

IMPLEMENTATION OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN PESANTREN TO STRENGTHEN SANTRI CHARACTER IN SOUTH KALIMANTAN

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Abstract : *This study examines how multicultural education is implemented in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in South Kalimantan to strengthen students' character. While existing studies often conceptualize multicultural education as a formal curriculum, limited attention has been given to its experiential and embedded practices within pesantren settings. This research adopts a qualitative case study approach, with data collected through semi-structured interviews involving five teachers and santri actively engaged in daily activities. The findings indicate that multicultural education is not delivered as a formal subject but is internalized through daily interactions, collaborative learning, and communal living practices. Continuous exposure to cultural diversity fosters tolerance, empathy, and cooperation among santri. Despite its positive contributions, challenges such as cultural adaptation and communication differences persist. This study highlights that the strength of multicultural education in pesantren lies in its habituation process and social interaction patterns, offering an alternative model of character education rooted in lived experience rather than formal instruction.*

Keywords : *Multicultural Education; Pesantren; Character.*

Abstrak : *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi pendidikan multikultural di pesantren di Kalimantan Selatan dalam upaya memperkuat karakter santri. Kajian sebelumnya umumnya memandang pendidikan multikultural sebagai bagian dari kurikulum formal, sementara praktik berbasis pengalaman yang terintegrasi dalam kehidupan pesantren masih belum banyak dikaji. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap lima informan yang terdiri dari guru dan santri yang terlibat langsung dalam aktivitas harian pesantren. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan multikultural tidak diajarkan sebagai mata pelajaran formal, melainkan terinternalisasi melalui interaksi sehari-hari, pembelajaran kolaboratif, dan kehidupan komunal. Paparan terhadap keberagaman budaya secara terus-menerus mendorong berkembangnya sikap toleransi, empati, dan kerja sama di kalangan santri. Meskipun demikian, terdapat tantangan berupa proses adaptasi budaya dan perbedaan komunikasi antar santri. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa kekuatan pendidikan multikultural di pesantren terletak pada proses pembiasaan dan pola interaksi sosial, sehingga menawarkan model alternatif pendidikan karakter yang berbasis pengalaman nyata, bukan semata-mata pembelajaran formal.*

Kata Kunci : *Pendidikan Multikultural; Pesantren; Karakter.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia have historically functioned not only as institutions for Islamic learning but also as social environments that shape students' moral, spiritual, and interpersonal development (Keser Aschenberger et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2024). The effectiveness of pesantren in cultivating character is closely associated with the integration of religious values, discipline, and communal life within everyday educational practices (Munawwaroh, 2024; Rozi et al., 2025). According to Made Santi Diwyarthi et al., (2023), pesantren provide a living environment where responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness are continuously developed through collective routines and interactions among santri. This educational model becomes increasingly significant in the contemporary Indonesian context, where social diversity and intercultural interaction are becoming more visible within educational institutions. In South Kalimantan, for instance, pesantren accommodate students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including Banjar, Javanese, Dayak, and Madurese communities. Such diversity creates a dynamic social setting that directly influences patterns of communication, adaptation, and social integration among students.

The multicultural nature of pesantren life requires educational approaches that are capable of fostering mutual respect and inclusive social relationships. In this context, multicultural education emerges as an important framework for managing diversity within educational environments (Siahaan et al., 2023; Wahid et al., 2020). Multicultural education is generally understood as an educational effort aimed at promoting equality, tolerance, respect, and appreciation for cultural differences (Tsauri et al., 2024). Previous studies have shown that multicultural education contributes positively to the development of empathy, openness, and social sensitivity among students through both classroom instruction and social interaction (Korte et al., 2024). Within pesantren, the integration of multicultural values is particularly important because students live together intensively in dormitory-based systems that demand cooperation and harmonious interaction despite cultural differences. Therefore, multicultural education in pesantren cannot be separated from the broader objective of strengthening students' character formation in pluralistic social settings.

