

Negotiating Tolerance and Belief Boundaries in Islamic Religious Education: A Case Study of a Plural Public School in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT (10pt)

In increasingly diverse school environments, Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) is supposed to foster tolerance while upholding students' religious beliefs. However, tolerance is frequently portrayed as a normative ideal without any pedagogical direction for dealing with actual interreligious interactions. In a multiple public school, this study explores how PAI serves as a pedagogical space for negotiating tolerance and defining the parameters of interreligious participation. A qualitative case study was conducted in class XI-9 at SMAN 1 Babadan, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a PAI teacher, written reflections from two Muslim students and one non-Muslim student, classroom and school observations, and supporting documents. The findings reveal that students develop tolerance not only through classroom instruction but also through everyday interreligious interaction within the school community. School activities strengthen cooperation and mutual respect, while the teacher plays a central role in distinguishing social respect, epistemic openness, and ritual participation when responding to interreligious issues. The study concludes that tolerance becomes educationally meaningful when translated into contextual pedagogical practices that help students navigate real interreligious experiences without compromising their religious beliefs. These findings contribute to multicultural Islamic education by highlighting belief-boundary negotiation as a key pedagogical dimension of tolerance education in plural schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious education consistently identifies tolerance as a fundamental value, yet its implementation in schools often falls short of preparing students to respond to the realities of religious diversity they encounter in everyday life (R'boul, 2021). Within the Indonesian educational context, Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) is expected not only to strengthen students' commitment to their own faith but also to cultivate their capacity to understand, appreciate, and interact constructively with individuals from different religious traditions (Mu'ti, 2023). This expectation is becoming increasingly difficult in schools with students with diverse religious backgrounds, because learning takes place in real interreligious interaction rather than in a homogeneous classroom (Utami, 2022). Thus, the main pedagogical challenge is not only to present tolerance as a moral principle, but also to require teachers to translate the concept into practical learning experiences that enable students to distinguish between social respect, epistemic openness, and religious engagement in their daily lives. The significance of this issue is closely linked to both educational policy and contemporary social demands. Multicultural education is one of the key elements of Indonesia's national curriculum (Raihani et al., 2025), but Islamic Religious Education (hereafter: PAI) increasingly faces the challenge to find a balance between religious commitment and respect for diversity and peaceful cohabitation in a plural society (Abubakar et al., 2023). However, analysis of senior high school PAI textbooks showed that the issues of tolerance, inclusiveness, and interfaith dialogue were still rather limited, implying the need for further

contextualized pedagogical approaches (Ritonga & Nurmawati, 2025). The challenge of promoting tolerance thus goes beyond theoretical discussion to the institutional and social realities of schooling. Without pedagogical strategies that bridge concepts with students' lived experiences, PAI risks being largely normative when learners encounter actual interreligious situations in plural educational institutions. The need to address this issue more concretely becomes evident in socially heterogeneous school contexts. At SMAN 1 Babadan, this study focuses on PAI learning in class XI-9, which consists of 34 students, including 33 Muslim students and 1 non-Muslim student. Although the non-Muslim student is given the option either to attend or not attend PAI classes, the student consistently chooses to participate in classroom learning. Discussions on tolerance therefore emerge from students' real experiences rather than from abstract theoretical explanations. Classroom dialogue often revolves around practical questions related to interreligious life such as visiting during Eid al-Fitr, engaging with Christmas activities, discussions on sacred texts, and visiting places of worship. Tolerance is not only about content delivery but requires actual learning experiences reinforced with appropriate pedagogical strategies (Ma'arif et al., 2022; Nuha et al., 2021). Therefore, the challenge for PAI is not only to clarify the notion of tolerance but also to guide students in interpreting their interreligious experiences in the realities of school life.

