

ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STRATEGY IN MULTICULTURAL SMP NEGERI 2 PANCUR BATU

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning strategies in multicultural schools, focusing on SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu, a public school characterized by significant religious and ethnic diversity among its students. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis involving PAI teachers, school principals, and students. Data were analyzed through thematic reduction, categorization, and interpretive synthesis. The findings reveal three core PAI strategies: diversity-based class composition management, Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), and the cultivation of multicultural values through teacher modeling and cross-subject integration. These strategies are sustained by inclusive institutional policies on worship practices, Ramadan observance, and interfaith celebration. This study contributes an empirically grounded framework for implementing PAI in religiously plural state schools, extending existing scholarship by demonstrating how institutional policy and pedagogical strategy mutually reinforce multicultural harmony.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country blessed with extraordinary richness in the form of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. This diversity is both a blessing and a challenge for all Indonesians in realizing a peaceful and harmonious life together. However, in reality, the journey of maintaining harmony amidst diversity is not always smooth. Various potential conflicts triggered by differences in background still frequently surface, even in educational settings. Therefore, the world of education is required to be able to appreciate and manage diversity that has the potential to trigger disputes, conflicts, and divisions. In facing these challenges, an attitude of mutual respect, tolerance, and respect for differences must continue to be prioritized and internalized, so that the identity of the

Indonesian nation is always maintained, preserved, and can be continuously communicated to all generations. (Saptadi et al., 2023:1)

In the midst of a multicultural society, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) not only serves as a means of transferring religious knowledge, but also bears a broader responsibility, namely shaping Muslim individuals who are able to live harmoniously in a diverse society. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) occupies a very strategic position in the process of character formation of students, while also being an important vehicle for instilling humanitarian values, a spirit of tolerance, and an insight into a peaceful religious life. At this point, PAI teachers appear as key actors who play a central role in this process, because they are directly at the forefront of educating and guiding students to grow into individuals of character who are able to strengthen the spirit of brotherhood between religious communities, always respect every existing difference, and consistently avoid exclusive and intolerant attitudes in everyday life. (Luthfi, 2025:44).

Pancur Batu 2 Public Middle School is a public school with a strong multicultural character. Located in an area historically inhabited by the Karo people, the surrounding community has become increasingly diverse, both in terms of ethnicity and religion. Currently, the ratio of Muslim and non-Muslim students at the school has reached a balanced 50:50, with students representing three religions: Islam, Christianity, and Catholicism. This unique diversity makes Pancur Batu 2 Public Middle School a true implementer of multicultural education, where the values of tolerance and harmony between religious communities are tested and practiced in daily life.

To address these challenges, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu have developed a variety of innovative learning strategies. These strategies include fair and balanced classroom management, a contextual learning approach that connects Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material to real-life situations, the development of multicultural-based lesson plans (RPPs), and an emphasis on tolerance in every learning session. Implementing multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning relies heavily on the central role of teachers as the spearhead of educational implementation. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers serve not only as transmitters of material but also as role models in practicing the values of tolerance and religious moderation.

The study of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning strategies in multicultural environments is highly urgent. However, a specific study focusing on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) strategies at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu, with its unique and distinctive diversity context, still requires further in-depth study. This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of inclusive, tolerant, and multicultural Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning practices, particularly in public schools with similarly diverse characteristics.

Despite the growing body of literature on multicultural education and PAI, existing studies predominantly focus on private Islamic schools or theoretical frameworks, leaving a significant gap in empirically grounded accounts of how PAI teachers in public state schools navigate religious plurality in daily practice (Khoiruddin, 2021; Luthfi, 2025). SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu represents a particularly rich case given its historically Karo-dominated context and its balanced Muslim-Christian student composition. This study therefore asks: what PAI learning strategies are implemented at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu, and how do these strategies foster multicultural harmony within an Indonesian public school setting?

