

Religious Tolerance In Islamic Education: A Systematic Literature Review (Toleransi Beragama dalam Pendidikan Islam: Satu Kajian Semakan Sistematik Literatur)

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ABSTRACT

The rise of religious extremism underscores the critical role of Islamic education in fostering social harmony. This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) examines the diverse definitions, curricular integration, and pedagogical approaches to religious tolerance within Islamic education systems, as well as the challenges associated with their implementation. The review synthesises empirical studies, including content analysis, quasi-experimental designs, and qualitative case studies, from Kuwait, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran. Data were drawn from curricula, textbooks, and the perspectives of teachers and students to identify definitions, effective models and implementation barriers. Tolerance is broadly defined as mutual respect and the rejection of coercion. Levels of integration vary by national context: comprehensive in Kuwait, limited in Indonesia and hegemonic in Iran. Inclusive Islamic Education (PAI) materials and Qur'an-based pedagogical models in Indonesia have demonstrably enhanced student tolerance and reduced tendencies toward radicalism. Key challenges include high levels of student intolerance, curriculum weaknesses, state-imposed ideological constraints, intolerant social media narratives and narrow interpretations of religious texts. Promoting religious tolerance through Islamic education is a complex undertaking. Despite several practical innovations, systemic gaps, restrictive state policies, and external radical influences continue to hinder holistic implementation. Future initiatives require comprehensive strategies that are contextually sensitive, particularly in the interpretation of religious texts and awareness of sociopolitical realities, to achieve genuine inclusivity.

Key Words: Religious Tolerance; Islamic Education; Curriculum Integration; Pedagogical Approaches, Systematic Literature Review

ABSTRAK

Kebangkitan ekstremisme agama menggariskan peranan penting pendidikan Islam dalam memupuk keharmonian sosial. Kajian Literatur Sistematik (SLR) ini meneroka pelbagai definisi, integrasi kurikulum, dan pendekatan pedagogi terhadap toleransi agama dalam sistem pendidikan Islam serta cabaran yang berkaitan dengan pelaksanaannya. Ulasan ini mensintesis kajian empirikal termasuk analisis kandungan, reka bentuk kuasi-eksperimen, dan kajian kes kualitatif dari Kuwait, Indonesia, Malaysia dan Iran. Data diambil daripada kurikulum, buku teks dan perspektif guru dan pelajar untuk mengenal pasti definisi, model yang berkesan dan halangan pelaksanaan. Toleransi secara meluas ditakrifkan sebagai saling menghormati dan penolakan paksaan. Tahap integrasi berbeza mengikut konteks nasional: komprehensif di Kuwait, terhad di Indonesia dan hegemoni di Iran. Bahan Pendidikan Islam Inklusif (PAI) dan model pedagogi berasaskan Al-Quran di Indonesia telah menunjukkan peningkatan toleransi pelajar dan mengurangkan kecenderungan ke arah radikalisme. Cabaran utama termasuk tahap intoleransi pelajar yang tinggi, kelemahan kurikulum, kekangan ideologi yang dikenakan oleh kerajaan, naratif media sosial yang tidak bertoleransi dan tafsiran sempit teks agama. Menggalakkan toleransi beragama melalui pendidikan Islam adalah satu usaha yang rumit. Walaupun terdapat beberapa inovasi yang berkesan, jurang sistemik, dasar negara yang terhad dan pengaruh radikal luaran terus menghalang pelaksanaan holistik. Inisiatif masa depan memerlukan strategi komprehensif yang sensitif secara kontekstual terutamanya dalam tafsiran teks agama dan kesedaran tentang realiti sosiopolitik untuk mencapai keterangkuman yang tulen.

Kata kunci: Toleransi Agama; Pendidikan Islam; Penyepaduan Kurikulum; Pendekatan Pedagogi, Kajian Literatur Sistematik

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected yet ideologically polarised world, the promotion of religious tolerance has become an urgent necessity for cultivating harmonious and inclusive societies (Alabdulhadi, 2019; Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016). Education, as a central pillar of societal development, plays a vital role in nurturing such values. Within this framework, Islamic education systems bear a significant responsibility in fostering social cohesion and positive interreligious relations (Alabdulhadi, 2019; Purwanto, Firdaus & Faqihuddin, 2024).

In countries such as Kuwait, Indonesia, Malaysia and Iran, Islamic education is not only designed to impart religious knowledge and understanding but also to instil attitudes of mutual respect and acceptance of religious diversity (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016; Rahmat, Firdaus & Yahya, 2019). Religious tolerance in this context, is consistently defined as an attitude of openness and conduct that reflects respect for others, encompassing the recognition of religious rights, rejection of coercion and acceptance of differing beliefs without prejudice or discrimination (Alabdulhadi, 2019; Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023; Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016).

However, the implementation of these values within Islamic education systems remains fraught with considerable challenges and observable gaps. Research indicates growing concerns over rising intolerance and radical tendencies among students, particularly in Indonesia, where many students exhibit exclusive religious thinking and are susceptible to extremist narratives (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023). A major contributing factor is the lack of emphasis on the formation of a tolerant character in Islamic education textbooks, which fail to adequately address the challenges of widespread intolerance (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Rahmat, Firdaus, & Yahya, 2019).