Nevertheless, existing studies on multicultural education in pesantren still tend to emphasize formal and curriculum-oriented dimensions. Most discussions focus on the integration of multicultural values into teaching materials, religious instruction, or institutional policies, while limited attention has been given to how these values are practiced and experienced in the daily lives of santri (Otaya et al., 2023; Tadege et al., 2022). In practice, several pesantren continue to prioritize religious knowledge transmission

without explicitly facilitating intercultural engagement within informal social spaces (Frazer et al., 2022). As a result, cultural differences among students may still produce communication barriers, social exclusivity, or informal grouping based on ethnic similarity. These conditions indicate that the presence of diversity alone does not automatically generate inclusive attitudes or multicultural awareness (Lin & Xu, 2024). Consequently, there remains a gap between the normative ideals of multicultural education and its lived implementation within pesantren environments.

In addition, previous research has largely examined multicultural education from normative, conceptual, or policy perspectives, with limited exploration of its experiential dimensions in culturally diverse pesantren communities. Studies rarely investigate how multicultural values are internalized through everyday interactions, communal activities, conflict resolution, shared traditions, and dormitory life (Geletu & Mihiretie, 2023; Mundiri et al., 2021). This limitation becomes particularly important in the context of South Kalimantan, where cultural heterogeneity creates unique social dynamics that may shape the character-building process differently from pesantren in more homogeneous regions. Therefore, understanding multicultural education as a lived and socially embedded process is necessary to reveal how character strengthening actually occurs within students' daily experiences.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the implementation of multicultural education in pesantren in South Kalimantan by focusing on how multicultural values are practiced, negotiated, and internalized in everyday life. The novelty of this research lies in its experiential approach to multicultural education, which positions multiculturalism not merely as a formal curricular concept but as a lived social practice embedded within the daily interactions of pesantren communities. Unlike previous studies that predominantly emphasize institutional policies or classroom instruction, this study highlights the role of communal living, intercultural encounters, and informal social experiences in shaping students' character formation within culturally diverse pesantren settings.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach to explore the implementation of multicultural education in a pesantren setting in South Kalimantan. A qualitative approach is selected because this research aims to understand social practices, meanings, and interactions experienced by participants in their natural environment. The case study design is used to enable an in-depth examination of a specific

educational setting, particularly how multicultural values are practiced and internalized within the daily life of the pesantren.

The research site is a pesantren in South Kalimantan, selected due to its culturally diverse student background. Informants were chosen using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in pesantren activities and their relevance to the research focus. A total of five informants participated in this study, consisting of teachers (ustadz/ustadzah) and santri who are actively engaged in both learning processes and daily social interactions. Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews. This method allows the researcher to explore participants' experiences and perspectives in depth while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. The interview process focused on three main aspects: (1) the forms of multicultural education practices in the pesantren, (2) how these practices are experienced by santri, and (3) their perceived contribution to character development.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis procedure. The process began with data organization and transcription of interview results, followed by coding to identify significant statements. These codes were then grouped into categories and developed into broader themes representing patterns of multicultural education practices and their impact. The final stage involved interpreting these themes to understand how multicultural education is implemented and how it contributes to strengthening santri character. The findings are presented in a descriptive narrative form to provide a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the case.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Results

The findings indicate that multicultural education in the pesantren is implemented through daily learning processes, social interaction, and communal habituation rather than through a specific formal subject. The pesantren environment functions as a social space where students from different cultural and regional backgrounds interact continuously in both academic and non-academic activities. In this context, multicultural values such as tolerance, equality, cooperation, and mutual respect are embedded within classroom learning, group activities, dormitory life, and daily communication among santri. Teachers play an important role in integrating multicultural values into learning activities, while students experience these values directly through collective interaction and shared responsibilities in pesantren life.

