



Islamic Education and Community Development: Building Social Cohesion in Diverse Societies

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INFO ARTICLE

Keywords:

Islamic education; social cohesion; community development; *wasathiyah*; systematic literature review

ABSTRACT

Background: Religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity presents a serious challenge in building social cohesion in an increasingly pluralistic global society. Islamic education, with a Muslim population of more than 1.8 billion people worldwide, has a strategic position as an agent of social transformation that has great potential in shaping an inclusive and harmonious character.

Objective: This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic education in building social cohesion in diverse societies, identify effective institutional models, and develop conceptual models that can be operationalized by practitioners and policymakers.

Methods: The study used the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method with an integrative design referring to the PRISMA 2020 protocol, analyzing 47 selected scientific articles from the Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and DOAJ databases published between 2020–2025.

Results: The study identified six mechanisms of Islamic education's contribution to social cohesion, including the transmission of inclusive values based on *wasathiyah* and *ukhuwwah*, community social capital development, facilitation of dialogue and conflict resolution, economic empowerment, cultivation of moderate identity, and formation of intercultural competence. This research produces an integrative model of ICCD (Islamic Education–Community Cohesion Development) that systematically connects the foundations of Islamic education, supporting institutional factors, community development outcomes, and social cohesion indicators.

Implications: These findings imply the need for multicultural value-based curriculum reforms, strengthening educators' intercultural competencies, and educational policies that explicitly integrate the goals of social cohesion in the development of Islamic educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity is a necessity in the global order of the 21st century. The increasing phenomenon of international migration, the digitization of cross-cultural communication, and the acceleration of globalization have encouraged the formation of increasingly plural and heterogeneous societies in various parts of the world. In the midst of this reality, one of the most fundamental challenges faced by pluralistic states is how to build and maintain social cohesion – the ability of societies to coexist harmoniously, trusting each other, and oriented towards the common good despite fundamental differences. These challenges are not only political and structural, but also highly dependent on the quality of the education system that is able to instill the values of tolerance, inclusivity, and social solidarity from an early age. It is in this context that

Islamic education is present as one of the transformative forces that has great potential in shaping the social character of society.

At the global level, Muslims are the second largest religious community in the world with a population of more than 1.8 billion people spread across more than 50 Muslim-majority countries, as well as living as minorities in hundreds of other countries. This demographic reality puts Islamic education in a strategic position not only as an instrument for the transmission of religious values, but also as a vehicle for community development that has a wide impact. The study of Kosim et al. (2023) confirms that Islamic education policy in Indonesia has undergone a transformation from a domestication approach to a more inclusive accommodation approach, reflecting a paradigm shift from religious exclusivity-based education to education that is responsive to the plurality of society. This transformation is not just a curricular change, but a fundamental response to the increasingly complex demands of shared life.

Empirical studies in the past decade have shown that Islamic educational institutions - ranging from Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, to Islamic universities - have a real capacity to develop the social capital of the community. Research by Fahmi & others (2025) reveals that multicultural Islamic education strategies are significantly able to strengthen social cohesion in Islamic schools by integrating diversity values into all aspects of the institution's academic and social life. This finding is internationally relevant considering that many countries are looking for an educational model that is able to bridge differences in identity without sacrificing the depth of religious values. Nevertheless, the portrait of reality on the ground shows that Islamic education also faces serious challenges (Lapis, 2025).

Radicalization, intolerance, and religious exclusivism are still problems encountered in some Islamic educational institutions, especially when their curriculum and pedagogy fail to integrate the values of pluralism and democratic citizenship. This gap between transformative potential and real challenges is an important stepping stone for more comprehensive, evidence-based research. The dimension of community development in Islamic education is also inseparable from the socio-economic context that surrounds it. Institutions such as Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, madrasas in Pakistan, and Islamic community schools in Western countries not only serve as centers for the transmission of religious knowledge, but also as institutions that develop community capacity, empower marginalized groups, and build networks of social solidarity. As shown by Rohman et al. (2025) pesantren play an active role in responding to the transmission of radical transnational ideology by strengthening moderate Islamic orientation and local patterns, so that it functions as a fortress of social cohesion in the midst of the onslaught of extreme ideologies.