In Malaysia, although the curriculum highlights tolerance as a value, there remain shortcomings in offering comprehensive exposure to the ethics and philosophies of other religions (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016). Conversely, Iran exhibits a form of "religious monopolism" in which its education system indoctrinates a dominant theological perspective, marginalising religious minorities and stifling pluralism and openness (Godazgar, 2025). This is further exacerbated by external influences such as intolerant social media content and radical activists who openly denounce non-Muslims and Islamic minority groups. Additionally, internal challenges such as literalist interpretations of religious texts contribute to the spread of extremist ideologies, including takfir (excommunication), thereby intensifying polarisation and intergroup hostility (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023).

Collectively, these factors illustrate the complexity of integrating religious tolerance within Islamic education, an effort challenged by curricular constraints, pedagogical limitations and sociopolitical realities. In response, this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) seeks to address the following core research question: *"How is religious tolerance addressed and cultivated within contemporary Islamic education systems and what outcomes and challenges have been reported in these approaches?"*

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, which emphasise transparency, rigour, and replicability in reporting systematic reviews. The process involved four major phases: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion.

SEARCH STRATEGY AND IDENTIFICATION

A systematic search was conducted on 1 May 2025 across the following databases:

- i. Scopus (n = 10) using the keywords: *"Islamic education" OR "Islamic religious education" AND "religious tolerance"*
- ii. Web of Science (n = 12) using: *"religious tolerance" AND "Islamic education" OR "religious tolerance"*

This initial search yielded a total of 22 records. Duplicate records (n = 7) were removed before screening, resulting in 15 unique records.

SCREENING AND ELIGIBILITY

Titles and abstracts screened the remaining records (n = 15):

- i. 2 records were excluded due to a lack of relevance to the Islamic education context.
- ii. 13 articles were retrieved for full-text review.
- iii. 1 article could not be retrieved due to access issues.

Thus, 12 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility and included in the final synthesis. No studies were excluded at this stage due to methodological flaws.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Document Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, indexed proceedings, and high-quality theses	Non-academic sources, opinion pieces, blogs, and editorials
Language	English or Malay	Other languages without official translation
Focus	Studies on religious tolerance in Islamic education (curriculum, pedagogy, teacher training, textbooks)	Studies unrelated to Islamic educational settings
Geography	Muslim-majority contexts (especially Malaysia)	Studies not contextualised within Islamic frameworks
Publication Year	2010–2025	Before 2010 or contextually irrelevant

DATA EXTRACTION

A standard data extraction form was used to gather relevant variables, including:

- i. Author(s), year, and publication source
- ii. Study location and educational level
- iii. Research objectives and design
- iv. Sample characteristics
- v. Focus of intervention (curriculum, pedagogy, teacher training, etc.)
- vi. Key findings related to religious tolerance
- vii. Theoretical framework
- viii. Declared limitations

Two reviewers independently extracted the data. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion or referral to a third reviewer.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

To ensure methodological soundness, the included studies were assessed using the following critical appraisal tools based on study design:

- i. Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) for qualitative studies
- ii. Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) tools for quantitative studies
- iii. Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) for mixed-methods studies

Studies that did not meet the minimum quality threshold were excluded. In this review, however, all 12 studies satisfied the inclusion criteria.

DATA SYNTHESIS

Thematic synthesis was used to analyse the extracted data through three phases:

- i. Initial reading and open coding
- ii. Grouping codes into thematic categories
- iii. Abstracting into higher-order themes

The process was supported by qualitative data analysis software (Atlas.ti). This enabled systematic integration and identification of patterns across contexts.

PRISMA FLOW DIAGRAM

The study selection process is illustrated in a PRISMA 2020-compliant flow diagram, summarising the number of records identified, screened, excluded, and included.

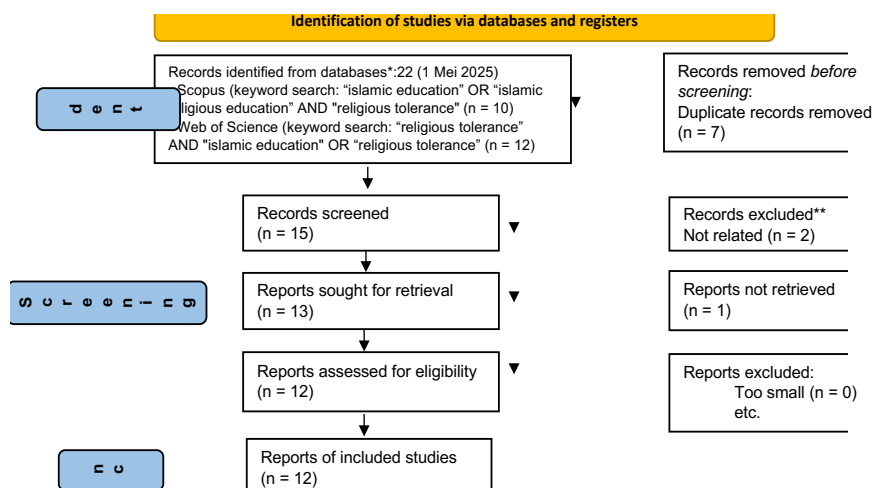


FIGURE 1. The PRISMA 2020

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

The findings of this study are synthesised into three key themes:

- i. Conceptualisation and curricular integration of religious tolerance in Islamic education,
- ii. Pedagogical approaches and their effectiveness in cultivating tolerance, and
- iii. Challenges and hindrances to implementing religious tolerance.