Although these realities in schools show that tolerance is a real educational issue, it has not been sufficiently examined as a specific pedagogical problem in Islamic Religious Education in previous research. Studies of PAI teaching materials show that the mentions of tolerance are still predominantly normative and ritualistic and the multicultural perspective is still underrepresented (Farouq et al., 2025). Other studies have shown that multicultural values can be internalized through instructional planning, classroom implementation, and continuous habituation. Even so, their primary emphasis is still placed on the general cultivation, but rather how students negotiate real interreligious situations (Afrian et al., 2025). Similarly, research on religious intellectual humility also found that students' tolerant attitudes are influenced by learning experiences that promote reflective thinking and intellectual openness (Pelupessy et al., 2022). Research in public secondary schools describes similarly PAI teachers as important persons to promote openness and balance in classroom practices (Abdul et al., 2024). However, the literature does not yet explain in depth how PAI becomes a pedagogical space for teachers to guide students in negotiating the boundaries of interreligious participation, especially in distinguishing social interaction from religious ritual. These limitations point to the need for a more coherent conceptual framework. This study begins with Paulo Freire's perspective, which views learning as a dialogical process grounded in students' lived experiences rather than as the simple transmission of prescribed knowledge from teacher to learner (Freire, 2005). Building on this perspective, multicultural PAI is understood as an educational orientation that connects Islamic teachings with the realities of a plural society while preserving students' religious commitments (Fakhruddin et al., 2023). The study also draws upon Azyumardi Azra's ideas, which emphasize that Islamic education should encourage peaceful coexistence without neglecting the normative foundations of faith (Yudhyarta et al., 2025). Religious literacy complements this perspective by highlighting students' capacity to understand religious diversity critically and to differentiate between social respect, epistemic openness, and ritual participation (Suyanto et al., 2024). Within this framework, negotiation refers to a socio-pedagogical process through which students and teachers examine concrete interreligious experiences, clarify participation boundaries, distinguish social and ritual domains, and determine appropriate forms of engagement in everyday school life. To clarify the analytical structure of this study, the four theoretical perspectives are presented as an integrated sequence rather than as separate concepts. Freire's problem-posing pedagogy provides the starting point by positioning students' real social experiences as the basis for learning, including the questions and tensions arising from interreligious encounters in school (Freire, 2005). Azra's perspective then establishes the normative direction by

explaining that Islamic education should strengthen religious commitment while preparing students to live constructively in a plural society (Azra, 2012). Religious literacy represents the competence students need to interpret religious differences thoughtfully and to distinguish between social respect, epistemic openness, and ritual participation. Finally, negotiation explains the pedagogical process through which teachers and students interpret concrete cases, define participation boundaries, and decide how involvement should be understood in specific situations. Taken together, these perspectives form a single analytical framework: Freire explains where learning begins, Azra defines its normative orientation, religious literacy describes the competence that students develop, and negotiation explains how belief boundaries are constructed throughout the learning process. Building on these pedagogical concerns, contextual demands, and gaps in previous studies, this research examines how interreligious coexistence is negotiated through PAI learning and everyday school life at SMAN 1 Babadan. In this study, negotiation is understood as a socio-pedagogical process through which teachers, students, and school practices establish the boundaries between social respect, epistemic openness, and religious ritual when responding to concrete interreligious situations. PAI learning is therefore viewed not simply as classroom instruction delivered during scheduled lessons, but as an educational practice that is closely connected to students' social experiences across the school environment. Accordingly, this study seeks to explain how PAI introduces the value of diversity in a religiously plural school, how the school environment supports interreligious coexistence beyond formal classroom activities, and how belief boundaries are negotiated without creating rigid or exclusionary relationships. By addressing these issues, the study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how the boundaries of interreligious participation are pedagogically constructed and how harmonious coexistence can be sustained while preserving students' religious commitment.

