

1. Identification Stage

The research process began with searching for and finding articles related to the research topic to be studied. The Systematic Literature Review approach was chosen because it is systematic, explicit, and replicable. This method is used to identify, evaluate, and synthesize research results and thoughts from researchers and practitioners with the aim of finding, examining, and evaluating all research related to the specified topic. The researcher chose the theme "Islamic Education in the Midst of Plurality" as the main topic in this study. Data collection was carried out through a literature study by searching for articles on Google Scholar using the Publish or Perish (PoP) application with the keywords "Islamic Education and Plurality". The search results yielded 190 articles relevant to the research topic.

2. Screening Stage

At this stage, the author conducted screening in Covidence to ensure the process was systemati in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. At this stage, out of 190 articles, 83 articles were eliminated, with 1 article eliminated due to duplication and 83 articles not meeting the inclusion criteria. At this stage, 106 articles remained to be reviewed further.
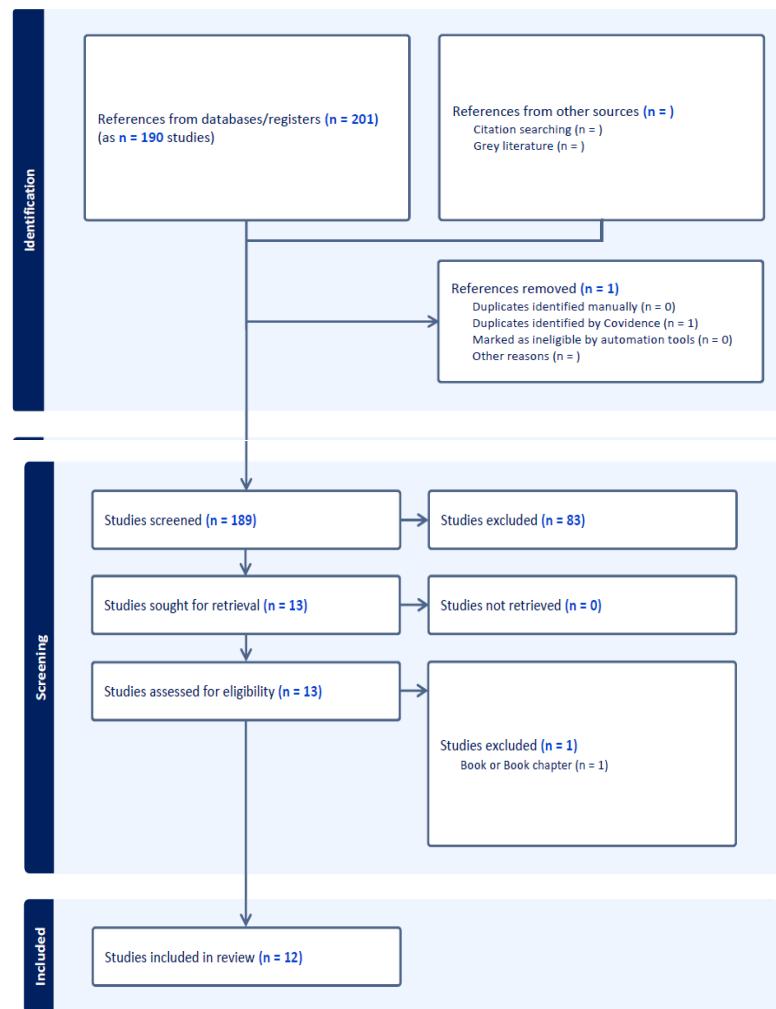
3. Eligibility Stage

At the eligibility stage, the articles that had successfully passed the initial screening were subjected to a more in-depth review to ensure their relevance and methodological suitability for this study. Each article was carefully evaluated against predetermined inclusion criteria to maintain the rigor and focus of the review. The inclusion criteria comprised studies that explicitly addressed Islamic education in relation to pluralism, were conducted within the context of primary and secondary education, were published in Indonesian-language open-access journals, and were released between 2020 and 2025. Articles that did not align with these thematic, contextual, or temporal criteria were excluded. As a result of this eligibility assessment, 13 scientific articles were identified as relevant and deemed appropriate for further qualitative synthesis.

4. Inclusion Stage

During the inclusion stage, the selected 13 articles were analyzed systematically to extract meaningful insights related to the research objectives. The analysis involved several structured steps: first, each article was read comprehensively to identify and highlight key concepts, arguments, and empirical findings; second, the extracted data were categorized into major thematic domains, namely the roles of Islamic Religious Education, the challenges encountered in pluralistic contexts, and the strategies employed to address diversity in educational settings; and third, the categorized findings were synthesized to develop an integrated and coherent theoretical understanding. This process ensured that the analysis moved beyond descriptive reporting toward interpretative synthesis, enabling a deeper understanding of recurring patterns and conceptual linkages across studies.