Theme 1: Conceptualisation and Curricular Integration of Religious Tolerance in Islamic Education

This theme examines how the concept of religious tolerance is understood and incorporated into Islamic education systems across various countries. Generally, religious tolerance is defined as an inclusive attitude and behaviour characterised by mutual respect, the recognition of religious rights, freedom from coercion, and acceptance of different beliefs without discrimination (Alabdulhadi, 2019; Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016; Rahmat, Firdaus & Yahya, 2019). In many contexts, the concept of *wasatiyyah* is equated with tolerance, representing a balanced, harmonious, and non-violent middle path (Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023).

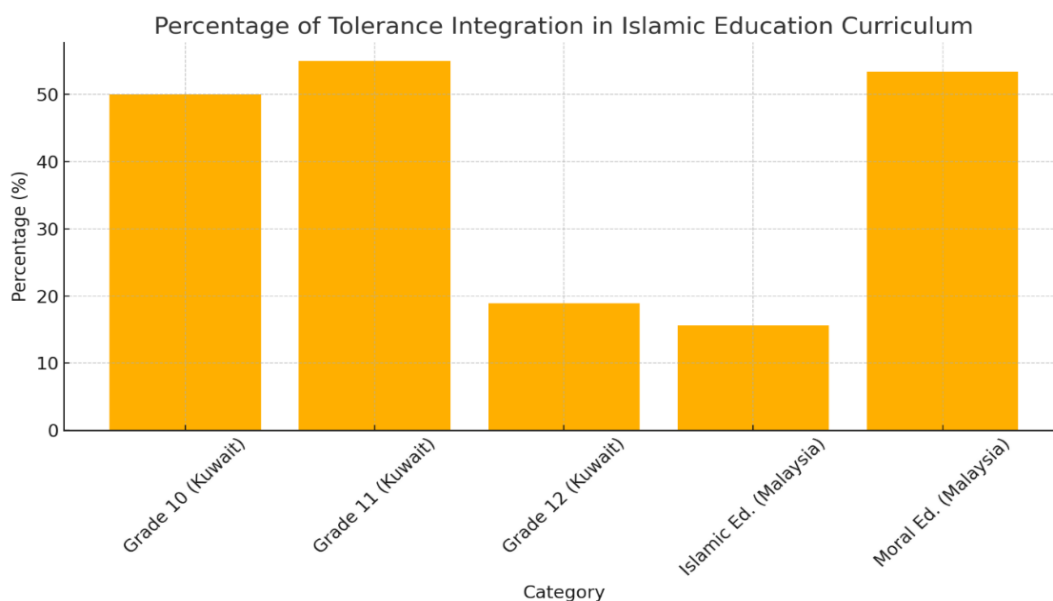


FIGURE 2: Percentage of Tolerance Integration in Islamic Education Curriculum

Figure 2 presents a comparative analysis of the integration of tolerance-related elements across selected education categories in Kuwait and Malaysia. The vertical axis reflects the percentage of content explicitly addressing tolerance, while the horizontal axis categorises different grade levels and subject streams. The data reveal an apparent disparity in how tolerance is embedded within the Islamic Education curriculum across the two countries and educational stages. In Kuwait, Grade 11 registers the highest percentage, with over 55% of its curriculum demonstrating straightforward integration of tolerance-related themes. This is closely followed by Grade 10, which reflects approximately 50%. However, the percentage drops significantly in Grade 12, with only about 18%, suggesting a potential de-emphasis on tolerance as students progress to higher levels.

In contrast, the Malaysian data illustrate a stark variation between subject domains rather than grade levels. Moral Education in Malaysia exhibits a strong presence of tolerance integration, aligning closely with Grade 11 in Kuwait at around 55%. Conversely, Islamic Education in Malaysia shows a notably low percentage, approximately 15–16%, highlighting a relative underrepresentation of tolerance themes within the religious curriculum. These findings underscore two important trends. First, tolerance content in Kuwait appears to be more embedded within earlier secondary education stages, with a diminishing emphasis in the final school year. Second, in Malaysia, while Moral Education promotes tolerance prominently, Islamic Education appears to lag in this regard. This raises important pedagogical and policy implications, particularly the need to ensure that religious education in both contexts more consistently cultivates values of mutual respect, diversity, and peaceful coexistence.

In conclusion, Figure 2 illustrates uneven patterns of tolerance integration, both across countries and within curricular streams. The data suggest the potential value of curriculum reform, particularly in religious education, in aligning with broader national and global goals of fostering inclusive and tolerant societies.

