

FROM COMPASSION TO DIVERSITY: STRENGTHENING TEACHERS' MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS AREA

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Abstract: This article aims to describe the strengthening and application of multicultural competence among Religious Education teachers in Lumajang Regency as a means to curb radicalism and foster tolerance within the school environment. A qualitative research design employing a case study approach was used to explore the phenomenon in depth across the teachers' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Data were gathered through fieldwork including interviews, observations of instructional interactions, and documentation of activities involving teachers belonging to the Religious Education Subject Teacher Forum (MGMP) in Pasrujambe District, Lumajang Regency. Qualitative data analysis was conducted interactively, encompassing data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing based on a synthesis of social learning theory, operant conditioning, and perspective-taking. The findings indicate that multicultural competence is integrated across three spheres: the cognitive dimension, where teachers cultivate critical understanding and universal interfaith values without imposing doctrine, thereby fostering a sense of compassion among the school community; the affective aspect, fostered through the habituation of greetings and teachers modeling inclusive behavior; and the psychomotor sphere, where multicultural values are manifested through concrete actions, such as showing mutual respect for major religious observances (Eid al-Fitr, Nyepi, and Galungan) and respecting differences in social organizations.

Keywords: Multicultural Competence, Religious Education Teachers, Tolerance, Learning Environment

Abstract: Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penguatan dan penerapan kompetensi multikultural guru Pendidikan Agama di Kabupaten Lumajang dalam membendung radikalisme serta meningkatkan toleransi di lingkungan sekolah. Jenis penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus untuk mengeksplorasi fenomena secara mendalam pada ranah kognitif, afektif, dan psikomotorik guru. Sumber data diperoleh dari data lapangan melalui wawancara, observasi interaksi pembelajaran, serta dokumentasi kegiatan guru yang tergabung dalam Forum Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP) Pendidikan Agama di Kecamatan Pasrujambe, Kabupaten Lumajang. Analisis data kualitatif dilakukan secara interaktif, meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan berdasarkan sintesis teori belajar sosial, conditioning operan, serta perspective-taking. Hasil

penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa kompetensi multikultural diintegrasikan ke dalam tiga lingkup, yaitu dimensi kognitif: guru membangun pemahaman kritis dan nilai universal lintas agama tanpa pemaksaan doktrin, sehingga terbentuk kesadaran welas asih (*compassion*) antarwarga sekolah. Pada aspek afektif, melalui pembiasaan salam serta keteladanan perlakuan guru. Sedangkan pada lingkup psikomotorik, nilai multikultural diwujudkan melalui tindakan nyata, seperti saling menghormati perayaan hari besar keagamaan (Idulfitri, Nyepi, dan Galungan) serta menghargai perbedaan organisasi kemasyarakatan.

Kata Kunci: Kompetensi Multikultural, Guru Agama, Toleransi, Lingkungan belajar.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a primary focus in contemporary education, particularly due to the importance of ensuring equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their differences.¹ This approach focuses not only on academics but also on the development of students' social and emotional character, enabling them to participate actively in society by addressing their needs and nurturing their interests and talents.² Research by Buenconsejo found that students in inclusive learning environments demonstrated higher academic achievement and better social skills compared to those in segregated settings.³ This is supported by Llorent's research, which concluded that inclusive and collaborative learning environments where students work in groups to complete tasks foster mutual respect and effectively curb bullying behavior.⁴

One relevant approach is the "Love-Based Curriculum" developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; it aims to create a comfortable, safe, and respectful learning atmosphere where students feel valued and

¹ Ahmad Zarkasyi, "Epistemology and Strategy of Multicultural Islamic Education," *Syaikhuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pranata Islam* 12, no. 2 (2021): 114–22, <https://doi.org/10.36835/syaikhuna.v12i2.5116>.

² Klavdija Zorec, "Continuity, collaboration, and culture: toward co-creating sustainable assistive technology ecosystems for inclusive higher education: International Journal of Inclusive Education: Vol 0, No 0 - Get Access," *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2026.2712437>.

³ Jet Uy Buenconsejo, "Empowering Southeast Asian Students Through Positive Youth Development: A Pathway to Equitable, Inclusive, and Sustainable Education," dalam *Handbook of Asian Educational Innovation towards the Futures of Education*, XI (Springer, Singapore, 2026), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-3901-4_97-1.