Theoretically, learning strategy is defined as a set of planned actions, steps, and approaches employed by teachers to facilitate effective learning and achieve instructional objectives (Dick & Carey in Selegi et al., 2023). In multicultural education contexts, two strategies are especially relevant: Cooperative Learning, which structures heterogeneous student groups to foster mutual respect and collaborative skills (Hayati, 2017), and Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), which connects academic content to students' real-life experiences and cultural backgrounds (Mashudi, 2020). Multicultural education itself is understood as a deliberate effort to develop students' personalities to coexist harmoniously within a pluralistic society (Banks, 2010 in Agustian, 2019), grounded in Islamic values of human dignity (Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13; Q.S. Al-Isra': 70) and prophetic teaching on human equality. Effective classroom management that respects diversity—including the social, cultural, and religious dimensions of students—is therefore a prerequisite for successful multicultural PAI implementation (Mustafida, 2021).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study approach. This qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to gain a deeper understanding of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning strategies in multicultural school environments. According to (Sugiyono, 2013), qualitative research is a research method based on the natural conditions of the object, with the researcher as the key instrument. The case study approach was chosen because this research focuses on a particular school unit, namely SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu, which has unique characteristics in the form of a relatively balanced composition of Muslim and non-Muslim students from various ethnic and religious backgrounds, including Islam, Christianity, and Catholicism. The case study itself is a type of research used to examine in depth one or several cases that are considered to represent broader phenomena in real life. (Nurhayati et al., 2024:23)

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu, located in the Pancur Batu area, with a predominantly Karo community that has developed into a multicultural community. This location was chosen based on the consideration that SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu is a public school that clearly reflects the reality of diversity, where the values of tolerance and multicultural education are consistently implemented in daily school activities, including in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly through in-depth interviews and field observations, while secondary data were obtained from relevant school documents. Research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, which selects informants based on research criteria and objectives. (Sugiyono, 2013). Research informants include: (1) Islamic Religious Education Teachers; (2) Vice Principal for Student Affairs; (3) Subject Teachers; and (4) Students as the direct targets of Islamic Religious Education learning.

The data collection techniques used in this study were in-depth interviews, non-participatory classroom observation, and document analysis. Data collection was conducted from January to March 2025. Data were analyzed following Miles and Huberman's interactive model through three stages: (1) data reduction, in which raw interview transcripts and field notes were coded and filtered to identify relevant themes related to PAI strategy and multicultural practice; (2) data display, in which themes were organized into a structured narrative matrix to map the relationship between strategies, institutional policies, and outcomes; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, in which interpretations were cross-checked against multiple data sources. Data credibility was ensured through source triangulation—comparing information from PAI teachers, the school principal, and students—as well as member checking, in which key findings were validated with informants to confirm accuracy of interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Overview of Multicultural Schools

SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu is a public school located in an area historically dominated by the Karo people. Over time, the social composition of the school community has undergone significant shifts, both in terms of ethnicity and religion. This makes SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu a multicultural educational institution. Based on observations and interviews, it was discovered that initially, non-Muslim students were the more dominant group at this school. However, over time, the number of Muslim students continued to grow until now the ratio between Muslim and non-Muslim students has reached a balanced figure of 50:50. The composition of the student body at this school reflects a very real and distinctive diversity. This diverse composition does not simply occur naturally. The school deliberately implements a policy that establishes a balanced class composition of Muslim and non-Muslim students in each study group.

The religions embraced by students at this school include Islam, Christianity, and Catholicism, and there have also been Hindu students. Ethnically, the majority of students are from the Karo tribe, but there are also students from Javanese, Batak, and Padang ethnicities. This diversity reflects the increasingly heterogeneous community around

Pancur Batu. This multicultural environment presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the school to build a culture of tolerance and harmony between religious communities.

B. Islamic Religious Education Learning Strategies in Multicultural Schools

Based on the data analysis, three principal PAI learning strategies were identified at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu. These strategies align with Banks' (2010) multicultural education framework, which emphasizes the integration of diverse cultural perspectives into both curriculum content and classroom management. Each strategy reflects a deliberate institutional commitment to maintaining religious harmony within a plural school environment, consistent with findings by Khoiruddin (2021) and Gonie et al. (2024) on multicultural-based classroom management in Indonesian Islamic schools.

1. Class composition management and diversity-based learning systems

The first strategy is the management of class composition, which is intentionally designed based on diversity. As explained in the previous section, each class at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu has a balanced composition of Muslim and non-Muslim students (50:50). This policy did not occur by chance, but was deliberately designed by the school with the aim of getting students accustomed to interacting and working together in diversity from an early age. This is in line with what was conveyed by the vice principal for student affairs, who emphasized that a class is not permitted to consist of only Muslim or only non-Muslim students, because each class must reflect the diversity that exists in society. This policy is based on the awareness that diversity that is not handled properly has the potential to give rise to negative prejudices, ranging from stereotypes to discriminatory attitudes, which if left unchecked can threaten harmonious relationships between individuals and groups. (Mustafida, 2021:88). The balanced class composition policy is designed to accustom students to interacting and appreciating differences from an early age, so that the value of tolerance can grow naturally in their daily lives.