TABLE 1: Conceptualisation and Curricular Integration of Religious Tolerance in Islamic Education

Country	Definition & Conceptualization	Curricular Integration & Quantitative Data	Gaps & Contradictions
Kuwait	Tolerance is framed as a theological and behavioural value ensuring religious freedom, justice, and security under Shariah, supported by eight foundational principles (Alabdulhadi, 2019).	Strongly represented in Islamic Studies textbooks: 50% (Grade 10), 55% (Grade 11), 18.9% (Grade 12) including tolerance topics (Alabdulhadi, 2019).	Uneven distribution across grade levels; notably low at Grade 12 (Alabdulhadi, 2019).
Indonesia	Tolerance is aligned with religious moderation, guided by four indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and cultural accommodation (Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023).	The Islamic Studies (PAI) curriculum promotes tolerance (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022), but only 1 of the 11 textbook themes covers tolerance (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). Pesantren promote balanced aqidah, fiqh, and akhlaq (Athoillah et al., 2024).	Textbook content is insufficient to meet students' needs (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022).
Malaysia	Promotes interfaith understanding through shared positive values while respecting differences (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016).	A core component in Islamic and Moral Education curricula: 15.6% (Islamic Education) and 53.4% (Moral Education) cover interfaith understanding (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016).	Lacks explicit topics on ethics, philosophy, and taboos of other religions (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016).
Iran	Defined by religious monopolism (Shi'ism as the official religion), excluding pluralist interpretations (Godazgar, 2025).	Textbooks are constructed around a single Shi'i narrative, leaving no space for pluralism (Godazgar, 2025). Minority students are compelled to conform (Godazgar, 2025).	Incompatibility with minority beliefs increases from primary to pre-university (from 48% to 0% tolerance content) (Godazgar, 2025).

Table 1 shows the comparative data reveal considerable diversity in how tolerance is understood and operationalised in Islamic education. While countries like Kuwait and Malaysia incorporate tolerance to varying degrees within structured curricula, Indonesia relies heavily on informal institutions to fill curricular gaps. Iran, in contrast, embodies an exclusionary approach that marginalises religious diversity. These findings highlight the need for more coherent, inclusive, and philosophically grounded approaches to religious tolerance in Islamic education systems globally.

Theme 2: Pedagogical Approaches and Their Effectiveness in Cultivating Tolerance

Figure 2 illustrates a comparative evaluation of various pedagogical models used in Islamic education, specifically assessing their simulated effectiveness in promoting religious tolerance. The models include Inclusive PAI (Pendidikan Agama Islam), Qur'an-Based Model, Moderation Literacy, Pesantren (Islamic boarding school), and Reception of Texts. Among the approaches, the Inclusive PAI model scores the highest, with an effectiveness score exceeding 85, indicating its strong capacity to foster tolerant attitudes through a pluralistic and context-sensitive curriculum. This model likely emphasises inclusive narratives, interfaith understanding, and critical engagement with contemporary social issues.

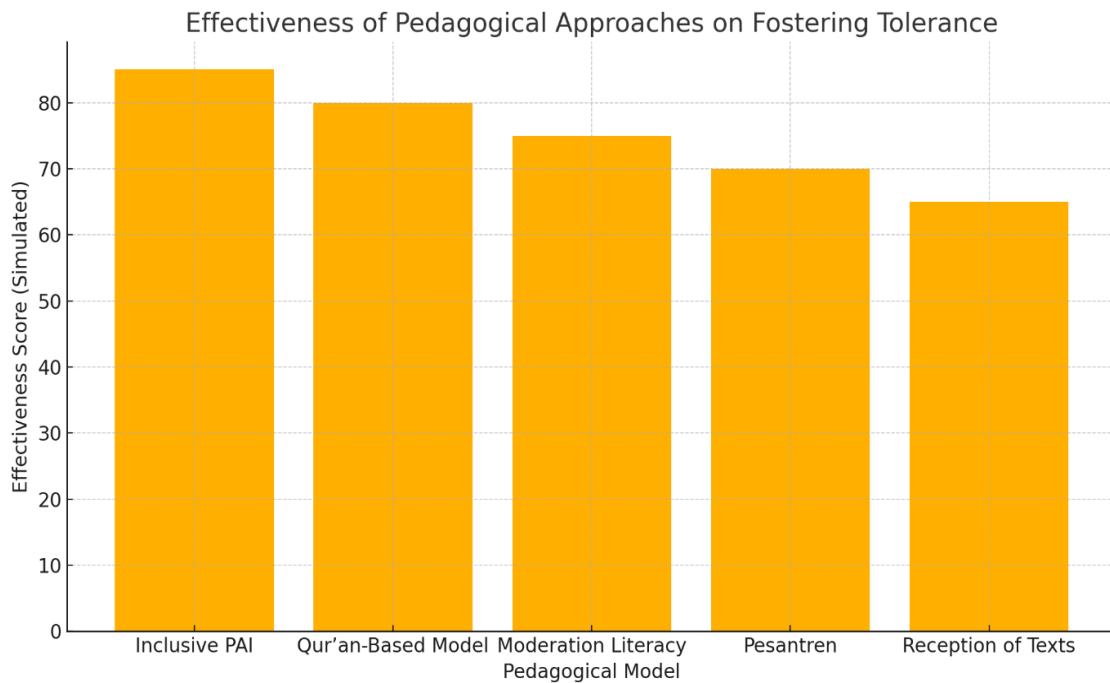


FIGURE 2: Effectiveness of Pedagogical Approaches on Fostering Tolerance

The Qur'an-Based Model follows with a slightly lower score (around 80), suggesting that pedagogies grounded in scriptural interpretation can be effective when applied with contextual sensitivity. Moderation Literacy, which focuses on balancing religious commitment with civic values, shows moderate success with a score of 75. In contrast, more traditional forms of instruction, such as Pesantren and the Reception of Texts, show lower effectiveness, at approximately 70% and 65%, respectively. These models may emphasise doctrinal fidelity over dialogical or intercultural competencies, limiting their capacity to promote pluralism. Overall, the figure underscores the importance of curricular innovation and pedagogical inclusivity in cultivating tolerance. It suggests that models which integrate interpretive flexibility, contextual relevance, and civic ethics are more effective in preparing students for engagement in diverse societies.

