

## Strengthening Religious Tolerance through Islamic Religious Education

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### ABSTRACT

In Indonesia’s pluralistic society, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in fostering students’ religious tolerance. This study investigates how PAI learning strengthens interreligious tolerance among university students through values of moderation and nonviolence. Using a qualitative approach, six students from different classes and academic years at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten were interviewed through semi-structured questions. The findings reveal that PAI not only provides theoretical knowledge but also practical experiences, such as discussions, case studies, and group projects, that promote empathy, fairness, and peaceful coexistence. Lecturer guidance, inclusive learning materials, and interactive classroom activities were identified as key factors in internalizing tolerance values. The study suggests that integrating participatory learning, interfaith seminars, and real-life examples of tolerance can further enhance the effectiveness of PAI education in shaping students’ attitudes.

**Keywords:** *Religious tolerance; Islamic Education; Nonviolence culture; Students; Moderation.*

### INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia’s diverse cultural and religious landscape, tolerance has become a core pillar of social harmony. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) not only provides knowledge about faith and worship but also instills values of humanity, compassion, and respect for others (Anwar, 2016). Recent research shows that episodes of intolerance persist among students despite these educational initiatives, frequently as a result of a lack of exposure to interfaith relationships and a limited comprehension of religious pluralism.

PAI plays a strategic role in addressing these issues by fostering awareness that Islam promotes peace and coexistence (*rahmatan lil ‘alamin*). Strengthening tolerance through PAI learning should be based on a culture of nonviolence that respects differences and avoids ideological rigidity (Mutholingah, 2021). Furthermore, textbooks and learning materials in PAI courses can provide concrete examples of moral behavior and interfaith respect, helping students internalize tolerance values (Mawadda et al., 2023).

Students at my university frequently connect with friends from different religious backgrounds during campus events. These exchanges underscore how

important it is to put PAI lessons into practice. For example, class discussions might motivate students to organise awareness campaigns or volunteer for interfaith projects, demonstrating that tolerance is not just a theoretical concept but is also actively applied in everyday life. Although it is rarely discussed in formal literature, this feature offers crucial context for comprehending how PAI affects students' behaviour in authentic settings.

The curriculum and teaching approach also significantly influence students' attitudes. Inclusive curricula and integration of religious moderation ensure that students gain balanced perspectives on coexistence and social responsibility (Hanif et al., 2025). In order to develop empathy and a practical grasp of tolerance, lecturers' instruction and role modelling are equally crucial. In PAI learning environments, workshops, case studies, and dialogue-based activities can further improve students' ability to interact well with classmates from different backgrounds.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate how PAI instruction at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten strengthens students' religious tolerance. It focusses on how the curriculum, instructional strategies, and student involvement promote respect for one another, awareness of religious difference, and moderation in day-to-day interactions. By comprehending these elements, this study aims to give educators and legislators the knowledge they need to maximise PAI as a tool for fostering peaceful cohabitation in a pluralistic society.

## **METHODS**

### **Subjects of Research**

Six students from the same department at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, representing different classes and academic years, served as the research's subjects. Purposive sampling was used in their selection to guarantee a range of viewpoints and experiences in PAI education. A more thorough examination of how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) affects students' tolerance is made possible by the participants' diverse social origins and degrees of religious engagement. The study concentrated on how PAI courses help students internalise tolerance values and how these values manifest in their regular academic interactions. After being made aware of the study's goal and confidentiality protocols, each subject freely consented to participate.

### **Instruments and Interview Questions**

The main research instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide. This instrument allowed flexibility for the researcher to explore participants' personal experiences while still focusing on core research themes such as tolerance, moderation, and interreligious understanding within the PAI context.

The interview questions were designed to capture students’ reflections on both cognitive (understanding of tolerance) and affective (attitude and empathy) dimensions. The key interview questions included:

1. How do you perceive the role of PAI courses in fostering religious tolerance?
2. What aspects of PAI learning most influence your attitude toward people of other beliefs?
3. How do lecturers and class discussions affect your views about diversity?
4. Do you find the PAI curriculum inclusive and open to interreligious understanding?
5. What improvements do you suggest for PAI learning to strengthen tolerance?

### Data Collection

Over the course of a week, direct interviews were used to gather data. To ensure transparency, each interview took place in a calm, comfortable setting and lasted between ten to twenty minutes. With the participants' permission, the interviews were taped in Indonesian and then verbatim transcribed. Throughout the interviews, the researcher remained impartial, refraining from passing judgement, and concentrated on assisting participants in sharing sincere experiences pertaining to tolerance in the context of PAI learning. All transcripts were examined twice to confirm response uniformity and assure dependability.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students expressed that PAI not only teaches theoretical knowledge but also provides practical experiences that help them understand tolerance. They mentioned that classroom discussions, assignments, and case studies make it easier for them to respect people of different beliefs and apply tolerance in their daily interactions.