2. METHODS

This research was designed using a qualitative case study to explore the position of Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) as a pedagogical space for negotiating tolerance and belief boundaries in a plural school context. Qualitative methods were used because they allow an in-depth examination of social phenomena and the meanings constructed by participants in their daily contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design was chosen because this study focused on a specific educational context, namely a single classroom in which inter-religious interaction is an inherent part of the learning experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was done in SMAN 1 Babadan, Ponorogo Regency, East Java Indonesia. The site was selected intentionally as it is a school where inter-religious interaction takes place naturally within the framework of PAI learning. The research involved a class of XI-9 with thirty-four students, thirty-three Muslim students, and one non-Muslim student. This classroom provided a relevant context to explore the interpretation of tolerance through the lived experience of students rather than simply presenting it as an abstract normative idea. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the learning process and their relevance to the research focus on tolerance and interreligious participation (Sugiyono, 2017). The study involved one PAI teacher as the key informant, together with two Muslim students and one non-Muslim student from class XI-9. The teacher was included because of his central role in facilitating classroom discussions on tolerance and responding to students' questions concerning interreligious participation. The selected students contributed perspectives drawn from their direct experiences in the classroom while representing different religious positions within the school context. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, students' written reflections, classroom and school observations, and supporting documentation. The interview protocol addressed three interconnected themes: the way tolerance

was taught in PAI lessons, the contribution of school activities to interreligious coexistence, and the teacher's explanation of the boundaries between social respect, epistemic openness, and ritual participation. These themes also guided the collection of observational data, written responses, and documentary evidence. Students' written reflections were used to capture their personal understanding of tolerance, togetherness, and participation in interreligious situations. Observations were carried out during classroom learning as well as selected school activities, including Grebek Maulid, the P5 cultural diversity project, and visits to places of worship. Documentary evidence consisted of lesson plans, instructional materials, school activity records, photographs, and the Grade XI PAI textbook covering topics related to tolerance and religious harmony. Combining these different sources strengthened the credibility of the empirical findings by reducing reliance on a single source of information.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing with continuous verification. During the first stage, the researchers reviewed and organized the data by focusing on issues directly related to the objectives of the study. The analysis concentrated on three major themes: the representation of diversity in PAI learning, the role of the school's social environment in fostering interreligious coexistence, and the pedagogical negotiation of belief boundaries. The organized data were subsequently presented in thematic categories that integrated evidence from interviews, students' written reflections, observations, and documentary sources. The final stage involved interpreting patterns across these data sources and verifying emerging conclusions through the conceptual perspectives of problem-posing pedagogy, plural Islamic education, religious literacy, and belief-boundary negotiation. Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Methodological triangulation was carried out by comparing evidence obtained from interviews, written reflections, observations, and supporting documentation. Member checking was conducted by discussing the preliminary interpretations with the PAI teacher to confirm that the findings accurately reflected the learning process and classroom experiences. The consistency of the analysis was further strengthened through peer review, in which fellow researchers critically examined the interpretation and thematic development. An audit trail was also maintained throughout the study by documenting each stage of data collection, data condensation, category development, and conclusion verification. Together, these procedures helped improve the credibility and dependability of the research findings. Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process to ensure the protection of all participants. Confidentiality was maintained by replacing participants' identities with anonymous codes, namely G1 for the PAI teacher, S1 and S2 for the Muslim students, and NMS for the non-Muslim student. Participation was entirely voluntary and all sources of information were used for academic purposes only. These ethical considerations were applied throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

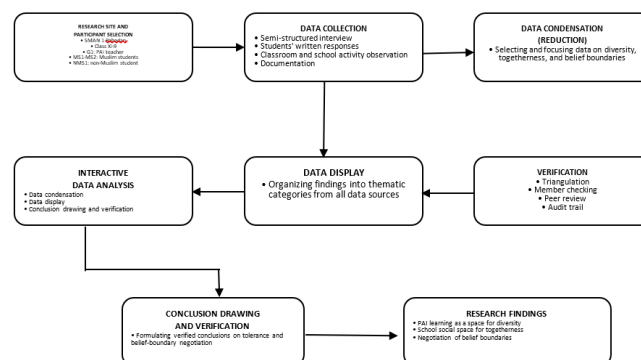


Chart 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 PAI Learning as a Space for Presenting the Value of Diversity