5. Process Summary and PRISMA Diagram

The overall review process followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor. The stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion are summarized in a PRISMA flow diagram, which visually illustrates the number of records identified, excluded, and retained at each phase of the review. This systematic process resulted in the final inclusion of 13 articles, which constituted the primary data sources for the synthesis and discussion of findings in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Tabel Hasil Penelitian Berdasarkan Reseach Question (RQ1-RQ3)

Based on the results of research and a review of articles relevant to the research topic included in this literature review, the findings are as follows

Table 1. Summary of Article Findings Based on Research Questions

No	Article Title, Author, Year	Research Results	Relevance to RQ
1	*The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Instilling Tolerant Religious Attitudes* (Nuruddin Araniri, 2020)	Teachers play an important role in instilling tolerance by modeling non-discriminatory behavior, treating students equally,	RQ1

		facilitating deliberation, and teaching tolerant and moderate Islamic values.	
2	*Strategies of Islamic Education Teachers in Instilling Multicultural Education Values* (Raden Dedi Gunawan, Badarussyamsi, Musa, 2022)	Implementation of multicultural education is still not optimal and lacks a standard curriculum. Diversity of religion, ethnicity, and race becomes an obstacle. Teachers integrate materials with multicultural values and provide guidance to students.	RQ1 dan RQ3
3	*Islamic Religious Education in a Pluralistic Society* (Idrus, 2023)	Islamic education contributes to fostering humanity, tolerance, and nationalism. Teachers are expected to be open to diversity, learn from differences, and respect diverse perspectives while maintaining Islamic principles.	RQ1
4	*Multicultural Islamic Education in Schools/Madrasahs* (Fauzul Azmi Purba, Meyniar Albina, 2025)	Core values include recognition of plurality, human rights, global responsibility, and responsibility toward the earth. Islamic multicultural values include tolerance, nationalism, anti-radicalism, and local cultural accommodation.	RQ1
5	*The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Strengthening Religious Moderation in Indonesia* (M. Ikhwan et al., 2023)	Islamic religious education supports the strengthening of religious moderation. This requires critical thinking, appreciation of plurality, and respect for diversity to promote peaceful coexistence.	RQ1
6	*Development of an Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Relevant to Contemporary Challenges* (Fadilah Sari Butar Butar et al., 2024)	Islamic Religious Education shapes morality and character but must adapt to technological, globalization, pluralism, and social change challenges. Updating curriculum relevance is crucial.	RQ2-3
7	*The Approach of Religious Pluralism in Education in Indonesia: Challenges and Implementation Strategies* (Muzakkir Walad et al., 2024)	Pluralism creates tension and discrimination. Religious pluralism enriches human life. Effective strategies include inclusive curriculum, diverse literature, dialogical approaches, teacher training, extracurricular support, and supportive policies.	RQ2-3
8	*The Dynamics of Islam: Challenges and Transformations in the Contemporary Context* (Tasya Avionita & Syahidin, 2024)	Islam faces modernization, globalization, pluralism, and radicalization. These influence how Muslims understand and practice religion amid social, political, economic, and technological developments.	RQ2
9	*Multicultural Islamic Education: Concepts, Values, and Practices in Madrasahs* (Yesi Arikarani et al., 2025)	Challenges include internal factors (teacher quality, curriculum, policies, organizational culture, infrastructure, leadership attitudes) and external factors (government policy, society, parents, globalization, media,	RQ2-3

		technology). Strategies include teacher competency improvement and strengthening cooperation with stakeholders.	
10	*Islamic Education Strategies in Facing the Challenges of Religious Pluralism in a Multicultural Society* (Agus Yasin & Muhammad Iksan Rahmadian, 2024)	Strategies include inclusive curriculum development, innovative learning methods, digital literacy strengthening, instillation of moderate values, collaboration with institutions, integration of universal values, and enhancement of teachers' multicultural competence.	RQ3
11	*Forming Pluralistic Islamic Religious Education* (Sukman, 2022)	Four causes of failure in fostering pluralism: focus on knowledge transfer, religious education viewed as secondary, lack of moral-based harmony education, lack of cross-religious learning. Religious education must instill empathy, sympathy, and solidarity. Curriculum should include plurality-based perspectives.	RQ 2-3
12	*Strategies for Developing Multicultural Education in Islamic Educational Institutions* (Yuli Supriani et al., 2022)	Foundations include religious, historical, psychological, socio-cultural, and geographical bases. Quantitative strategies: socialization, innovation programs, building multicultural culture. Qualitative strategies: epistemological strengthening based on Qur'an–Sunnah, curriculum revision, educator training, and local wisdom programs.	RQ3

B. Synthesis of Research Results Based on Research Questions (RQ1-RQ3)

1. The Role of Islamic Education in Facing Plurality (RQ1)

a. Instilling Values of Tolerance and Religious Moderation

Islamic Religious Education plays a major role in shaping students' characters so that they have tolerant and moderate attitudes. Araniri (2020) emphasizes that Islamic Religious Education teachers play an important role in instilling religious attitudes that are open to differences. This is in line with the findings of Ikhwan, et al. (2023), which show that religious education can strengthen religious moderation through the integration of Islamic wasathiyah values.

