



From pluralism to tolerance: The role of project-based social studies learning in Islamic schools

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a mixed method with a sequential exploratory model approach. The research population consisted of 120 students with a sample of 92 eighth-grade students at MTsN 1 Kediri City. Qualitative data were obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Meanwhile, quantitative data were obtained through the distribution of questionnaires using a Likert scale (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.97). The results showed that pluralism had been systematically integrated into teaching modules through heterogeneous group discussions and problem-based learning. This application was reinforced by the P5RA (Rahmatan Lil Alamin Student Profile Strengthening Project) school program, which is a character-building program for students in instilling Islamic values and understanding cross-cultural diversity. Simple linear regression analysis produced a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating that the integration of pluralism values in Social Studies (IPS) learning has an effect on students' tolerance levels in Islamic-based educational institutions. Thus, the application of pluralism values in IPS learning, implemented through heterogeneous project-based learning and school programs in the form of cultural performances, has been proven to be effective in increasing student tolerance.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a heterogeneous country with diverse religions, ethnicities, and cultures. This phenomenon necessitates tolerance among the people to create harmony and peace amid differences (Sukandarman & Sofa, 2024). However, facts on the ground show that there were 217 incidents involving 329 violations of freedom of belief throughout 2023. This figure has increased significantly compared to the previous year, which recorded 175 incidents with 333 violations, confirming an increase in violations in public spaces (Manese, 2021). This phenomenon shows that the application of pluralism values has not been optimal, including in madrasah tsanawiyah or junior high schools (Weiss, 2025). This creates a gap between the theoretical potential of pluralism and its practice in the field (Diaz et al., 2025). Therefore, formal educational institutions such as schools play an important role in promoting mutual

respect and tolerance of differences to minimise intolerant behaviour (Haryono et al., 2023). Similar challenges are not limited to Indonesia. Multicultural countries such as India, France, and even the United States also experience similar problems related to ethnicity and cultural differences in education (Rosita et al., 2026). Several studies show that identity politics and religious exclusivism shape the younger generation's attitudes towards heterogeneity (Rustandi, 2025). In response to this phenomenon, the educational environment has become a strategic means of instilling inclusive values and understanding of intercultural tolerance (Rosadi et al., 2024). Studies related to the integration of pluralism values into the level of tolerance among students in Islamic-based public educational institutions are not only relevant in the context of education in Indonesia, but also in the global multicultural education sphere (Muhajir et al., 2025).

One way schools can instil tolerance in students is by fostering the concept of pluralism in social studies (Masruroh et al., 2023). Pluralism is a concept that recognizes and accepts diversity within a community (Ruswandi et al., 2022). Pluralism can be implemented in schools through several strategies. First, schools can create inclusive school policies that open access to students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and implement anti-discrimination policies (Harefa & Lase, 2024). Second, schools can integrate the curriculum with teaching materials and textbooks that contain values of cultural diversity, harmony, and respect for differences (Asfar & Miftah, 2024). Third, teachers can adapt discussion-based learning methods through interfaith/interethnic group work and experiential learning to foster mutual respect (Nurmansyah & Muttaqin, 2024). Fourth, involvement in extracurricular activities such as interfaith dialogue, interfaith celebrations, and joint social activities can strengthen positive interactions (Amtiran & Kriswibowo, 2024). Finally, teachers have a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes of tolerance. Social studies teachers must be role models in conveying fairness, openness, and respect for differences, so that pedagogical functions and role modeling can go hand in hand (Ali, 2025). Social studies teachers must set an example by being fair, open, and respectful of differences, so that their pedagogical and exemplary functions can go hand in hand (Ali, 2025). Social studies has a strategic role because it substantially contains material related to social interaction, culture, and citizenship, so it can be an ideal medium for discussing issues of diversity (Saihu et al., 2025).