⁴ Vicente J. Llorent dkk., "Inclusive education by teachers to the development of the social and emotional competencies of their students in secondary education," *Learning and Instruction* 91 (Juni 2024): 101892, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2024.101892>.

accepted within the school environment.⁵ However, research by Musthofa indicates that while values of love have begun to be incorporated into lesson plans (RPP), the actual implementation remains fragmented and incomplete.⁶ This reveals a conceptual gap between the vision of humanistic learning and actual classroom practice.

According to research by Sari, these limitations are exacerbated by a lack of specialized training that integrates values of compassion and empathy into teachers' multicultural competence.⁷ Multicultural competence is understood as a teacher's comprehensive ability to function effectively within a culturally diverse society.⁸ These findings align with research conducted by Abellán, which showed that the school employed educators from diverse religious backgrounds Catholic, Islamic, and Protestant.⁹ All of them demonstrated tolerance and sensitivity toward the needs of students holding various religious beliefs.¹⁰

While various previous studies have addressed the crucial role of teachers in supporting inclusive education, the focus and context of those studies differ from the present research. This study examines in depth how schools facilitate teachers in developing the multicultural competence needed to create inclusive learning environments for all students. The focus extends beyond policy aspects and institutional support to include the teachers' roles, methods for tailoring instruction to individual student needs, and strategies for fostering positive classroom social interactions that support successful inclusive education.

⁵ Thita M. Mazya, "Religious and Cultural Diversity in Indonesia: Dynamics of Acceptance and Conflict in a Multidimensional Perspective," *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review* 07, no. 07 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/V7-i7-32>.

⁶ Ali Mustofa, "PELAKSANAAN KOMPETENSI PROFESIONAL GURU PAI DALAM PENINGKATAN EFEKTIVITAS BELAJAR PESERTA DIDIK DI SMAN 3 JOMBANG," *Ilmuna: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam* 1, no. 1 (2019): 40–57.

⁷ Zola Permata Sari dkk., "The Implementation of Inclusive Education in Indonesia: Challenges and Achievements," *Journal Public Policy* 8, no. 4 (2022): 264–69, <https://doi.org/10.35308/jpp.v8i4.5420>.

⁸ Louise Boland dkk., "An experimental investigation of the effects of perspective-taking on emotional discomfort, cognitive fusion and self-compassion," *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science* 20 (April 2021): 27–34, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2021.02.004>.

⁹ Miguel Abellán, "Catholics, Protestants and Muslims: Similar work ethics, different social and political ethics," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 51, no. 3 (2023): 778–815, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2023.02.004>.

¹⁰ Ho Cheong Lam, "Teachers' understanding of cultural diversity: phenomenography of ethnically diverse children in Hong Kong," *Multicultural Education Review* 14, no. 1 (2022): 28–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2022.2040143>.

Senior High School in Pasrujambe District, Lumajang Regency, was selected as the research site due to the district's population diversity regarding religious backgrounds. Religious education teachers in Pasrujambe District are members of the Religious Education Subject Teachers' Forum (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran Pendidikan Agama*). Furthermore, the development of multicultural competence among teachers at the Pasrujambe Madrasah Aliyah receives specialized guidance from the Interfaith Communication Forum (FKUB) to translate the concept of "knowing" (knowledge) into "doing" (concrete action).¹¹ This is achieved through three key aspects, specifically integration within subjects such as Civics (PKN), Indonesian Language, Mathematics, and Natural Sciences. Moreover, schools in this district advance inclusive education by leveraging teachers' multicultural competence within extracurricular activities, such as arts and cultural workshops. The school also organizes special programs, including cultural days, tolerance training, and community service initiatives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach characterized by a naturalistic setting.¹² It utilizes a case study design aimed at conducting an in-depth investigation into teachers' attitudes and multicultural competence.¹³ The primary sources of information for this study are the religious education teachers who are members of the Lumajang Regency Religious Education Subject Teachers' Forum and who conduct their activities in Pasrujambe District, Lumajang.

As the key instrument, the researcher conducted data collection¹⁴ including interviews, observations, and documentation directly at the research site. In-depth interviews were used to gather information regarding the role of the Lumajang Regency Religious Education Subject Teachers' Forum in developing teachers'

¹¹ Zainul Arifin dkk., "Ministry Of Religious Affairs' Innovative Strategy In Building Lumajang District As A Model Of Religious Moderation," *Journal of Research and Thought on Islamic Education (JRTIE)* 7, no. 2 (2024): 122–39, <https://doi.org/10.24260/jrtie.v7i2.3207>.

¹² Oliver Rudolf Herber, "Theory in qualitative research: a qualitative study of research experts," springer, BMC Medical Research Methodology | Springer Nature Link, diakses 26 Mei 2026, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12874-025-02752-6>.