Table 2 presents a synthesis of pedagogical models implemented in Indonesian Islamic education that aim to foster religious tolerance, along with empirical evidence of their effectiveness. These approaches reflect a shift from traditional rote learning towards thematic, experiential, and values-based instruction. The Inclusive PAI model stands out as particularly impactful, using a digital, thematic Qur'anic curriculum that directly addresses the misuse of terms such as *kāfir*. In a controlled study, students exposed to this model demonstrated a significant reduction in intolerant attitudes, from 47% and 70% to 16% and 14%, respectively (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). Similarly, the

Qur'an-Based Learning Model employs a six-phase pedagogical structure that promotes interfaith exposure, rejects exclusivist doctrines (*takfir*), and fosters inclusive thinking. This model was found to deepen students' understanding of both Islamic and non-Islamic beliefs while reinforcing their faith (Rahmat, Firdaus & Yahya, 2019).

Another promising initiative is the Religious Moderation Literacy Project, which trains pre-service teachers through tutorials, field visits, and workshops. This approach successfully raised participants' awareness and their commitment to becoming role models of tolerance (Purwanto, Firdaus & Faqihuddin, 2024). Traditional pesantren education, while grounded in doctrinal knowledge (*aqidah*, *fiqh*, and *akhlaq*), has also shown positive results. Studies reveal that it fosters interfaith understanding, particularly among students in Islamic public universities (Athoillah et al., 2024). Finally, the Reception of Religious Texts model promotes moderation through deep engagement with Qur'anic verses and Hadith. The internalisation of these values has been observed in students' behaviours, as evidenced by their rejection of conflict and promotion of peaceful dialogue (Benny Afwadzi et al., 2023). Collectively, these models underscore the potential of inclusive, critically reflective, and value-oriented pedagogies in shaping tolerant attitudes within Islamic education.

TABLE 2: Pedagogical Approaches and Their Effectiveness in Cultivating Tolerance

Model / Country	Core Features	Evidence of Effectiveness
Inclusive PAI Materials (Indonesia) (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022)	Thematic digital Qur’anic approach that challenges the misinterpretation of kāfir (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022).	Intervention group showed a drastic decrease in intolerance: 47% & 70% reduced to 16% & 14% (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022).
Qur’an-Based Learning Model (Indonesia) (Rahmat, Firdaus & Yahya, 2019)	Six phases, including exposure to other faiths, rejection of takfir, and building inclusive attitudes.	Students developed a deeper understanding of Islam and other religions, along with strengthened faith (Rahmat, Firdaus & Yahya, 2019).
Religious Moderation Literacy Project (Indonesia) (Purwanto, Firdaus & Faqihuddin, 2024)	Involves teacher training, online tutorials, and visits to tolerant communities.	Raised awareness and commitment among pre-service teachers to become tolerant educators (Purwanto, Firdaus & Faqihuddin, 2024).
Pesantren Education (Indonesia) (Athoillah et al., 2024)	Emphasises balance in aqidah, fiqh, and akhlaq; encourages critical thinking and openness.	Improved interfaith understanding among students in Islamic public universities (Wan Razali et al., 2018; Athoillah et al., 2024).
Reception of Religious Texts (Indonesia) (Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023)	Students internalise Qur’anic verses and Hadith that promote moderation.	Values manifested through speech, writing, and practice: rejecting conflict, promoting peace (Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023).

Theme 3: Challenges and Hindrances to Implementing Religious Tolerance in Islamic Education

Figure 3 presents a simulated frequency analysis of the main challenges encountered in promoting religious tolerance through Islamic education. The identified categories include intolerance and radicalism, curriculum and policy gaps, ideological monopoly (noted explicitly in the Iranian context), external influences, and interpretative and theological constraints. The most frequently cited challenge is intolerance and radicalism, highlighting ongoing concerns over extremist interpretations that undermine peaceful coexistence. This suggests a persistent need for counter-radicalisation strategies within educational frameworks. Following closely are curriculum and policy

gaps, as well as ideological monopolies, particularly in contexts where a single religious narrative is institutionally enforced, thereby restricting pluralistic discourse.

External influences and interpretative/theological rigidity are noted less frequently but still represent significant obstacles. These may include socio-political interference, sectarian tensions, or rigid doctrinal teaching that limits critical engagement with diverse beliefs. Overall, Figure 3 underscores the multifaceted nature of the barriers to embedding tolerance within Islamic education. Addressing these challenges requires both curricular reform and broader ideological openness, supported by inclusive policy interventions and pedagogical innovation.