Several studies in Indonesia and other countries show that teaching pluralism in the curriculum actually helps students understand diversity and harmonious living (Arfan, 2022). In addition, learning models that integrate multicultural and pluralistic values help students develop tolerant attitudes, accept differences, and understand perspectives from different viewpoints (Mubarak & Rahman, 2025). Looking further, teaching religion in Islamic-based schools that incorporate pluralism can shape students to be more humane, tolerant, and friendly towards differences, while strengthening social competence in interfaith relations and promoting peaceful interfaith relations (Walad et al., 2024). A school climate that supports cultural diversity and implements policies of equality, inclusion, and recognition of cultural and religious differences helps to improve students' psychological well-being, reduce discrimination, and strengthen intergroup relations (Hasanuddin, 2024). This is in line with (Wibowo's; 2024) statement that classes consisting of students from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and social backgrounds tend to make students more tolerant of minority groups. Although several previous studies have shown that multicultural education and pluralism can build tolerance, most of these studies have focused only on public schools and religious education separately. Research specifically examining the integration of pluralism values in social studies learning in Islamic-based public Tsanawiyah educational institutions is still very limited. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this gap, combined with qualitative and quantitative exploration of student tolerance outcomes. The novelty of this study lies in its mixed-method research approach, which focuses on the implementation of pluralism values within the scope of inclusive and multicultural state Islamic education. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to: 1) determine the application of pluralism principles in social studies learning in improving student tolerance in madrasah and;

2) determine the effect of the application of pluralism values in social studies learning on student tolerance levels.

METHOD

This study uses a mixed method approach. According to Sugiyono, 2014, a mixed method is a research method that combines qualitative and quantitative data to produce valid and reliable data (Setiawan et al., 2025). The approach used in this study is the sequential exploratory model, where the first stage is conducted with qualitative analysis followed by quantitative collection to strengthen the research findings (Khabibullah et al., 2024).

Table 1. Mixed Method Research Method

Component	Qualitative Analysis	Quantitative Analysis
Data Source	Interviews, observation, documentation	Likert scale 1–5 questionnaire (valid & reliable, $\alpha = 0.966$)
Focus of Study	Planning, implementation, and evaluation of pluralism values in social studies	learning Testing the influence of pluralism (X) on student tolerance (Y)
Analysis Techniques	Miles & Huberman model: data reduction, presentation, conclusion drawing	Descriptive statistics, normality test, linearity test, simple linear regression

Table 2. Validity Test

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
X (Application of pluralism values)	.980	15
Y (Level of Tolerance)	.978	15

Qualitative data collection techniques used the model from (Huberman & Miles; 2002) in (Qomaruddin & Halimah; 2024), using interview, observation, and documentation techniques and analyzed through reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, as well as the distribution of questionnaires to obtain accurate data related to the influence of pluralism values integration on students' tolerance levels (Muzaki et al., 2025). Before the questionnaire was used in the study, validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure that the research instrument was truly valid and reliable (Subhaktiyasa, 2024). The instrument was declared valid if each item showed adequate internal consistency, as indicated by a Cronbach's Alpha value ≥ 0.70 , suggesting acceptable reliability (Zayrin et al., 2025). Based on the validity test results in this study, Cronbach's Alpha was 0.980 for the variable of pluralism integration, while the variable of student tolerance was 0.978. Both values are well above the minimum standard of 0.70 as described in the reference journal, so all questions are declared valid and reliable and suitable for use in quantitative analysis. This study was conducted at MTsN 1 Kediri City. The population in this study were eighth-grade students at MTsN 1 Kediri City who were at a stage of development where they could think reflectively and actively discuss diversity. The population comprised four classes, VIII A, B, C, and D, which had integrated pluralism-based social studies learning, totaling 120 students. All students who integrated pluralism values were included to avoid selection bias. This was because the classes selected were not based on specific aspects but rather on their direct involvement in the integration of pluralism values in social studies learning. The sample used in this study consisted of 92 students from a total of 120 students. However, in practice, only 52 respondents completed the data collection form,