¹³ Steven Tenny dkk., "Qualitative Study," dalam *StatPearls* (StatPearls Publishing, 2026), <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470395/>.

¹⁴ Dr Neeraj Kumar Sharma, "Instruments Used in the Collection of Data in Research," SSRN Scholarly Paper no. 4138751 (Social Science Research Network, 1 Mei 2022), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4138751>.

multicultural competence,¹⁵ while observations aimed to describe the interaction dynamics between teachers and students.¹⁶

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative methods, comprising data reduction, data display, interpretation, and verification. To ensure the validity of the research data, the researcher employed qualitative verification approaches such as triangulation, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and confirmability.¹⁷

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presented below are research data regarding the scope of multicultural competence dimensions among religious education teachers members of the Religious Education Subject Teachers' Forum in creating an inclusive educational environment in Lumajang Regency. The research findings illustrate the teachers' multicultural competence as follows:

A. Multicultural Competence in the Aspect of Cognitive Compassion.

Efforts by teachers in the Religious Education Subject Teachers' Forum to instill multicultural values within the cognitive aspect focus on developing students' mindsets, broadening their perspectives, and fostering critical thinking regarding religious diversity. In this realm, teachers aim not only to cultivate tolerant emotional attitudes but also to build a foundation of accurate knowledge concerning pluralism.

The researcher identified this cognitive-domain multicultural competence based on field data revealing religious education teachers' desire to impart multicultural values to students, driven by concerns regarding the prevalence of potentially radical and intolerant religious ideologies. These concerns stem from a fear of actions associated with radical religious movements. Teachers believe it is essential to reinforce multicultural and religious values so that students are not easily provoked after completing their schooling. And according to research

¹⁵ Alexis Bazen dkk., "Research Techniques Made Simple: An Introduction to Qualitative Research," *Journal of Investigative Dermatology* 141, no. 2 (2021): 241-247.e1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jid.2020.11.029>.

¹⁶ Oliver C. Robinson dan Deborah Bailey-Rodriguez, "Deductive qualitative research: an integrative approach to designing studies," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 23, no. 2 (2026): 369-84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2025.2604773>.

¹⁷ Moh Fatkhur Rozaq dkk., "ANALISIS DATA PENELITIAN KUALITATIF," *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Dan Humaniora* 5, no. 2 (2026): 1566-77.

findings, an understanding of religion and multicultural values are the factors that prevent children from joining radical groups.

In classroom practice, it is common for non-Muslim students to attend Islamic religious education classes even though it is not mandatory when the subject is being taught. In principle, Islamic religious education teachers never force Hindu students to participate in these lessons. Such coercion would not only be a radical stance but could also be open to abuse if a teacher were to act arbitrarily. Instead, the teacher makes a rational choice to be welcoming and tolerant, granting Hindu students freedom of choice an approach grounded in the ethics of a Muslim educator.

Based on this, it can be concluded that teachers belonging to the religious education teachers' forum in Lumajang Regency teach that fundamental values such as honesty, justice, compassion, social concern, and humanity are present in all religions. When covering specific topics (such as social ethics, moral conduct, or the history of civilization), teachers enrich the material by demonstrating, in a balanced and objective manner, how these noble values are also found or cherished in other religious traditions.

Social learning theory emphasizes observational learning as a process wherein individuals learn behaviors by systematically observing the rewards and punishments administered to others. The theory elucidates the continuous, reciprocal relationship between cognition, behavior, and the environment, thereby establishing a robust knowledge base for fostering multicultural understanding within the educational setting.

In the context of tolerance, research by B. Holmez indicates that perspective-taking a cognitive component of empathy is positively correlated with the affective component of tolerance toward other groups. This suggests that individuals capable of understanding others' perspectives tend to be more tolerant of differences.¹⁸ The multicultural competence fostered by these teachers and the religious education framework is grounded in a rational normative choice: a commitment to avoid emphasizing background differences

¹⁸ Yvonne Barnes-Holmes dkk., "Perspective-Taking and Theory of Mind: A Relational Frame Account," *The Behavior Analyst Today* 5, no. 1 (2004): 15–25, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0100133>.

between teachers and their colleagues.¹⁹ This ethical choice is intended to prevent existing differences from becoming exacerbated, prioritizing factors of harmony and unity instead.