Observation data also show that multicultural practices are reflected in mixed-group discussions, collaborative assignments, communal worship, and dormitory activities that encourage interaction among students from diverse backgrounds. Through

these routines, students gradually develop awareness and understanding of cultural differences in practical rather than theoretical ways. The following interview and observation data illustrate how multicultural education is implemented in daily pesantren activities.

Table 1: Implementation of Multicultural Education in Pesantren Learning Activities

Interview / Observation Data	Description	Code
<i>"We do not teach multicultural education as a separate subject, but we insert it in daily lessons and interactions among santri"</i> (N1).	Integration of multicultural values into daily learning activities	Integrated Learning
<i>"Students are guided to respect differences in culture and language during group activities"</i> (N2).	Teacher guidance in respecting diversity during collaborative learning	Respect for Diversity
<i>"We come from different regions, but in pesantren we are treated equally and learn to work together"</i> (N3).	Equality and cooperation among students from different backgrounds	Equality and Cooperation
<i>"When doing tasks, we are always mixed in groups so we can understand each other"</i> (N4).	Mixed group learning to encourage intercultural interaction	Heterogeneous Grouping
<i>"Habituation is the key; students learn tolerance through daily practice, not theory only"</i> (N5).	Daily habituation as a strategy for multicultural internalization	Habituation Practice
Observation shows students from different ethnic backgrounds participating together in classroom discussions, dormitory cleaning, and communal religious activities.	Daily interaction and shared activities strengthen multicultural understanding	Communal Interaction

Table 1 shows that the implementation of multicultural education in pesantren is carried out through structured daily interaction and communal learning practices. The data reveal several important forms of multicultural implementation that contribute to students' social and character development as follows:

First, integrated learning. The findings demonstrate that multicultural education is not positioned as an independent subject but is embedded within everyday teaching and interaction. Teachers consciously integrate values such as tolerance, equality, and respect into classroom discussions and social activities. This indicates that multicultural education in pesantren is practiced contextually through real interaction rather than

merely delivered theoretically. Such integration allows students to experience multicultural values directly within authentic social situations.

Second, respect for diversity. The interview data show that teachers actively guide students to appreciate cultural and linguistic differences during collaborative activities. This guidance becomes important because students come from various social and regional backgrounds with distinct communication styles and cultural habits. Through continuous interaction, students gradually learn to accept differences as part of collective life within pesantren. Respect for diversity therefore emerges not only as a moral principle but also as a practical social skill developed through repeated interaction.

Third, equality and cooperation. The findings indicate that students experience equal treatment regardless of their cultural origins. The pesantren environment encourages students to work together, share responsibilities, and support one another in both academic and daily activities. This equality strengthens social solidarity among santri and reduces the possibility of exclusive social grouping based on ethnicity or regional identity. Cooperation becomes an important mechanism through which students internalize inclusive attitudes in communal life.

Fourth, heterogeneous grouping. The use of mixed-group assignments reflects a deliberate strategy to facilitate intercultural interaction among students. By placing students from different backgrounds in the same group, pesantren creates opportunities for dialogue, adaptation, and mutual understanding. These interactions help students develop communication skills, empathy, and openness toward diverse perspectives. Heterogeneous grouping therefore functions not only as a learning strategy but also as a medium for multicultural socialization.

Fifth, habituation practice. The findings emphasize that multicultural understanding is primarily developed through habituation and daily practice rather than formal theoretical instruction. Activities such as communal worship, dormitory cleaning, eating together, and collaborative learning provide continuous opportunities for students to practice tolerance and cooperation. This demonstrates that multicultural education in pesantren operates as a lived experience embedded within students' everyday routines and social interactions.