The findings show that PAI learning in class XI-9 at SMAN 1 Babadan takes place in a religiously diverse classroom context. The class consists of 34 students, including 33 Muslim students and 1 non-Muslim student. Although the non-Muslim student is given the freedom either to remain in the classroom or leave during PAI lessons, the student chooses to stay and participate in the learning process. This situation is significant because PAI learning does not function solely as a space for transmitting Islamic teachings to Muslim students, but also as a social space where students encounter religious difference directly. Therefore, tolerance is not taught in a neutral or abstract setting, but within a classroom situation where diversity is already present as part of everyday learning. The teacher's account further illustrates that the presence of a non-Muslim student is not perceived as a barrier to PAI instruction. Instead, it is regarded as an integral part of the classroom environment that enriches discussions on religious diversity. Rather than separating tolerance from students' daily experiences, the teacher incorporates actual classroom situations into the learning process. This approach encourages students to relate religious concepts to the realities they encounter in school. As the teacher explained: "In this school, students are not only Muslim but also come from different religious backgrounds. During PAI lessons, non-Muslim students are given the freedom either to remain in the classroom or leave the class. However, in practice, most of them choose to stay and participate in the lesson. Therefore, when teaching tolerance, I do not only explain the concept, but also invite students to discuss and connect it with real cases they encounter in school life." (G1, personal communication, March 31, 2026). This statement indicates that the teacher does not position religious diversity as an obstacle to PAI learning. Instead, diversity becomes a pedagogical entry point for discussing tolerance through students' lived experiences. The teacher's emphasis on "real cases" shows that tolerance is not treated merely as a definition to be memorized, but as a practical issue that students need to interpret in their daily interactions with friends of different religious backgrounds. In this sense, the presence of a non-Muslim student in the classroom allows PAI learning to move beyond normative instruction and become a space for interpreting interreligious encounters pedagogically.

3.2 The School's Social Space as Support for Interreligious Togetherness

The findings further suggest that interreligious togetherness is cultivated not only through formal classroom instruction but also through the broader social environment of the school. At SMAN 1 Babadan, school programs such as Grebek Maulid and the P5 project on cultural diversity create meaningful opportunities for students from different religious backgrounds to interact. These activities encourage students to collaborate, share experiences, and participate in common school events beyond the classroom. Through such interactions, tolerance is practiced as part of everyday school life rather than discussed solely as a theoretical concept. This indicates that the school functions as more than a setting where PAI lessons take place. Instead, it serves as a social environment that shapes students' understanding of how to live alongside religious diversity. Experiences of togetherness are therefore developed through daily social engagement, allowing students to learn how interreligious relationships are built and sustained in practice. The teacher's account confirms that school activities beyond formal classroom instruction support interreligious togetherness. The teacher explained: "In school activities such as Grebek Maulid, non-Muslim students also participate in the walking activity and wear costumes according to their class theme. In the P5 project on cultural diversity, students were also introduced to different places of worship. These activities make students meet and work together, not only talk about tolerance in the classroom." (G1, personal communication, March 31, 2026). This evidence further highlights the educational role of the school's social environment in extending learning beyond the PAI classroom.

Opportunities to practice tolerance emerge not only through classroom discussions but also through participation in school activities that encourage cooperation, shared experiences, and interaction among students from different religious backgrounds. These experiences allow students to encounter religious diversity in authentic social settings rather than through theoretical explanations alone. At the same time, such interactions do not dissolve the boundaries of religious belief. Instead, they provide meaningful opportunities for students to reflect on how togetherness can be maintained while recognizing that certain forms of participation require thoughtful consideration in light of their religious commitments. Students' written responses also reflect this situation. One Muslim student stated that interreligious togetherness is felt in daily activities because students "really work together without thinking about differences" (S1, personal communication, April 16, 2026). Another student wrote that togetherness becomes visible "when praying according to each person's belief and then respecting one another" (S2, personal communication, April 16, 2026). From the perspective of the non-Muslim student, a similar experience emerged; the student stated that they had never been treated differently or excluded and could still socialize with peers of different religions (SNM, personal communication, April 16, 2026). Viewed through Azra's perspective on Islamic education in a plural society, these experiences indicate that schools should not only strengthen internal religious identity, but also cultivate the ability to live together without erasing boundaries of belief. Thus, based on the teacher's explanation and students' responses, the school's social space does not merely bring together students from different religious backgrounds, but also functions as a pedagogical medium that habituates students to live together while disciplining the boundaries of participation.