B. Multicultural Competence in the Affective Aspect

The affective aspect often relates to feelings or emotions, motivation, interests, as well as attitudes and behaviors. This aspect is malleable and subject to change. In the context of a teacher's multicultural competence, the attitudinal aspect represents an expression of one's worldview or values, manifested through behavior. Religious education is an educational program aimed at shaping individuals in accordance with religious principles. The program seeks to prepare students to understand, internalize, and believe in their faith; to practice piety and embody noble character; and to live out the teachings of the religion they profess.

Regarding this affective aspect, several processes contribute to attitude formation, one of which is habituation. In the school learning process, researchers observed that teachers build multicultural competence by consistently reinforcing positive behaviors within the school environment. This occurs through practices such as using inclusive greetings or showing respect for various religious greetings when opening lessons or during daily interactions. Teachers in Lumajang actively engage in discussions within professional learning communities, civic organizations, or cross-cultural/interfaith forums to cultivate social flexibility and empathy. Teachers foster these habits in both themselves and their students.

A teacher's role as a role model for students is key to successfully preparing for and fostering a future spirit of cooperation between Hindu and Muslim communities. Teachers are viewed by the community as exemplary figures, serving as models for self-identification across all aspects of life. Thus, the example set by teachers has a positive impact on passing down a culture of civility among adherents of different religions.

Children bring these behaviors with them to school, as each student comes from a different background. This diversity forms the central focus of Islamic religious education with a multicultural perspective. While education has

¹⁹ Boland dkk., "An experimental investigation of the effects of perspective-taking on emotional discomfort, cognitive fusion and self-compassion."

traditionally emphasized the processes of "how to know," "how to do," and "how to be," education for tolerance introduces the dimension of "how to live and work together with others." Teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Pasrujambe Lumajang Regency instill this through students' active participation in activities that frame differences within the context of relationships and interdependence, thereby establishing equality among individuals. It is essential to recognize that every individual has the opportunity to live and to contribute to universal human well-being.

Skinner also explored the formation of attitudes through habituation via his theory of operant conditioning. The process of attitude formation through habituation employed by Watson differed from that of Skinner, who emphasized the reinforcement of a child's responses. Whenever a child demonstrated a desirable achievement or behavior, reinforcement was provided in the form of a reward or a pleasant interaction.²⁰ Over time, the child would strive to enhance their positive attitude.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of Bandura's social learning theory, students accustomed to practicing empathy in their daily interactions find it easier to develop a tolerant attitude, as they understand the importance of respecting the feelings and rights of others.²¹ Thirdly, from the perspective of social neuroscience, empathy involves the activation of the mirror neuron system, enabling individuals to experience what others are feeling.²² When a person is capable of sensing another's emotions, it becomes more difficult for them to act in a discriminatory or intolerant manner, as they perceive the negative impact of such behavior.

C. Diversity Competence in the Psychomotor Aspect

Researchers identified a model of multicultural competence among teachers at Pasrujambe State Senior High School. The multicultural attitude

²⁰ Henry D. Schlenger, "The impact of B. F. Skinner's science of operant learning on early childhood research, theory, treatment, and care," *Early Child Development and Care* 191, no. 7–8 (2021): 1089–106, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1855155>.

²¹ Dale H. Schunk dan Maria K. DiBenedetto, "Albert Bandura's legacy in education," *Theory Into Practice* 62, no. 3 (2023): 205–6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2023.2226560>.

²² Zarkasyi, "Epistemology and Strategy of Multicultural Islamic Education."

demonstrated by the educators was rooted in the school's established customs regarding the celebration of major religious holidays. The teacher explained how they approached these multicultural values based on the traditions surrounding religious holiday celebrations. In this instance, the Muslim teacher did not hesitate to attend religious celebrations held at the school, such as Nyepi, even though the gesture was not always reciprocated meaning their desire to participate did not always align with the invitations extended by those celebrating the event.

Conversely, the Hindu religious education teacher felt no reluctance in inviting Muslim teachers and students to attend the Galungan celebration a festival marking the victory of good (dharma) over evil (adharma) observed by the school's Hindu community. In this case, the Muslim peers responded positively by attending the Galungan celebration held by the school's Hindu community. A multicultural attitude is grounded in norms and values. A teacher's attitude and the embodiment of multicultural values are based on rational choices. Teachers consciously, deliberately, and purposefully practice these values to set an example for their students. Regarding implementation, the guiding principles for action are rooted in specific beliefs, norms, or ethics. In the context of this model, the researcher presents an overview based on the previously mentioned research data.