which was sufficient to proceed to the data processing stage. This was due to time constraints and student absences during the questionnaire completion. Therefore, the data calculation in this study used the Slovin formula, which resulted in an error rate of 10% to ensure proportional representation of all four classes (Putri et al., 2026).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The results of qualitative analysis using interviews, observation, and documentation show that the application of pluralist values at MTsN 1 Kediri City is evident in the integration of diversity into the social studies curriculum. With this foundation, social studies learning provides space for the emergence of tolerant attitudes through a planned educational process. Statements from teachers and school officials indicate that pluralism has been systematically planned in the curriculum. The social studies teacher (Y), deputy principal (N), and principal (M) explained that pluralism has become part of the school's curriculum planning, including the integration of the value of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity) and the strengthening of character education. In line with this, students (A and M) understand pluralism as a condition of diversity that needs to be respected and used as a basis for social interaction. Supporting programs such as P5RA, scouting activities, dance, and class meetings were also designed to expand the space for cross-cultural interaction. This planning shows that pluralism is not only formulated administratively but also projected into concrete learning practices. The results of the interviews are presented :

"The design of pluralism values is actually integrated into several subjects, one of which is social studies." (Interview with social studies teacher on November 13, 2025, at 9:25 a.m. Western Indonesian Time).

"The main design comes from the social studies teacher." (Interview with the Vice Principal of Curriculum on November 13, 2025, at 10:30 a.m. WIB).

"What is certain is that the school initially designed pluralism values, for example, in subjects such as social studies. Second, there are extracurricular programs and P5RA programs every semester." (Interview with the Principal on November 13, 2025, at 08:15 WIB).

Interviews with the social studies teacher, deputy head of curriculum, and principal confirmed that pluralism values are directly integrated into social studies learning. In this case, the school plays a role in providing support by giving teachers space in terms of policies for implementing pluralism values in social studies learning plans. In addition, the principal also explained that pluralism has become part of educational planning. This is demonstrated by school programs such as P5RA, extracurricular scouting activities, and school rules that emphasize anti-discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA). Then, from the students' perspective, they understand that diversity has become part of the learning plan. The interview results are presented below:

"Pluralism means that there are many religions or ethnic groups in Indonesia." (Results of interviews with students on November 12, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. Western Indonesian Time).

"I learned from my social studies class that if we are pluralistic, we should not be hostile to others just because we have different beliefs." (Interview with students on November 12, 2025, at 9:20 a.m. WIB).

Interviews with students show that they understand pluralism as diversity in religion, ethnicity, and culture. They gained this understanding through social studies lessons on social and cultural diversity, which helped students appreciate the importance of tolerance in everyday life.



Figure 1. Scouting Extracurricular Activity

Planning also includes learning methods such as heterogeneous group discussions, case studies, and cultural projects that aim to introduce students to direct experiences of diversity. This confirms that social studies learning plays a role in strengthening students' understanding of pluralism. The implementation of pluralism values is carried out through active learning strategies that emphasize interaction and appreciation of differences. Teachers consciously form heterogeneous learning groups based on the cultural backgrounds and characters of students. The classroom discussion environment is made safe so that students can express their opinions without fear of negative criticism. Teachers emphasize that differences of opinion are part of the social learning process. Interviews with teachers and students show consistency: teachers encourage students to view social issues from various perspectives, while students admit they are more accustomed to listening, respecting their friends' opinions, and avoiding domineering attitudes in discussions. Thus, the implementation of learning creates a learning experience that fosters tolerance. Problem-based learning (PBL) is used to discuss topics of social diversity, intergroup conflict, and issues of tolerance. This approach fosters empathy, analytical skills, and a respect for differences. The results of the interviews are presented below:

"Yes, the teacher always says that we must respect friends from different cultures." (Interview with students on November 12, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. WIB).

"My teacher once discussed the history of Isla's arrival. The social studies teacher said that it is cultural diversity that must be respected." (Interview with student on November 12, 2025, at 9:20 a.m. WIB).