These findings are in line with previous studies showing that Islamic education grounded in nonviolence and inclusive values fosters peaceful coexistence (Mutholingah, 2021) and that PAI can serve as an effective medium to nurture tolerance in pluralistic societies (Anwar, 2016). (Tabel. 1)

**Table 1.** The Role of PAI in Fostering Religious Tolerance

No	Students’ Answers
1	“PAI helps me understand that tolerance is about respecting others.”
2	“It teaches values that we can practice in daily life with different beliefs.”
3	“Through PAI, I realize the importance of empathy and fairness.”
4	“PAI discussions show how we can live peacefully with others.”
5	“It gives me awareness to avoid judging people from other religions.”
6	“Lecturers explain real-life examples that make tolerance more tangible.”

Students emphasized that the most significant factors in developing tolerance through PAI are the examples set by lecturers, interactive class

discussions, assignments, and collaborative group projects. These activities provide practical experiences that allow students to apply the values of empathy, fairness, and peaceful coexistence in real situations. Furthermore, textbooks and other learning materials serve as supportive resources, reinforcing these moral principles and helping students deepen their understanding of tolerance (Mawadda et al., 2023).

**Table 2.** PAI Aspects that Most Influence Attitude

No	Students' Answers
1	“Lecturer examples and case studies help me see tolerance in practice.”
2	“Class discussions allow me to reflect on different beliefs.”
3	“Assignments encourage us to think about interfaith cooperation.”
4	“Group projects make me collaborate with peers of different backgrounds.”
5	“Textbooks show stories of moral and tolerant behavior.”
6	“Lecturer guidance in class discussions shapes my understanding of respect.”

According to (Mulasi & Saputra, 2024) and (Muh Habibulloh, 2024), lecturers must share real-world examples, promote discussion, and set an example of polite behaviour in order to assist students in making the connection between abstract ideas and real-world applications. This is consistent with the opinions of the students, who said that open class discussions and lecturer guidance enable them to reflect on actual circumstances and internalise the ideals of tolerance, empathy, and respect.

**Table 3.** Influence of Lecturers and Class Discussions

No	Students' Answers
1	“Lecturers guide us in analyzing diversity and tolerance examples.”
2	“Discussion lets us hear different perspectives.”
3	“Role modeling by lecturers shows us how to act respectfully. ”
4	“Lecturers encourage questions, making class more interactive.”
5	“Debates and dialogue help us critically reflect on our biases.”
6	“Case studies in class demonstrate tolerance in everyday life.”

Mawadda et al. (2023) and Hanif et al. (2025) emphasise that lessons on other religions and cultures, as well as well-structured learning materials and textbooks, are crucial in fostering students' empathy, justice, and ability to cohabit peacefully. Accordingly, pupils said that the PAI curriculum fosters interreligious understanding and feels inclusive. They said that dialogue-based exercises and conversations about other cultural viewpoints enable them to value diversity and cultivate tolerance in their day-to-day experiences on campus.

**Table 4.** Inclusiveness of PAI Curriculum

No	Students' Answers
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1	“The curriculum includes lessons about different religions and cultures.”
2	“I feel that PAI encourages interfaith understanding.”
3	“Textbooks provide moral guidance related to tolerance.”
4	“Lecturers “Activities show the importance of moderation and peaceful coexistence.” questions, making class more interactive.”
5	“Class discussions highlight differences without judging.”
6	“Lecturer explanations help understand values beyond theory.”

In order to develop religious tolerance, students proposed a number of approaches to enhance PAI education. They suggested holding more participatory class discussions, planning seminars or workshops with classmates from various religious backgrounds, incorporating contemporary social issues into case studies, working on cooperative group projects, and engaging in role-playing exercises. Students emphasised that they are better able to internalise the ideals presented in class when they use tolerance in real-life circumstances on campus.

**Table 5.** Students’ Suggestions for Improving PAI Learning

No	Students’ Answers
1	“Include more interactive discussions about real-life religious diversity.”
2	“Workshops or seminars with students from different religions to practice tolerance.”
3	“Include case studies from current social issues related to religious harmony.”
4	“More group projects requiring collaboration with students of other faiths.”
5	“Organize role-play activities simulating interfaith dialogue.”
6	“Provide more examples of tolerance in campus environment, not just theory.”

Overall, students reported that the combination of lecturer guidance, interactive learning methods, and exposure to practical interfaith cooperation developed a more holistic understanding of tolerance, integrating empathy, social responsibility, and peaceful coexistence.

## CONCLUSION

This study draws the conclusion that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) significantly contributes to the development of religious tolerance based on interviews with six students from various classes and academic years at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten. Through conversations, assignments, case studies, and group projects, students believe that PAI promotes practical applications in addition to theoretical knowledge. Respectful attitudes towards people of diverse religions were found to be shaped by lecturer supervision, inclusive learning resources, and an open classroom setting. More interactive exercises, seminars with peers of many religions, role-playing games, and actual instances of tolerance in campus settings,

according to students, should improve PAI education even more. These results are consistent with other research, demonstrating that incorporating inclusive curricula, a nonviolent culture, and religious moderation successfully promotes pupils' comprehension of tolerance. Overall, PAI has the potential to shape students' values, empathy, and social responsibility, preparing them to live peacefully and respectfully in a pluralistic society.

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