Sigalingging (2025) adds that PAI not only teaches religious doctrines but also universal values found in Islam, such as justice, brotherhood, and respect for human rights. Thus, PAI can serve as a bridge for creating harmony among religious communities.

b. Strengthening an Inclusive Islamic Identity

In a pluralistic society, PAI has a responsibility to shape an Islamic identity that is not exclusive. Idrus (2023) emphasizes the importance of an understanding of Islam that is adaptive to socio-cultural diversity. This reflects the function of PAI as a social instrument to strengthen social cohesion through the values of togetherness and mutual respect.

Meanwhile, Kastasari's (2023) research confirms that through contextual learning, PAI can help students understand plurality as part of God's will. Thus, religious education becomes a reflective space for bringing together faith and humanity in harmony.

c. PAI as an Agent of Peace and Multicultural Value Socialization

Gunawan et al. (2022) and Purba and Albina (2025) emphasize that PAI teachers act as agents of social change who integrate multicultural values into learning. PAI not only builds individual piety but also social piety, which is manifested through empathy towards other groups.

2. The Challenges of Islamic Education in a Pluralistic Society

a. Resistance to Pluralism

One of the biggest challenges faced by PAI is the emergence of resistance to the idea of pluralism. Latuapo (2022) explains that some people still view pluralism as a threat to the purity of faith. This causes PAI teachers to often experience dilemmas in delivering material related to tolerance and diversity.

Khamim et al. (2024) also found that political and ideological dynamics often influence religious education practices, making it difficult to consistently apply messages of pluralism in the field.

b. Limited Teacher Competence

Another significant challenge is the low competence of teachers in developing multicultural learning. Nopitasari (2020) and Gunawan (2022) explain that some PAI teachers still tend to use a normative-doctrinal approach rather than a dialogical one. As a result, the values of plurality have not been fully internalized in teaching and learning activities.

In addition, Avionia and Syahidin (2024) highlight the need for continuous training for teachers so that they are able to integrate contemporary issues such as pluralism and globalization into the PAI curriculum.

c. Curriculum and Learning Material Bias

The PAI curriculum in Indonesia is still dominated by a dogmatic approach, which refers to rigid adherence to beliefs or ideas, usually based on religious doctrines or teachings. Butar et al. (2024) mention that the curriculum content often emphasizes cognitive aspects without providing space for reflection on pluralistic social realities. As a result, students have a narrow understanding of religion and are less adaptive to differences.

d. The Influence of Media and Social Issues

The development of information technology also brings new challenges for PAI. Walad et al. (Walad et al., 2024) show that the flow of digital information can reinforce religious polarization if it is not accompanied by digital and religious literacy skills. PAI teachers need to guide students to critically select information so that they do not fall into intolerant or extreme narratives.

3. Islamic Education Strategies in Facing Plurality

a. Strengthening Multicultural Education

The main strategy proposed by various studies is to strengthen Islamic values-based multicultural education. Arikarani et al. (2025) and Supriani et al. (2022) emphasize that a multicultural approach needs to be integrated into the PAI curriculum so that students can understand differences as part of sunnatullah.

The implementation of multicultural education can be carried out in three stages: (1) reconstruction of an inclusive curriculum, (2) application of participatory learning methods, and (3) familiarization with interfaith and intercultural collaborative activities at school.

b. Innovation in PAI Curriculum

Butar et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of PAI curriculum innovation to ensure its relevance to contemporary challenges. A contextual curriculum will make it easier for students to

understand the relevance of Islamic values to pluralistic social life. Project-based learning and local plurality case studies have proven effective in increasing socio-religious awareness.

c. Teacher Competency Development

PAI teachers are key to the successful implementation of plurality values in schools. Nopitasari (2020) emphasizes the need for professional training that emphasizes critical and reflective pedagogical approaches. In addition, collaboration between Islamic higher education institutions and schools needs to be strengthened to produce teachers who are adaptive to social change.

d. Cross-Sector Collaboration

Sukman (2022) emphasizes the importance of collaboration between educational institutions, the government, and the community in building a tolerant educational ecosystem. This synergy can be achieved through interfaith forums, joint social activities, and strengthening religious moderation networks in schools.

e. Integration of Technology and Religious Literacy

In the context of education digitalization, PAI needs to utilize digital media to spread the values of tolerance and moderation. Yasin and Rahmadian (2024) emphasize the importance of digital religious literacy so that students are able to sort information and understand diversity wisely.

CONCLUSION

This Systematic Literature Review study shows that Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in building a tolerant and harmonious society amid plurality. PAI serves as a means of internalizing Islamic values of rahmatan lil 'alamin, which emphasize compassion, justice, and respect for differences. However, the implementation of PAI faces a number of challenges, including resistance to pluralism, limited teacher competence, curriculum bias, and the influence of the media and social issues. To address these challenges, strategies are needed that include strengthening multicultural education, curriculum innovation, improving teacher competence, cross-sector collaboration, and the integration of educational technology

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