From an analytical perspective, the sense of togetherness observed in this study should not be understood as eliminating all religious boundaries. Instead, the findings suggest that social interaction and religious commitment continue to coexist within the same educational environment. While the school's social space encourages students to build relationships across religious differences, it also requires them to recognize the point at which social participation may intersect with religious ritual. This distinction becomes an important part of students' learning experiences rather than a source of exclusion. Viewed through Azra's perspective, the educational task of Islamic Religious Education in a plural society is not to prioritize either openness or religious commitment. Rather, it is to cultivate both in a balanced manner through everyday social engagement. This interpretation is consistent with studies showing that meaningful interaction plays a significant role in shaping students' attitudes toward tolerance (Suyanto et al., 2024). Tolerance education also appears to be supported by school policies and consistent pedagogical practices (Kosim et al., 2025). Living together tends to be sustained when differences are managed within social relationships characterized by mutual familiarity (Pattiasina, 2025). In addition, Azra's perspective can be linked to Islamic education that is responsive to plurality (Yudhyarta et al., 2025). Thus, in the case studied, the school's social space appears to sustain togetherness while also disciplining the boundaries of participation, enabling students not only to become familiar with those who are different, but also to assess where social involvement needs to be distinguished from the ritual domain.

3.3 Negotiating the Boundaries of Belief as Pedagogical Work

The most significant finding of this study lies in how the boundaries of belief are explained and negotiated. In the context of the case examined, negotiation does not imply bargaining over faith, but rather a pedagogical process in which the teacher interprets and explains the limits of interreligious participation to students. This process becomes evident when the teacher responds to questions about whether it is permissible to visit during Eid al-Fitr, attend Christmas-related activities, respond to food in non-Muslim homes, or discuss sacred texts and visit places of worship. Therefore, the issue of boundaries does not appear as an additional concern, but as a central issue emerging from concrete interreligious experiences at school. In this context, PAI learning functions

not only to convey religious teachings, but also to clarify the limits of participation that students continue to question in their social lives. The teacher's explanation shows that the most sensitive issue in teaching tolerance lies in clarifying the boundary between social respect and ritual participation. The teacher stated: "There have been sensitive questions from students. For example, when Eid al-Fitr comes, non-Muslim students may visit Muslim friends or teachers. Then students ask whether Muslims may also attend Christmas-related activities. In tolerance lessons, students have also been introduced to visits to places of worship from different religions. At that time, Muslim and non-Muslim students were given opportunities to talk about their sacred texts, including the differences and similarities they understood." (G1, personal communication, March 31, 2026) The teacher further explained: "Regarding visits during Eid al-Fitr or Christmas, I usually explain it conditionally. If it is related to food, as long as the food is halal, it is acceptable. If it is related to visiting a house, it is also acceptable as long as one is sure that the place is free from najis. What becomes sensitive is when students interpret 'lakum dinukum waliyadin' too rigidly or too loosely. Some are afraid that participating in a celebration may be considered as acknowledging the truth of another religion. This is why the boundary between social respect and ritual participation needs to be explained carefully." (G1, personal communication, March 31, 2026). These direct quotations clarify that negotiation in this study does not refer to bargaining over religious doctrine. Instead, negotiation refers to the teacher's pedagogical effort to help students interpret concrete interreligious situations. Rather than responding with a general prohibition or unconditional permission, the teacher encourages students to consider each situation according to its specific context. In classroom discussions, distinctions are made between sharing food, visiting particular places, making social visits, encountering religious symbols, and becoming involved in religious rituals. This approach allows students to see that tolerance is not only about respecting others but also about understanding the limits of one's own religious commitments. Negotiating the boundaries of belief becomes part of the learning process. Students are helped to consider whether a form of participation remains an expression of social respect or enters the realm of religious ritual, where the rules of religious considerations may be different.