Another example beyond interfaith contexts is the multicultural attitude demonstrated by teachers at SMP Pasru Jambe in their interactions with colleagues. The school community, comprising both students and teachers, reflects diverse cultural backgrounds; some belong to the Muhammadiyah religious tradition, while others come from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) circles. Fundamentally, the teachers' attitudes toward students from different backgrounds do not convey discrimination; instead, a spirit of mutual respect and appreciation for differences has developed. Those with an NU background respect Muhammadiyah cultural practices, and conversely, those from the Muhammadiyah community respect the differences present among their peers.

In an educational environment characterized by diverse religious backgrounds and differing organizational affiliations, teachers in Lumajang

Regency are faced with the choice of how to approach multiculturalism specifically, by respecting and valuing the differences among their students. In Lumajang Regency, for instance, community activities often involve holding religious events alongside *tahlilan* (commemorative prayer) gatherings.

For example, observations revealed a situation where two religious events organized by different groups were scheduled for the same Thursday. Teachers in this multi-religious setting chose to show respect and consideration for the other group by ensuring that their loudspeakers were not directed toward the Hindu group conducting their own activities. This decision to honor and respect cultural diversity was rooted in the teacher's conviction as a Muslim of the necessity to value others and practice tolerance regarding differences; the multicultural competence mentioned earlier is thus actively practiced within the school environment. In developing multicultural psychomotor competencies, teachers have a rational choice to act in a non-discriminatory manner by treating their students with multicultural attitudes such as tolerance, friendliness, and a refusal to impose their will.²³

They put these multicultural values into practice because they recognize that, as both religious individuals and educators, they should not discriminate against those with different beliefs. Lickona offers a slightly different perspective, positing that teachers must act as caregivers, role models, and ethical mentors. These three roles are inseparable when it comes to guiding students and modeling appropriate attitudes. As caregivers, teachers should demonstrate care and sincerity in helping students, with the expectation that students will, in turn, extend that same sincerity to others around them.²⁴

Teachers belonging to the Religious Education Teachers' Forum in Lumajang Regency consistently implement multicultural competence by offering choices to non-Muslim students, who typically constitute a minority within the school environment. Furthermore, a rational commitment to civic values specifically the requirement to possess a national and pluralistic outlook leads

²³ Mazya, "Religious and Cultural Diversity in Indonesia."

²⁴ Jochem Thijs dkk., "The diversity teaching beliefs scale: Addressing cultural diversity, communalities between cultures, and the national culture in the classroom," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 153 (Januari 2025): 104846, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104846>.

these religious education teachers to apply multicultural attitudes in both the community and the school setting.²⁵ This multicultural attitude is not limited to religious differences; it can also manifest in the differing thought processes of teachers and students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that strengthening the multicultural competence of religious education teachers in Lumajang Regency encompasses three primary domains: cognitive-compassion, affective, and psychomotor-diversity. This approach aims to curb the dangers of radicalism, indoctrination, and intolerance among students. In the cognitive domain, strengthening understanding focuses on fostering critical thinking and a nationalistic outlook. Teachers instruct students that universal values such as honesty, justice, and humanity are taught by all religions. Through a rational and ethical approach, teachers grant non-Muslim students freedom of choice, free from coercion.

This learning process is supported by social learning theory and perspective-taking skills, which reinforce an objective understanding of pluralism. In the affective domain, multicultural competence is cultivated through emotional management, motivation, and the reinforcement of tolerant attitudes. This is realized through daily habits, such as using inclusive greetings and interacting harmoniously in cross-cultural settings. Teachers setting a good example is key to teaching how to live and work together amidst differences.

Regarding the psychomotor aspect, implementation is demonstrated through concrete actions and exemplary behavior in daily life. Teachers consciously attend and show respect for the traditions or major religious celebrations of other faiths such as Nyepi and Galungan and respect differences between religious organizations (like NU and Muhammadiyah). In practice, teachers demonstrate tangible tolerance, for instance, by adjusting the use of loudspeakers when other religious events are taking place simultaneously. Overall, teachers fulfill strategic roles as nurturers, role models, and ethical guides. This multicultural attitude is adopted based on rational choice and an awareness of national norms, aiming to create an educational environment that is inclusive, harmonious, and free from discrimination.

²⁵ Lam, "Teachers' understanding of cultural diversity."

The interplay of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in building multicultural competence is shaped by behavioral, environmental, and perceptual factors. In other words, a teacher's thoughts influence their behavior, and that behavior elicits reactions from students. The surrounding environment plays a similar role; environmental conditions influence individual behavior and evoke specific reactions in each student. The environment acts as a stimulus, prompting individuals to act based on what they observe and perceive fostering acceptance and tolerance regarding religious differences and understanding.

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