During religious instruction, a parallel learning system is implemented. Two classes are combined and divided into two groups based on religion, with one class specifically for Muslim students taught by a religious education teacher, and the other class for non-Muslim students taught by their respective religious teachers. This system ensures that every student receives religious education in accordance with their beliefs, without any feeling of being marginalized. Catholic students are even provided with a separate room. This approach aligns with the goal of multicultural education: to create equality in education while eliminating all forms of discrimination against minority groups, both within a nation and globally. (Hidayat, 2022:10) With this strategy, diversity is not only acknowledged symbolically, but is also structurally realized in the system and management of daily learning.

2. Using Contextual Teaching and Learning Strategies

Based on an interview with the PAI teacher, the strategy implemented integrates CTL principles by connecting Quranic material to students' daily multicultural experiences. As one PAI teacher stated: "When I teach about ukhuwah, I always use examples from what actually happens here—Muslim and Christian students sharing the same classroom. That makes the concept real for them." This approach reflects Mashudi's (2020) assertion that CTL increases learning meaningfulness by grounding abstract content in lived social contexts, and is corroborated by Muhartini (2023) who found that contextual strategies improve both comprehension and character formation.

The implementation of contextual learning strategies at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu is designed in a planned and comprehensive manner through the development of teaching materials tailored to the reality of diversity faced by students every day. The primary learning source remains the official Islamic Religious Education textbook provided by the government, but Islamic Religious Education teachers also utilize other equally meaningful learning resources, namely the school environment itself and students' direct experiences in everyday life. For example, the multicultural conditions of the school that bring together Muslim and non-Muslim students from various religious and ethnic backgrounds, where the values of tolerance and harmony are not only taught theoretically, but also experienced and practiced directly by each student. In addition, Islamic Religious Education teachers are also given the freedom and encouraged to develop the textbook material by preparing Learning Implementation Plans (RPP) or teaching modules that deliberately integrate the values of diversity into each learning topic. This step reflects one of the fundamental components of the CTL approach, namely constructivism, which encourages students to actively

construct their own understanding through real-life experiences and contexts, rather than simply receiving information passively. (Muhartini, 2023:69)

Another important aspect of implementing this strategy is the teacher's sensitivity in delivering the material. Islamic Religious Education teachers emphasize the importance of choosing words, examples, and language that do not offend other students' beliefs or convictions. The material is presented in a non-exclusive manner and does not marginalize any religious group. Teachers also build warm and open communication with all students so they feel valued and safe in the classroom. Teachers' consistent attitude of respecting all students without discrimination, labeling, or shaming serves as a concrete example that instills a strong message that every student deserves to be respected. (Hayati et al., 2026)

3. Instilling multicultural values in Islamic Religious Education Learning

The instillation of multicultural values is one of the most prominent aspects of PAI practice at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu, and represents the dimension most directly aligned with the normative goals of multicultural education as articulated by Mahfud (2011) and Ubadah (2022). Rather than treating tolerance as a standalone topic, PAI teachers at this school embed multicultural values across all instructional activities, from Quranic recitation to student-led discussions on the meaning of diversity.

In addition to integrating values into core material, Islamic Religious Education teachers also specifically teach social etiquette for Muslim students when interacting with friends of different faiths. The etiquette emphasized includes speaking politely and courteously to everyone without exception, not criticizing or demeaning others' beliefs, mutually respecting and appreciating differences, and maintaining brotherhood among fellow human beings as part of Islamic teachings. This teaching of etiquette is carried out consistently in every learning process as a form of character building. The results of instilling these values and etiquette are evident in daily life at school. Muslim and non-Muslim students interact naturally and amicably without distinction of religion, both inside and outside the classroom. When a friend experiences a disaster, Muslim students readily show concern regardless of religion. In school activities such as community service and mutual cooperation, students of various faiths work together. This aligns with Banks's statement in Suroyo et al (2024:7) Teaching about diversity can broaden students' understanding of different life experiences, while fostering empathy and an appreciation for differences.

Modeling is an integral part of this strategy. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers consistently demonstrate attitudes that reflect multicultural values in their daily behavior, such as mingling and interacting warmly with all fellow teachers regardless of religion, being fair in the learning and assessment process, and greeting and respecting all students equally. These values of tolerance are not only instilled in students but are also directly reflected by the teachers themselves. Although there are fewer Muslim teachers than non-Muslim teachers, this has never been a problem. Teachers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, demonstrate a real sense of unity and togetherness in their daily lives, thus serving as invaluable role models for their students.