The teacher does not take a rigid binary approach to these questions. Instead, distinctions are made between social respect, epistemic openness, and ritual engagement. Regarding food, the teacher stated that "as long as the food is halal, it is acceptable," while regarding places, visits may still be possible "as long as one is sure that the house is free from najis" (G1, personal communication, March 31, 2026). From the students' perspective, confusion arises when an activity feels like it is "A similar perspective was expressed by another student, who emphasized the importance of respecting friends from different religious backgrounds while remaining faithful to personal religious convictions. At the same time, the student acknowledged concerns about crossing boundaries that might conflict with those beliefs (S2, personal communication, April 16, 2026). This response is representative of a larger trend seen throughout the study. Questions of participation in interreligious activities were not answered through immediate acceptance or rejection. Rather, students first encountered a concrete situation, followed by the teacher's explanation of the distinction between social interaction and religious ritual. Students then reevaluated their own positions in light of that explanation before deciding how to respond. These findings suggest that the creation of belief boundaries occurs through an ongoing process of interpretation in which students constantly evaluate everyday experiences rather than through the use of pre-existing rules that apply to all situations. Theoretically, this finding suggests that negotiation is not merely a way for the teacher to provide answers, but a pedagogical mechanism for shaping boundaries. In this case, negotiation operates when interreligious experiences are first problematized, then differentiated into social, epistemic, and ritual domains, and finally reassessed by students to determine appropriate forms of involvement. In

this sense, negotiation explains how boundaries are formed through processes of problematization, differentiation, and positioning, rather than through prohibitions that are considered final from the outset. Religious literacy becomes essential because students need not only to understand the teachings of their own religion, but also to interpret differences reflectively in order to assess whether an action remains within the domain of social respect or has entered the realm of ritual. Thus, negotiation explains how the boundaries of belief are formed situationally, while religious literacy explains the competencies students require to evaluate these boundaries reflectively. This interpretation is further supported by findings that multicultural PAI learning can strengthen students' understanding of diversity, mutual respect, and interfaith dialogue (Nurmalita, 2025). At the same time, the successful internalization of multicultural values depends on learning strategies that deliberately engage students in meaningful educational experiences rather than relying on normative messages or rhetorical appeals alone (Wahidah & Marlina, 2025). Moreover, multicultural values are shaped through the negotiation of classroom practices and teacher strategies (Afifuddin et al., 2025). Value formation also occurs through the interconnection between classroom pedagogy, inclusive policies, and everyday social interaction (Noe et al., 2026). In this regard, Freire helps explain that students' questions and doubts are part of the learning process, rather than disruptions to it (Freire, 2005). Therefore, negotiating the boundaries of belief in a plural school context is not a peripheral phenomenon, but the core of PAI's pedagogical work.

3.4 Synthesis of the Discussion

Overall, the findings demonstrate that PAI learning at SMAN 1 Babadan extends beyond classroom instruction and should be understood as a broader pedagogical process within a plural school environment. Classroom discussions on tolerance provide students with opportunities to relate Islamic teachings to the realities of religious diversity they encounter in everyday life. These learning experiences are further reinforced through the school's social environment, where participation, cooperation, and daily interaction enable students to practice living alongside peers from different religious backgrounds. Within this process, the teacher plays a pivotal pedagogical role by helping students distinguish between social respect, epistemic openness, and religious ritual. Rather than functioning as separate dimensions, classroom learning, the school's social environment, and the clarification of participation boundaries work together to shape students' responses to interreligious encounters. The findings also suggest that the central challenge of PAI in plural schools lies not in introducing the value of tolerance itself, but in equipping students with the ability to interpret the boundaries of interreligious participation in context. Promoting harmonious coexistence alone is insufficient if students are not guided to recognize the differences between social respect, learning about religious diversity, and participation in religious ritual. What ultimately matters is not simply whether tolerance is taught, but whether students develop the capacity to evaluate their involvement thoughtfully when facing concrete interreligious situations. The principal contribution of this study is to show that tolerance acquires educational significance when it is translated into a pedagogical process that prepares students to navigate real interreligious encounters without compromising their religious commitments. Viewed from this perspective, PAI is more than a subject for transmitting Islamic teachings. It also serves as a pedagogical space where students develop the knowledge, judgment, and reflective capacity required to live constructively in a plural society while maintaining clear boundaries of interreligious participation. To synthesize these findings, the study proposes a conceptual model that illustrates the relationship between the plural context of PAI learning, the school's social environment, and the negotiation of belief boundaries. The model demonstrates that tolerance becomes pedagogically meaningful when classroom learning is closely connected to students' everyday interreligious experiences and when teachers actively guide them in interpreting the boundaries of participation across different social and religious contexts.