Overall, the findings suggest that multicultural education in pesantren is implemented through integrated learning, communal interaction, and habituation processes that continuously expose students to diversity. These practices create meaningful social experiences that encourage students to develop tolerance, cooperation, and mutual respect as part of their character formation within the pesantren environment.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study illustrate that multicultural education in the pesantren environment in South Kalimantan is not implemented as a formal subject, but rather as a lived experience embedded in daily interactions, learning activities, and social relationships among santri. This form of implementation shows that education in pesantren extends beyond cognitive learning into character formation through habituation (Ramadhan, 2021). Santri from diverse cultural backgrounds are placed in a shared living and learning space, which naturally requires them to interact, adapt, and collaborate (Keser Aschenberger et al., 2023). In this process, values such as tolerance, respect, and cooperation are continuously practiced rather than merely taught. The interview data consistently reflect this reality, where both teachers and students emphasize that multicultural understanding grows through daily experiences, group activities, and social mixing rather than structured theoretical instruction.

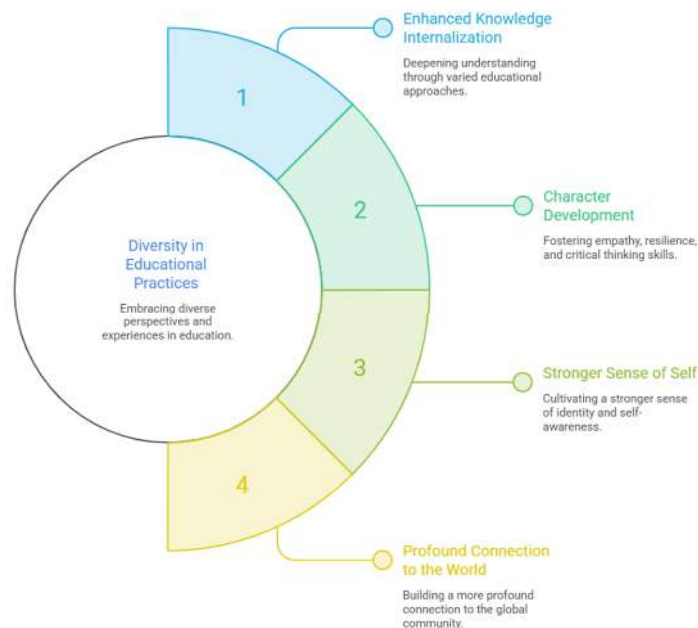


Figure 1: Key Outcomes of Multicultural Education in Pesantren

The figure 1 illustrates the major outcomes of multicultural education implemented in pesantren in South Kalimantan. The findings indicate that multicultural education is embedded in daily interactions, communal living, collaborative learning, and shared responsibilities among santri from diverse cultural backgrounds. Through these continuous experiences, students are exposed to different perspectives, values, and cultural practices, enabling them to develop a deeper understanding of diversity and strengthen their knowledge internalization (Huda et al., 2024). At the same time, regular

social interaction fosters character development by nurturing tolerance, empathy, cooperation, respect, and social responsibility. The multicultural environment also contributes to a stronger sense of self, as santri learn to appreciate their own identity while recognizing and respecting the identities of others (Geletu & Mihiretie, 2023). Furthermore, continuous engagement with diversity broadens their perspectives and promotes a stronger connection to the wider social world. Together, these outcomes demonstrate that multicultural education in pesantren functions not merely as the transmission of knowledge but as a holistic process of character formation and personal development that is continuously cultivated through everyday lived experiences.

This implementation process emphasizes that education in pesantren goes beyond cognitive learning and moves toward the internalization of multicultural knowledge and character formation through habituation. Through various group activities and continuous social interaction, important values such as tolerance, respect, and cooperation are actively practiced rather than merely taught in theory (Enginkaya & Saglam, 2025). Data from both teachers and santri consistently reflect that multicultural understanding develops from these daily lived experiences. Repeated exposure to diverse social interactions enables students not only to acquire knowledge about diversity but also to internalize multicultural values in meaningful ways (Kalocsai et al., 2025). This process of habituation demonstrates how the pesantren environment functions as a holistic educational ecosystem where learning is inseparable from daily life (Ezzaim et al., 2024; Kiyak & Kononowicz, 2024). Santri are continuously placed in situations that require negotiation, empathy, and mutual adjustment, naturally shaping their social attitudes, emotional maturity, and understanding of cultural diversity. The integration of multicultural values into communal living, shared responsibilities, and collaborative learning creates a continuous cycle of experience, reflection, and value internalization. As a result, students develop inclusive mindsets and constructive approaches to managing differences, making multicultural learning an integral part of character development.