"During class discussions, we are told to listen to our friends' opinions until they finish." (Interview with student on November 12, 2025, at 9:40 a.m. WIB).

"I often use Problem Based Learning (PBL) on the issue of social diversity." (Interview with Social Studies Teacher on November 13, 2025, at 9:25 a.m. WIB).

"In our program, every semester after the exams, there is a cultural arts performance." (Interview with the Principal on November 13, 2025, at 8:15 a.m. WIB)

Teachers use Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and case studies to teach students about diversity issues. Based on the interviews with the three students, they stated that social studies lessons helped them better understand differences and appreciate friends with different cultures and personalities. This aligns with the teaching methods used by teachers, namely case studies and PBL models. PBL is used to accustom students to viewing issues from different perspectives with the main objective of helping them become more sensitive and tolerant. In this case, the principal also stated that the implementation of pluralism values are implemented in practice, not just in theory. The application of PBL strengthens the development of empathy and tolerance among students.



Figure 2. Cultural Arts Performance Activities

School programs such as art performances, scouting, and P5RA also strengthen the internalization of pluralism values. The implementation of learning proves that pluralism practiced among students as a form of school program supports the application of pluralism values in increasing student tolerance in the environment of MTsN 1 Kediri City madrasah. Thus, school programs complement social studies learning in building student tolerance. Evaluation was carried out through observation, attitude rubrics, and teacher reports to monitor student behavior related to pluralism. Assessment was carried out through observation, attitude rubrics, teacher reports, and monitoring by the guidance counselor and school leadership. The evaluation showed that the practice of pluralism had a positive impact on student behavior. No cases of SARA-based intolerance were found in the past year. The verbal bullying that did occur was resolved through mediation, with an emphasis on respecting students' identities. Students admitted that they were better able to accept different opinions, were less likely to make cultural-based jokes, and were more comfortable working in diverse groups. This shows that the implementation of pluralism brought about positive changes in student behavior. Teachers stated that the classroom climate had become more inclusive and conducive to discussion. The interview results are presented below:

"Monitoring is conducted everyday during class by assessing students' attitudes in and outside the classroom." (Interview with Social Studies Teacher on November 13, 2025, at 9:25 a.m.)

"We check around the classroom during free time together with the curriculum coordinator." (Interview with the Principal on November 13, 2025, at 08:15 WIB).

Based on interviews with social studies teachers and the principal, they provided statements about the results of the evaluation, which was conducted through daily in-class monitoring. The evaluation of student attitudes is also included in each social studies teaching module. Overall, the evaluation shows that the implementation of pluralism has succeeded in increasing student tolerance, as reflected in the few conflicts, increased mutual respect, and a safe classroom climate for discussion. Therefore, education is the most strategic place to instill these values. Local history education and inclusive religious education can build multicultural awareness and strengthen national identity without neglecting differences. Research shows that social studies teachers have applied the value of pluralism in various ways: first, pluralism is incorporated into social studies subject matter, especially in skills related to cultural, social, and religious diversity in Indonesia. Teachers confirmed that this material was used to build students' awareness that differences are beautiful and an integral part of social life. This is in line with the results of research that integrates diversity material into social studies learning and fosters awareness and appreciation in students.

Second, discussion-based learning methods and diverse group work embody pluralism. Students said that teachers often gathered people from different cultural backgrounds for discussions. In addition, they were taught to listen carefully, avoid being domineering, and

respect different opinions when people spoke. Third, teachers used a problem-based learning (PBL) approach to address issues such as cultural differences, social conflicts, and diversity. Students are asked to complete case studies involving various groups without blaming either side. Students learn about pluralism and use it to make decisions, which shows that this method is effective in fostering empathy. Multicultural education theory is in line with this approach, which emphasizes that direct learning or experiential learning can increase students' social sensitivity and tolerance. School activities such as anti-discrimination rules, P5RA programs, and cultural performances reinforce the acceptance of pluralism. The P5RA program uses cultural exhibitions to teach students about diversity through art. This supports the finding that pluralism-based school programs can increase positive interactions and tolerance among students. Extracurricular activities, such as sports, dance, and scouting, greatly help students get to know people from different backgrounds and teach them how to work together and respect one another. These results are in line with findings that experiences interacting in a multiethnic school environment can increase students' acceptance of minority groups.