Instilling the value of tolerance is not solely the responsibility of Islamic Religious Education teachers, but a shared commitment of the entire school community. These values are embedded across subjects, not only in religious studies classes but also in general classes such as social studies, Indonesian language, and other subjects. Collaboration between Islamic Religious Education teachers and teachers of other subjects in building this climate of tolerance is well-established and consistent.

The tangible results of implementing these three strategies can be observed in daily school life. This aligns with observations, where Muslim and non-Muslim students interact naturally and cordially without distinction of religion, both inside and outside the classroom. When a friend experiences a disaster, Muslim students readily show concern, regardless of religious differences. In school activities such as community service and mutual cooperation, students of various faiths work together in a spirit of togetherness.

The positive impacts that can be observed clearly from the implementation of this multicultural Islamic Education learning strategy include: (1) the creation of a harmonious, conducive classroom and school atmosphere that is free from religious and ethnic-based conflicts; (2) an increase in the understanding of Muslim students that Islam is a religion that teaches peace and respect for fellow human beings, regardless of religious differences; (3)

the growth of a sense of mutual care among students which is reflected in the attitude of helping each other without regard to religious differences; (4) an increase in the ability of students to interact with non-Muslim friends naturally, without awkwardness or negative prejudice; and (5) an increase in the awareness of Muslim students that respecting and appreciating friends of different religions is part of the teachings of Islam itself.

The successful implementation of these Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning strategies is inseparable from the competence and commitment of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, which are not only obtained through formal education but also honed through years of direct teaching experience in multicultural environments, as well as active participation in training activities related to multicultural education, such as the Religious Moderation activity held in Kabanjahe in 2022. Furthermore, it is supported by the role of the MGMP (Subject Teachers' Consultation) forum, namely as an effective forum where religious teachers from various religions can sit together, discuss, and coordinate to create a harmonious school climate. This forum strengthens synergy between teachers in instilling values of tolerance across subjects and across religions. (Nurasmawi & Ristiliana, 2021:23) On the other hand, there are also a number of obstacles still faced in implementing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in this multicultural school, including the limited number of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, which is not proportional to the number of Muslim students, resulting in a fairly heavy teaching load. Furthermore, the allocation of only three hours of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning per week also hinders optimal Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. These obstacles are common challenges faced by multicultural public schools in implementing religious education optimally. As stated by (Mahfud, 2011) Multicultural public schools often face a dilemma between the need to respect diversity on the one hand and the need to meet the demands of comprehensive religious education on the other. Nevertheless, the innovative spirit of Islamic Religious Education teachers continues to encourage the creation of meaningful, inclusive religious activities that can shape students' overall character, as reflected in the various programs they have successfully initiated and implemented.

C. Managing Worship Practices and Religious Activities in Multicultural Schools

As a multicultural school, SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu is committed to facilitating religious activities for all students in a fair and balanced manner. This is a crucial part of multicultural education, as schools serve not only as academic spaces but also as environments that respect and accommodate the religious beliefs of each student (Agustian, 2019:7).

1. Integration of Worship Practices into School Activities

In Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, various worship practices have been successfully integrated into school activities as an effort by teachers to make them not just routines, but meaningful experiences that shape the character and spirituality of Muslim students as a whole. (Rosidin et al., 2024:74). Religious practices that have been successfully integrated include the Dhuha prayer held during religious studies, the Zuhr prayer in congregation, with a rotating schedule for each class due to the limited capacity of the prayer room, Hajj rituals, a new and unprecedented innovation, a short-term Islamic boarding school during Ramadan, and the practice of zakat fitrah (almsgiving) and animal slaughter. These activities are innovations successfully implemented at the initiative of Islamic Education teachers.

For the students, these activities were a truly memorable experience. Interviews with one student revealed that activities such as the short-term Islamic boarding school (pesantren kilat), Hajj recitation, and zakat practice were new experiences they had never experienced before, especially compared to those at their home school near Pancur Batu. These religious activities not only strengthened the students' spiritual dimension but also shaped their moderate and inclusive Islamic identity, as desired by multicultural religious education. (Khoiruddin, 2021)

2. Religious Policies During the Month of Ramadan

During Ramadan, the school implemented several specific policies reflecting a high level of tolerance for diversity. First, school hours were shortened, as is customary during Ramadan. Second, regarding the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), meals were not consumed at school during class hours but were taken home by students. This policy was implemented solely out of respect for students who were fasting. Third, the school actively instilled

and reminded all students of the value of tolerance, encouraging those who were not fasting to respect their fasting peers by refraining from eating or drinking in front of them during school hours.