The implementation of multicultural education also demonstrates a strong connection with character development among santri. The findings reveal that students gradually develop openness, empathy, patience, social responsibility, and awareness of diversity as a result of living in a multicultural environment. This transformation occurs through continuous exposure to cultural differences and shared responsibilities in pesantren life (Graham et al., 2024; Rozzaqyah & Dwi Sucipto, 2023). The practice of grouping students from different regions, encouraging collaboration in tasks, and fostering communal living contributes significantly to shaping their attitudes and behaviors (Munawwaroh, 2024; Uyuni, 2024). Students begin to view differences not as barriers but as valuable elements of social reality that deserve recognition and respect.

These experiences strengthen not only their interpersonal skills but also their moral character, demonstrating that multicultural education contributes directly to the formation of positive personal qualities through everyday practice.

The process of character development is reinforced by the presence of structured yet flexible social environments that encourage informal learning beyond the classroom. Daily routines create natural opportunities for santri to engage in dialogue, resolve minor conflicts, and cooperate in collective responsibilities. These experiences gradually improve their ability to regulate emotions, appreciate different viewpoints, and respond thoughtfully to social situations. The repetitive nature of these interactions strengthens internal value systems and promotes a stronger sense of self. Through ongoing engagement with diversity, students become more aware of their own identities while simultaneously learning to appreciate the identities and perspectives of others. Consequently, character traits become deeply rooted in lived experiences rather than temporary behavioral adjustments.

The multicultural setting of the pesantren also functions as a formative space where identity construction takes place through continuous social negotiation. Santri are exposed to diverse cultural expressions, communication styles, and behavioral norms, requiring them to adapt while maintaining mutual respect. This adaptation process contributes to the development of social flexibility, resilience, and self-awareness, enabling students to navigate diversity with greater confidence. As these interactions accumulate over time, they shape a collective culture that emphasizes harmony, inclusivity, and shared responsibility. Beyond strengthening individual character, this process broadens students' perspectives and enhances their connection to the wider social world, preparing them to engage constructively in increasingly diverse communities.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identifies challenges in the implementation of multicultural education. Differences in language, habits, and cultural expressions among santri initially create adjustment difficulties and occasional misunderstandings (Kircaburun et al., 2024; Zamroni et al., 2023). Some students require time to adapt to unfamiliar communication styles and traditions. These challenges highlight that multicultural integration is a gradual process requiring consistent guidance and supportive institutional practices (Dahri et al., 2024; Korte et al., 2024). Teachers play an important role in facilitating this adaptation by creating inclusive learning environments and encouraging students to engage with peers from different backgrounds. Over time, these challenges tend to diminish as students become more accustomed to diversity, develop stronger interpersonal understanding, and strengthen their multicultural competence.

The findings of this study can be analyzed through the lens of Social Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura. This theory emphasizes that individuals learn behaviors, values, and attitudes through observation, imitation, and interaction within social contexts. In the pesantren setting, santri learn multicultural values not solely through direct instruction but by observing and engaging with peers and teachers in everyday life. When students witness respectful behavior, cooperation across cultural differences, and inclusive attitudes being practiced consistently, they are likely to internalize and reproduce those behaviors. The habituation process identified in this study reflects Bandura's concept of observational learning, where knowledge, values, and behavior are shaped through continuous exposure to social models.