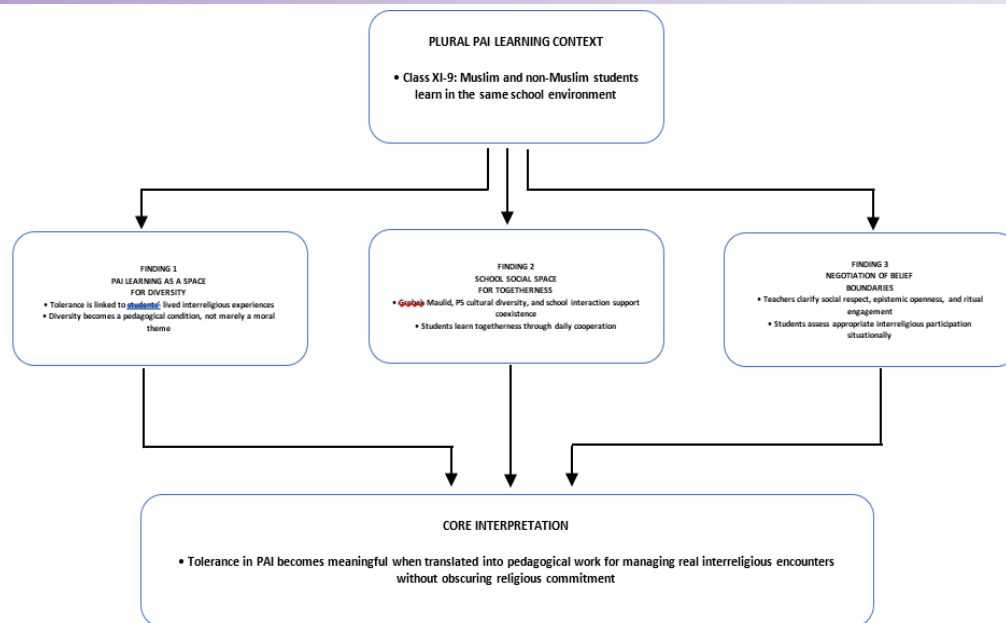


Chart 2. Research Findings Model

As shown in Chart 2, PAI learning in a plural classroom context produces three interconnected findings. First, PAI learning becomes a space for presenting diversity because tolerance is linked to students' lived interreligious experiences. Second, the school's social space supports interreligious togetherness through activities such as *Grebek Maulid*, the P5 cultural diversity project, and daily cooperation among students. Third, the negotiation of belief boundaries becomes the core of pedagogical work, as the teacher helps students distinguish between social respect, epistemic openness, and ritual engagement. These three findings show that tolerance in PAI becomes pedagogically meaningful when it enables students to manage real interreligious encounters while maintaining religious commitment. Although this study offers a contextual reading of tolerance and belief-boundary negotiation in PAI learning, its findings should be understood within the scope of a single case study. The data rely on one PAI teacher as the key informant, written responses from three students, classroom and school activity observations, and supporting documentation. Therefore, the findings are not intended to produce broad generalizations, but to offer an in-depth interpretation of how interreligious participation boundaries are negotiated in PAI learning within a plural public school setting.

3.5 Policy Implications

The findings provide several practical implications for strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in religiously plural school settings. At the policy level, they highlight the need for the Ministry of Religious Affairs to complement existing curriculum directions with more operational pedagogical guidance on teaching tolerance. Rather than presenting tolerance only as a religious and civic ideal, such guidance should assist teachers in explaining the distinctions between social respect, epistemic openness, and religious ritual. This recommendation reflects the realities identified in the study, where students' questions frequently arise from everyday experiences, including visiting friends during religious celebrations, participating in cultural activities, discussing sacred texts, and visiting places of worship. The study also points to the importance of strengthening teachers' pedagogical capacity to respond to sensitive interreligious issues in ways that are both contextually appropriate and educationally meaningful. Beyond delivering religious knowledge, PAI teachers are expected to facilitate students' interpretation of real situations encountered in school life.