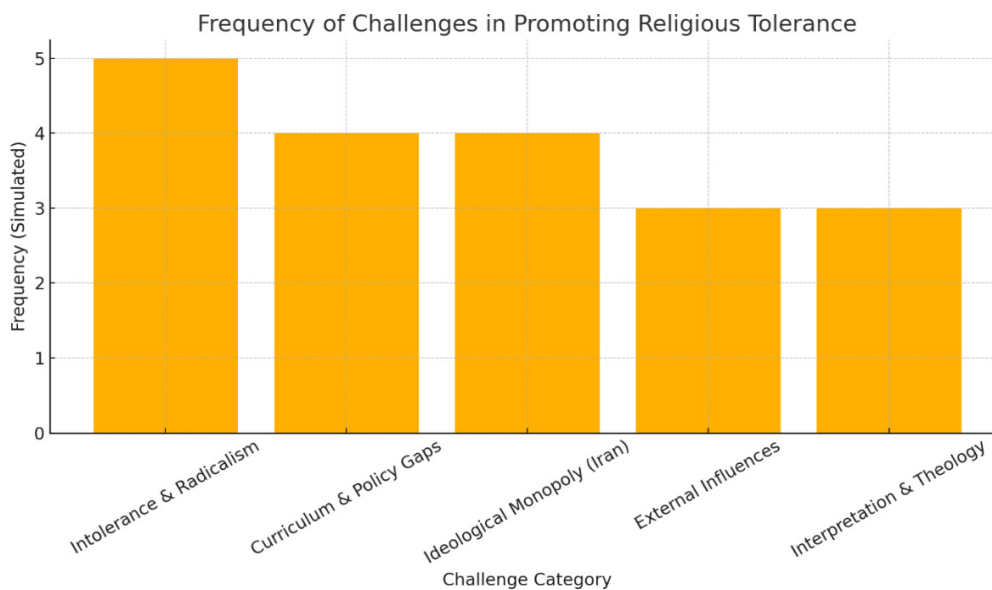


FIGURE 3: Frequency of Challenges in Promoting Religious Tolerance

Table 3 highlights the persistent and multifaceted challenges that obstruct the effective implementation of religious tolerance within Islamic education. Despite ongoing reform efforts, both structural and ideological barriers remain deeply embedded in educational systems across several contexts. One of the most alarming issues is the prevalence of intolerance and radicalism among students. In Indonesia, nearly half of high school students reportedly support radical acts, while 75% label non-Muslims as *kafir* a term often weaponised to delegitimise religious others. Shockingly, even Islamic kindergarten materials have been found to contain radical elements (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022), indicating that such views are introduced at an early age.

Curricular and policy shortcomings further exacerbate the problem. In Indonesia, standard Islamic Education (PAI) textbooks often fail to incorporate values of tolerance and pluralism. Similarly, in Malaysia, while Moral Education addresses interfaith values, the Islamic Education curriculum lacks coverage of the ethical and philosophical dimensions of other religions, thereby limiting students' exposure to diverse worldviews (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016). In Iran, the educational system is structured around a monopolistic religious ideology, where a singular Shi'i narrative dominates all levels of instruction. Tolerance toward religious minorities declines as students progress through the system, reflecting a state-driven exclusion of pluralistic discourse (Godazgar, 2025).

External influences, particularly through digital platforms and extremist networks, also pose a serious threat. Radical Islamic content, such as Salafi Takfiri rhetoric, circulates widely online, spreading hate speech and discrediting moderation as mere political propaganda (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Benny Afwadzi et al., 2023). Lastly, textual interpretation and theological rigidity serve as internal hindrances. Literalist readings of religious texts often legitimise violence and the act of *takfir* (declaring others as infidels). Even within pesantren environments, strong group loyalty can sometimes foster insularity and discourage openness to religious diversity (Wan Razali et al., 2018).

In summary, the implementation of religious tolerance in Islamic education is hampered by deeply rooted ideological, pedagogical, and socio-political barriers. Overcoming these challenges requires a concerted effort to reform curriculum content, diversify theological interpretation, and counter external radical influences through inclusive and critical religious pedagogy.

TABLE 3: Challenges and Hindrances to Implementing Religious Tolerance in Islamic Education

Category	Details & Quantitative Data
Intolerance & Radicalism	Nearly 50% of Indonesian high school students support radical acts (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022); 75% view non-Muslims as <i>kāfir</i> ; even Islamic kindergarten materials include radical elements.
Curriculum Content & State Policy	Conventional PAI textbooks lack tolerance values (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022); Malaysia's curriculum does not adequately cover ethics or philosophies of other religions (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016).
Monopolistic Ideology (Iran)	State imposes a single Shi'i ideology through the curriculum; intolerance toward minorities rises with education level (Godazgar, 2025).
External Influences	Intolerant Islamic social media and extremist activists (e.g., Salafi Takfiri) spread hate speech; some groups reject moderation as a "political agenda" (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023).
Textual Interpretation & Theology	Narrow literalist interpretations fuel extremism and justify violence; <i>takfir</i> remains widespread (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). Internal group solidarity within pesantren sometimes impedes openness (Wan Razali et al., 2018).