The study, which used a qualitative approach based on interviews and direct observation, found that applying the principles of pluralism in social studies learning helps students become more tolerant. Students said that they were more open, less judgmental, rarely experienced harassment, and more appreciative of their friends' cultural differences and characteristics. There is no evidence of intolerance based on ethnicity, religion, race, or social class, according to teachers and the principal. Therefore, the value of pluralism has been effectively applied in social studies learning at MTsN 1 Kota Kediri. This is in line with the theory of pluralism and tolerance, as well as with the literature stating that multicultural education is a strategic approach to building a peaceful, inclusive, and respectful society. The qualitative analysis results were reinforced with quantitative data through a series of simple linear regression tests to determine the effect of pluralism values (variable x) on student tolerance levels (variable y). The tests conducted are as follows:

Table 3. Normality Test Results

Variabel	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistic	df	Statistic	df
X	0.092	52	0.200*	52
Y	0.098	52	0,67083333	52

Based on the normality test table, it can be seen that the Kolmogorov–Smirnov significance value is 0.200. This value exceeds the 0.05 limit, indicating that the data distribution is statistically normal. This normality indicates that the data does not experience extreme deviations in either a skewed or peaked distribution. Normality is required to ensure that parametric analysis techniques can be applied without producing bias. Thus, it can be concluded that both variables in this study are normally distributed.

Table 4. Linearity Test Results

ANOVA Table							
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Y*X	Between Groups	(Combined)	257.109	23	11.179	3.059	0.003
		Linearity	133.178	1	133.178	36.440	0.000
		Deviation from Linearity	123.931	22	5.633	1.541	0.139
Within Groups			102.333	28	3.655		
Total			359.442	51			

Based on the linearity test table, the significance value in the Linearity row shows a figure of 0.000. This value is less than 0.05, so it can be stated that the variables of pluralism (X) and student tolerance (Y) have a linear relationship. In addition, the Deviation from Linearity value of 0.139 > 0.05 indicates that there is no significant deviation from the linear pattern. This condition reinforces that the relationship between variables is proportional and stable throughout the data range. Therefore, it can be concluded that the linearity assumption is fulfilled.

Table 5. Normality Test Results

Coefficients ^a						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	54,840	2,934		18,694	0,000
	X	0,246	0,045	0,609	5,425	0,000

a. Dependent Variable: Y

Based on the simple linear regression analysis table, the regression significance value is 0.000. This value is less than 0.05, indicating that the pluralism variable has a significant effect on student tolerance. The t-value of 5.425 reinforces the statistical significance of this effect. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.371 indicates that the pluralism variable explains 37.1% of the variation in student tolerance, while the rest is influenced by other factors. These findings provide a clear picture that pluralism contributes significantly to increasing student tolerance. Quantitative research results using simple linear regression analysis show that the application of pluralist values has a significant impact on students' tolerance levels at MTsN 1 Kota Kediri and is positively correlated. These results support qualitative findings in which teachers, principals, and other school leaders stated that social studies lessons integrated with pluralism values have proven to be effective in creating a more inclusive and open classroom atmosphere that embraces diversity. Statistically, the regression test results show a fairly strong relationship between the variables of pluralism and tolerance, in the moderate to strong category. However, student tolerance levels are not necessarily influenced only by classroom learning. Based on qualitative results from interviews with teachers and principals, it was found that family upbringing, peer interactions, and the influence of social media are also factors that drive students' tolerance attitudes.