Their role extends to helping students distinguish between maintaining positive social relationships and participating in religious rituals. For this reason, professional development programs would benefit from incorporating case-based learning focused on interreligious interaction, religious literacy, and the negotiation of belief boundaries within plural educational settings. The findings further demonstrate that the wider school environment contributes substantially to students' experiences of interreligious coexistence. School culture therefore becomes an important pedagogical resource rather than merely the setting in which learning occurs. Cultural projects, collaborative programs, and school celebrations can provide meaningful opportunities for students from different religious backgrounds to cooperate and interact while remaining respectful of their respective religious commitments. Such activities are most effective when they encourage participation without requiring students to cross boundaries that they understand as matters of religious belief. This suggests that plural schools should promote inclusion alongside clear and respectful pedagogical guidance regarding the limits of interreligious participation. Taken together, these implications indicate that tolerance education in PAI cannot rely solely on normative messages about harmony. It requires pedagogical guidance that is closely connected to students' lived experiences, teachers who are equipped to facilitate reflection on complex interreligious situations, and school cultures that support constructive interaction while respecting religious commitments. Accordingly, the contribution of this study extends beyond theoretical discussion by offering practical directions for strengthening Islamic Religious Education in plural public schools.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the key challenge facing Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) in plural school settings extends beyond promoting tolerance as a normative value. More importantly, it involves developing teachers' pedagogical capacity to help students interpret the boundaries of interreligious participation within real-life situations. In the classroom, discussions of tolerance enable students to connect Islamic teachings with their everyday experiences in a religiously diverse environment. These learning experiences are reinforced by the broader school community, where interaction, cooperation, and shared activities provide opportunities to experience living together across religious differences. Throughout this process, teachers play a pivotal role by helping students distinguish between social respect, epistemic openness, and participation in religious ritual. The findings further suggest that negotiating belief boundaries constitutes a central dimension of PAI pedagogy rather than a peripheral concern. Tolerance becomes educationally meaningful when students are encouraged to interpret concrete interreligious encounters while remaining committed to their own religious beliefs. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the scholarship on multicultural Islamic education and religious literacy by proposing that tolerance should be understood as a reflective process of interpreting religious difference instead of merely accepting diversity. The concept of belief-boundary negotiation offers a conceptual framework for explaining how teachers and students navigate interreligious interactions without compromising religious identity. In doing so, the study broadens current discussions of tolerance education by emphasizing contextual interpretation, pedagogical mediation, and the careful distinction between social interaction, epistemic engagement, and religious ritual. The study also offers practical insights for educational practice. In plural school settings, PAI teachers require pedagogical approaches that extend beyond normative messages about harmonious coexistence. They need the confidence and professional competence to facilitate students' questions arising from everyday interreligious experiences, including visits during religious celebrations, participation in cultural activities, discussions of sacred texts, and visits to places of worship. Likewise, schools need to cultivate inclusive social environments where students from different religious backgrounds can collaborate and interact while respecting each other's religious commitments. Such an environment

allows tolerance to be experienced through daily practice rather than classroom instruction alone, supported by collaborative activities and clear pedagogical guidance on the limits of interreligious participation. Several limitations should be acknowledged. This research examined a single case in one public senior high school and drew upon data from one PAI teacher, students' written reflections, classroom and school observations, and supporting documents. For this reason, the findings are intended to provide a contextual understanding of pedagogical practice rather than broad generalizations. Future studies may strengthen this line of inquiry by involving a wider range of schools, more diverse student populations, and comparative research across public schools, Islamic schools, and other plural educational settings. Additional research could also investigate how PAI teachers develop practical pedagogical frameworks to support students in making informed decisions when encountering complex interreligious situations.

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