DISCUSSION

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH PREVIOUS STUDIES

This study supports previous findings that highlight widespread concerns regarding student intolerance and increasing radical tendencies in Muslim-majority countries (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Benny Afwadzi et al., 2023; Athoillah et al., 2024). For instance, a survey in Indonesia revealed that nearly 50% of secondary school students exhibited intolerance towards other religions, with almost 75% considering non-Muslims as *kāfir* (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). Earlier criticisms of Islamic Studies (PI) textbooks in Indonesia emphasised a lack of content on tolerance-related values (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). Similarly, in Malaysia, despite the emphasis on tolerance, textbooks still lack dedicated topics that explore the ethics, philosophy, and taboos of other religions (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016). In contrast, the context in Kuwait appears more robust, where religious tolerance is well-represented in secondary school Islamic Studies textbooks (Alabdulhadi, 2019).

The concept of “religious moderation” (*wasatiyyah*) as a middle path that rejects violence is also consistently emphasised (Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023). However, some groups continue to reject this concept, viewing it as a “political agenda” (Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023). Iran, on the other hand, presents a more extreme example of “religious monopolism” in its education system, characterised by a complete rejection of pluralism (Godazgar, 2025).

This study contributes several significant new findings:

- i. Effectiveness of Inclusive Pedagogical Models: Inclusive Islamic Studies materials in Indonesia, utilising thematic digital Qur’anic approaches, significantly reduced student intolerance (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022).
- ii. Qur’an-Based Learning Model: A structured six-phase model helped students understand Islamic views on other religions, reject *takfir*, clarify misconceptions (e.g., the Trinity), and identify common ground. This approach strengthened faith while building tolerance (Rahmat, Firdaus & Yahya, 2019).
- iii. Empowering Educators: A Religious Moderation Literacy Project for pre-service teachers enhanced their awareness, confidence, and commitment to promoting peace (Purwanto, Firdaus & Faqihuddin, 2024).
- iv. The Nuanced Role of Pesantren: The study deepens understanding of how pesantren education fosters tolerance through a balanced curriculum, critical thinking, and community programs like Maghrib Mengaji (Athoillah et al., 2024).
- v. Multimodal Expression of Tolerance: Religious moderation is not only practiced verbally (respectful speech) but also through written expression (greetings on religious holidays) and action (respecting religious freedom, avoiding conflict, and spreading peace) (Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023).

IMPLICATIONS

First, the urgency of curriculum reform is apparent, particularly in contexts where religious education textbooks fail to promote interfaith tolerance and mutual understanding adequately. Scholars such as Rahmat and Yahya (2022) and Salleh and Abd Khahar (2016) emphasise that the current content often lacks the necessary depth and

inclusivity, which can hinder the development of interreligious empathy among students. Updating and restructuring these curricular materials is vital to cultivating a more inclusive religious discourse in schools. Second, there is a pressing need for pedagogical innovation. Educators must be trained to implement evidence-based teaching strategies that are inclusive and aligned with structured Qur’anic learning models. This includes the integration of inclusive Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) materials that foster critical engagement with religious texts in a way that supports tolerance and diversity (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Rahmat, Firdaus, & Yahya, 2019; Purwanto, Firdaus, & Faqihuddin, 2024).

Third, education systems must be equipped to counteract the growing influence of extremist ideologies, particularly those disseminated through social media. Rahmat and Yahya (2022) and Benny Afwadzi et al. (2023) argue that curricula should focus on developing students’ critical thinking skills, enabling them to identify, analyse, and reject extremist content and hate speech narratives that exploit religious sentiment. Lastly, there is a broader policy implication that underscores the importance of cross-national dialogue. The stark contrast between countries that promote pluralism, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Kuwait and those that enforce ideological uniformity, like Iran, highlights the urgent need for educational policy discourse that fosters pluralistic values in religious education (Godazgar, 2025).

LIMITATIONS

Despite the insightful findings, several limitations must be acknowledged. One key limitation is the review’s restricted geographical scope, which focuses on only four countries: Kuwait, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran. This geographical limitation restricts the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or political contexts (Benny Afwadzi et al., 2023; Godazgar, 2025). Second, the methodological diversity across the reviewed studies introduces variability in data quality and interpretability. Many of the studies employed content analysis to evaluate curriculum intentions but did not assess actual classroom implementation or pedagogical delivery (Alabdulhadi, 2019). Thus, the findings may not fully capture the lived experiences of students or teachers.

Third, reliance on student self-report data may present issues of social desirability bias. Students may respond in ways they perceive to be favourable rather than expressing their genuine beliefs or experiences, thereby skewing results (Benny Afwadzi et al., 2023).

Fourth, while pesantren institutions are often highlighted for their role in nurturing religious tolerance, they also tend to reinforce a strong sense of group identity. This internal cohesion, while beneficial in some ways, may limit the openness of students and teachers to religious or political diversity (Wan Razali et al., 2018).

Lastly, the heavy reliance on text-based learning and interpretation poses another limitation. As noted by Benny Afwadzi et al. (2023), textual analysis must be complemented by interpretations grounded in *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) and contextualised through historical understanding to avoid rigid or radical readings.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several avenues for future research are proposed to address the gaps identified. First, further studies should focus on examining how teachers actually foster tolerance within the classroom, particularly through their instructional methods (Alabdulhadi, 2019). Second, it is essential to consider the perspectives of both students and parents when assessing the effectiveness of tolerance education in religious curricula (Alabdulhadi, 2019). Their lived experiences can offer nuanced insights into the challenges and successes of educational interventions. Third, future research should also investigate why some students continue to hold intolerant views despite being exposed to inclusive and pluralistic religious content (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). Understanding these underlying factors can inform more effective pedagogical strategies.