DISCUSSION

Based on interviews conducted, students in supportive family environments will show more inclusive attitudes. Parenting patterns within the family are the initial determinants of students' attitudes toward diversity (Rosela et al., 2025). This shows that the family is

the most important factor in shaping students' morals, aside from the educational environment (Rufaedah, 2020). Interactions between students also have a real effect on their tolerance towards differences (Mahsun et al., 2025). Positive peer relationships will certainly encourage a high level of empathy towards diversity. The influence of social media is also a determining factor in students' attitudes towards tolerance (Ardiansyah & Bahri, 2025). The presence of several video examples on social media that explain tolerance has great potential to influence students' views on diversity (Pustikayasa, 2021). The influence of social media is also related to the emergence of empathy in students to live peacefully amid diversity and to filter various types of information that can cause division or certain conflicts (Purnomo et al., 2025). This confirms that students' tolerance does not only develop in the classroom learning process, but is also influenced by socialization within the family and interactions with peers. Social media also has a significant influence (Mukarom et al., 2024).

Thus, the increase in the value of pluralism in social studies learning in improving student tolerance has been answered, but the effectiveness of implementation can still be strengthened through more consistent and structured cross-sectoral programs (Saqjuddin et al., 2025). These results reinforce the grand theory of pluralism, which states that diversity is a social fact that must be recognized, appreciated, and incorporated into education (Nasution & Albina, 2024). Pluralism not only accepts diversity but also recognizes and maintains relationships between groups in a diverse social life (Mukhlisin et al., 2025). In the world of education, the integration of pluralism values requires learning that allows for diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and equal interactions (Asmiati et al., 2026). Students will learn to be more tolerant in cross-cultural interactions when these values are regularly applied in school policies, class discussions, group projects, and other learning strategies (Sari et al., 2024).

Qualitative and quantitative results show that the consistent integration of pluralism into social studies learning significantly increases students' tolerance. Facts on the ground indicate that students can coexist and respect each other's cultures and social differences (Umar & Nurrohman, 2024). The integration of pluralism in the curriculum, active learning methods, and school programs such as P5RA (Project to Strengthen the Profile of Pancasila Rahmatan Lil Alamin Students) has been proven to create a learning environment that values diversity (Arianto, 2024). Thus, this study provides evidence that the application of pluralism values in social studies learning has a real and significant effect on increasing students' tolerance. This reinforces the theory of pluralism and tolerance used as the basis for the research, while also strengthening previous literature on the relationship between pluralism education, multicultural education, and the formation of tolerant attitudes (Aliyah et al., 2025). This study also emphasizes that the implementation of pluralism in schools must be carried out systematically through the curriculum, learning methods, school activities, and the formation of an inclusive school culture to achieve an optimal impact on student character development.

CONCLUSION

Research on the integration of pluralist values in social studies learning has a significant contribution to students' tolerance levels at MTsN 1 Kota Kediri. The integration of diversity values in teaching tools, class discussions, problem-based learning, and heterogeneous group work creates a learning experience that allows students to recognize, understand, and appreciate differences, as well as strengthen their

understanding of cross-cultural issues. Quantitative findings through simple linear regression analysis show that pluralism has a significant effect on student tolerance. Meanwhile, qualitative findings show that student tolerance is influenced not only by the integration of pluralistic values in social studies learning but also by several external factors, including family upbringing, active peer interaction, and the influence of social media. Therefore, strengthening tolerance is not only about learning; it also requires direct family involvement and collaborative cross-cultural programs that build students' tolerance in their daily lives. Furthermore, in this increasingly digital era, schools need to integrate digital literacy activities to equip students with the ability to think critically and rationally about information that could exacerbate existing diversity.

Overall, this study demonstrates that integrating pluralism through social studies and school culture can be an effective strategy for building students' tolerance in the educational environment. These findings also contribute theoretically to the study of pluralism education and offer a practical model that can be applied in various educational units. For future research, an experimental or comparative study is needed to test the influence of pluralism more robustly. In addition, further research should consider variables such as empathy, school culture, cultural literacy, and the influence of the family environment to gain a more complete understanding of the factors that shape student tolerance.

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