The policies implemented during Ramadan at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu reflect the tangible manifestation of the values of tolerance that have become integrated into the lives of all members of the school community. This is in line with Lauster's (1994) opinion in (Arifin, 2019:172) formulated several indicators of tolerance, including a willingness to accept differences, respect religious freedom, reject coercion, and a willingness to live peacefully side by side. These indicators are clearly reflected in the Ramadan policy at SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu, where non-Muslim students consciously refrain from consuming food during class hours as a sign of sincere respect for their fasting peers. Similarly, the policy of shortening school hours during Ramadan reflects institutional respect for each student's religious freedom.

3. Celebration of Religious Holidays and Togetherness between Religious Communities

Celebrations of Islamic religious holidays, such as the Prophet's Birthday and Isra Mi'raj, were well-executed and received full support from the entire school community. The school implements a fair and symmetrical policy. Based on interviews with the Vice Principal, non-Muslim students are given the day off on Islamic religious activities; and conversely, Muslim students are given the day off during non-Muslim religious celebrations, such as Christmas. This policy reflects equal recognition of all religions within the school.

One interesting and inspiring phenomenon is the fact that even though non-Muslim students are given the day off during Islamic religious events, some of them, particularly those in the student council (OSIS), still volunteer to help with the events, such as acting as documentation officers, assisting with attendance, and preparing event supplies. Muslim students also do the same during non-Muslim religious activities. This is a concrete result of multicultural education, which successfully fosters empathy, solidarity, and respect among students that transcends religious boundaries. (Suroyo et al., 2024:7)

4. Policy on Prayer and Use of Greetings in Formal School Activities

The prayer policy during formal school activities also serves as a concrete reflection of the school's commitment to diversity. During flag ceremonies, prayers are recited alternately by students from various religions, not just one. There is no compulsion to use a particular religious greeting; each student is free to use a greeting according to their own beliefs. This policy demonstrates genuine respect for all religions within the school. This practice aligns with the principles of multicultural education, which emphasize the importance of integrating cultural and religious perspectives into all aspects of school life (Adnyana, 2025:3). By presenting prayers from various religious traditions during formal school events, SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu not only acknowledges diversity rhetorically but also actively celebrates it in institutional practice. This sends a strong message to all students that all religions have equal standing and are respected within the school environment.

The successful management of worship practices and religious activities implemented at the multicultural school of SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu is supported by the leadership of the principal who actively supports all Islamic religious activities, such as Pesantren Kilat (Swift Islamic Boarding School), Maulid Nabi (Prophet's Birthday), Isra Mi'raj (Isra Mi'raj), Hajj rituals, and various other worship activities. This support is not only formal, but is manifested in an attitude of mutual respect and sincere togetherness in daily school life. However, on the other hand, there are still a number of obstacles faced in implementing religious activities at this multicultural school. One of them is the short allocation of Islamic Religious Education learning time of only 3 hours per week, which makes the implementation of more comprehensive religious programs less optimal than in Islamic-based schools. Furthermore, the limited capacity of the prayer room requires congregational prayers to be scheduled alternately. Various routine worship practices cannot yet be made a formal priority program of the school, unlike in schools with Islamic-based status. These obstacles are common challenges faced by multicultural public schools in implementing religious education optimally.

CONCLUSION

SMP Negeri 2 Pancur Batu exemplifies a state school that has translated religious plurality into a structured pedagogical asset. With a balanced Muslim-Christian student composition and a historically diverse cultural background, the school demonstrates that multicultural harmony is achievable in public education when PAI strategies are deliberately designed for diversity.

Three interconnected PAI strategies underpin this achievement: diversity-based class composition management that ensures heterogeneous learning groups; Contextual Teaching and Learning that connects Islamic values to students' lived multicultural experiences; and the systematic cultivation of tolerance through teacher modeling and cross-subject integration. These strategies are institutionally reinforced through inclusive policies on worship, Ramadan observance, and shared celebration of religious holidays. Collectively, these practices demonstrate that PAI can function not merely as religious instruction but as a vehicle for building civic harmony in plural Indonesian schools.

This study contributes an empirically grounded framework for PAI implementation in religiously plural state schools, extending existing scholarship beyond private Islamic school contexts. However, several limitations should be acknowledged: the study is bounded by the limited weekly PAI instructional hours (typically two hours per week) and the small number of PAI teachers at the school, which constrains the generalizability of findings. Future research should examine PAI multicultural strategies longitudinally or comparatively across multiple public schools with different demographic compositions to strengthen theoretical generalization.

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