Fourth, researchers should explore students' interpretations of controversial Qur'anic verses, especially those on warfare, which are often manipulated to support radical ideologies. A deeper understanding of how students internalise these texts can help educators counteract radical misreadings (Benny Afwadzi et al., 2023). Fifth, scholars should focus on university students, particularly those in public institutions, as they may have limited exposure to foundational religious education and be more susceptible to extremist rhetoric (Benny Afwadzi et al., 2023). This demographic deserves closer scrutiny in terms of their ideological development and susceptibility.

Finally, there is a need to examine how institutions such as pesantren can reconcile the reinforcement of group identity with an openness to interreligious dialogue and political pluralism (Wan Razali et al., 2018). Such studies would provide valuable guidance for balancing tradition with tolerance in religious education settings.

Altogether, these implications, limitations, and recommendations underline the complexity of religious education in pluralistic societies and the critical need for multidimensional strategies to ensure its effectiveness in nurturing inclusive, tolerant, and critically engaged learners.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that religious tolerance, frequently aligned with the concept of moderation (*wasatiyyah*), is consistently defined within Islamic education as inclusive, respectful behaviour across religious boundaries, embracing a middle path that explicitly rejects violence and coercion (Alabdulhadi, 2019; Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016). In this regard, countries such as Kuwait and Malaysia have demonstrated a commitment to integrating tolerance values into their curricula (Alabdulhadi, 2019; Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016). However, Indonesia still faces significant challenges due to the limited presence of tolerance-related content in conventional textbooks, which are insufficient to address real-world issues (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). This situation stands in sharp contrast to Iran, where a form of religious monopolism is evident, with pluralism and religious diversity being actively suppressed through ideological influence within the education system (Godazgar, 2025).

A key contribution of this study lies in its confirmation that specific pedagogical approaches are demonstrably effective in fostering student tolerance, particularly in the Indonesian context. Inclusive Islamic Education (PAI) materials that incorporate thematic Qur'anic analysis have been shown to reduce intolerance by correcting misconceptions about other religions (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). Additionally, the structured six-phase Qur'an-based learning model has helped students gain a deeper understanding of other faiths while strengthening their own Islamic creed and rejecting *takfir* (Rahmat, Firdaus & Yahya, 2019). Moreover, the implementation of religious moderation literacy projects for pre-service teachers has enhanced their awareness and confidence in becoming tolerant educators (Purwanto, Firdaus & Faqihuddin, 2024). Similarly, the pesantren-based education system has played a key role in promoting interfaith tolerance through balanced curricula and critical thinking approaches (Athoillah et al., 2024; Wan Razali et al., 2018). Students have demonstrated their internalisation of moderation values in oral communication, written expression, and practical behaviour (Benny Afwadzi et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, promoting religious tolerance remains fraught with serious challenges. Widespread intolerance

and radical inclinations among students continue to be a major concern, including support for exclusivist actions and extremist views that shrink the space for difference (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). Inadequate curriculum content and state policies that hinder pluralism, as exemplified by Iran have been identified as key obstacles to fostering open-minded thinking (Godazgar, 2025). Additionally, external influences such as extremist narratives on religious social media platforms and radical activism have greatly shaped student mindsets (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023). Even more concerning is the internal trend of narrow, literal interpretations of religious texts, which are sometimes used to justify violence, failing to distinguish between theological doctrine and humanitarian imperatives (Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023). The ongoing prevalence of *takfir* practices, as well as the tension between strong group identity and openness to outsiders, continues to obstruct the development of truly inclusive societies (Wan Razali et al., 2018; Athoillah et al., 2024).

These findings are significant in contributing to efforts to build social harmony in Muslim plural societies, particularly through empirically validated strategies that counter radicalism and intolerance. The proven success of inclusive pedagogical models underscores the urgent need for comprehensive curriculum reform and targeted teacher training to effectively instil tolerance values (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022; Purwanto, Firdaus & Faqihuddin, 2024).

Based on the identified gaps and challenges, several key directions for future research are proposed:

- i. Further studies should investigate why some students remain intolerant despite being exposed to inclusive educational interventions (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022).
- ii. Research should focus on actual classroom practices and teaching methods used by educators to foster tolerance in practical and effective ways.
- iii. Greater attention should be paid to students' and parents' perspectives on religious tolerance, particularly how these values are practised in daily life and embedded within the curriculum (Alabdulhadi, 2019).
- iv. Further investigation is needed into how students interpret controversial religious texts such as Qur'anic verses on warfare and how reinterpretation based on *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* and historical context may prevent misuse for radical purposes (Benny Afwadzi et.al, 2023).
- v. Students in public universities should be prioritised in future research, as they may be more vulnerable to radical ideologies due to limited exposure to foundational religious education.
- vi. Finally, research should explore how traditional Islamic institutions such as pesantren can balance the cultivation of strong group identity with openness to interreligious and political diversity, so as to prevent the formation of exclusive communities that reject dialogue and pluralism (Wan Razali et al., 2018).

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