This process demonstrates that the social environment of the pesantren functions as an active learning space where multicultural knowledge and values are internalized through lived experiences. Continuous interactions among santri, teachers, and peers create patterns of social reinforcement that strengthen positive behaviors. Actions reflecting tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation become observable examples that are subsequently imitated and transformed into collective habits. The presence of role models further strengthens the internalization process (Riedmann-Streitz et al., 2024). Through this mechanism, students not only acquire multicultural understanding but also develop stronger personal identities and social awareness. This finding suggests that multicultural character development emerges through an ongoing process of social adaptation embedded within the daily structure of pesantren life.

Social Learning Theory further explains that the character development observed among santri results from reinforcement within their social environment (Gulzar et al., 2024; Lutfauziah et al., 2024). Positive behaviors such as tolerance, empathy, and cooperation are reinforced through peer acceptance, teacher guidance, and successful social interaction (Rossi et al., 2020). These reinforcements encourage students to repeat behaviors that receive positive responses from their surroundings. In the pesantren context, social approval and affirmation serve as powerful motivational factors that sustain prosocial behavior and strengthen multicultural values as part of students' everyday character.

Although this study is situated within the pesantren context of South Kalimantan, its implications extend to broader discussions of multicultural education. The findings suggest that multicultural education is most effective when embedded within daily social experiences rather than delivered solely through formal instruction. By integrating diversity into communal living, collaborative learning, and shared responsibilities, educational institutions can promote knowledge internalization, character development, identity formation, and broader social awareness simultaneously. The challenges identified in this study are interpreted not as failures of multicultural education but as

essential stages in the learning process. This perspective reinforces the argument that multicultural competence develops gradually through continuous interaction, adaptation, and reflection rather than through instant instructional approaches alone.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted in a limited pesantren context in South Kalimantan, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to other pesantren settings with different cultural, social, and institutional characteristics. Second, the study relied primarily on interview data, which may not fully capture the complexity of multicultural interactions and character development processes occurring in everyday pesantren life. Although interview data provided rich insights into participants' experiences, more extensive observational evidence could strengthen the validity of the findings. Third, the study focused on the perceptions of teachers and santri at a particular point in time, making it difficult to examine how multicultural values and character development evolve over longer periods. Future research is therefore recommended to involve multiple pesantren settings, employ longitudinal approaches, incorporate stronger observational triangulation, and explore comparative models of multicultural education across different educational contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how multicultural values are internalized and contribute to character formation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of multicultural education in pesantren in South Kalimantan is embedded in the daily lives of santri rather than being delivered solely through formal classroom instruction. Multicultural values are developed through communal living, collaborative learning, shared responsibilities, and continuous interaction among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. These everyday experiences provide opportunities for santri to learn how to respect differences, cooperate with others, and adapt to diverse social environments. As a result, values such as tolerance, empathy, mutual respect, and social responsibility are gradually internalized through habituation and practical experience rather than through theoretical learning alone.

The findings further demonstrate that multicultural education contributes significantly to the strengthening of santri character. Continuous exposure to cultural diversity encourages students to develop openness, emotional maturity, social awareness, and the ability to build harmonious relationships with others. The pesantren environment functions as a holistic educational ecosystem where academic learning, social interaction, and character formation occur simultaneously. Through repeated engagement in multicultural experiences, students not only gain a deeper understanding of diversity but also develop a stronger sense of self and a broader awareness of their role within society. These findings support Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that values and

behaviors are acquired through observation, interaction, imitation, and reinforcement within a social environment.

This study contributes to the growing discourse on multicultural education by highlighting that effective character development can be achieved when multicultural values are integrated into the everyday culture and practices of educational institutions. The findings suggest that multicultural education should be understood as a lived and continuous process that shapes attitudes, behaviors, and social relationships over time. Therefore, pesantren and other educational institutions can utilize diversity as an educational resource to foster inclusive character, social cohesion, and mutual understanding. In an increasingly diverse society, this approach offers an alternative model of character education that emphasizes meaningful social experiences as the foundation for developing responsible, tolerant, and socially aware individuals.

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