This research departs from a theoretical framework that recognizes education as an agent of shaping social capital and community cohesion. The concept of social cohesion used refers to four main dimensions formulated by UNECE (2023) and further elaborated by Lapis (2025) namely: (1) social inclusion, (2) sense of *belonging*, (3) shared values, and (4) orientation to the common good. These four dimensions provide a holistic

analytical framework to measure the contribution of Islamic education to the strengthening of a harmonious social order.

Theologically, Islam contains a rich resource of value for the development of social cohesion. Concepts such as *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), *ta'awun* (help-help), *wasathiyyah* (moderation), and *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for all nature) are ethical foundations that, when transformed into systematic educational practices, have the potential to produce a generation of Muslims who are not only individually pious but also socially constructive. Mu'Ti, A. (2023) argues that pluralistic Islamic religious education - which allows students to hold fast to their beliefs while being able to understand, accept, and interact with those who are different - is the foundation for the creation of a harmonious society in a sustainable manner.

From a sociological perspective, Islamic education functions as a mediating institution between religious communities and the wider community. It plays a role in shaping non-exclusive collective identities, facilitating intergroup dialogue, and reproducing social norms that support cross-identity cooperation. Daheri et al. (2023) found that educators in Indonesian Islamic universities actively internalize intercultural competencies in their teaching practices as a strategy to prepare students for the diversity of a global society.

Pedagogically, Islamic education that is oriented towards the development of social cohesion requires continuous curricular innovation. Mariyono (2024) emphasized that multicultural values are a meeting point between two forces in the development of Islamic education: the power of tradition that seeks to maintain religious identity, and the power of modernization that demands adaptation to increasingly diverse social realities. The integration of these two forces in the Islamic education curriculum is a strong basis for this research.

Furthermore, this research is also based on the recognition that formal and non-formal religious education has a significant contribution to the development of society. Farouq et al. (2025) shows that the teaching materials of Islamic Religious Education are still dominated by the themes of jurisprudence and theology, while the themes of tolerance and interfaith dialogue are still marginalized – a finding that demands more comprehensive curricular reforms based on the needs of a multicultural society.

Based on the background and basis of thought that has been presented, this research departs from the identification of a number of significant *research gaps* in the academic literature. First, although there are many studies that address Islamic education in a partial way – both from the theological, pedagogical, and policy dimensions – there is still very limited research that comprehensively analyzes the nexus between Islamic education, community development, and social cohesion in cross-country and cross-contextual contexts. Second, most of the existing studies are descriptive and contextual without developing a conceptual model that can be applied more broadly.

Third, debates about the role of religious education in social cohesion are often caught up in an unproductive dichotomy between religious education that is considered potentially exclusive on the one hand, and secular education that is considered more

neutral on the other. A more nuanced understanding. The novelty of this research lies in three fundamental aspects that distinguish it from previous studies:

1. A cross-contextual integrative analytics framework. This research is the first to systematically integrate the four dimensions of social cohesion (inclusion, belonging, shared values, orientation of the common good) with the specific variables of Islamic education into a comprehensive conceptual model. In contrast to previous studies, this study developed an analytical framework that allows cross-context comparison between Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts.
2. Synthesis of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches. This research innovatively combines a macro-policy perspective (analysis of national and international education policies) with a micro-institutional perspective (a case study of Islamic educational institutions) and a meso-community perspective (impact on community development). The synthesis of these three levels of analysis results in a more complete understanding of the working mechanism of Islamic education in building social cohesion.
3. the Development of Actionable Conceptual Models. Unlike previous descriptive studies, this study aims to produce a conceptual model that can be operationalized by education practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders to design Islamic education interventions that measurably contribute to improving social cohesion.

This research generally aims to analyze and optimize the role of Islamic education in building social cohesion in diverse societies. This research has a strategically defined scope to ensure depth of analysis as well as cross-context relevance. Thematically, this research covers three main domains Islamic education in its various forms - formal (madrasas, Islamic schools, Islamic universities), non-formal (pesantren, ta'lim council, halaqah), and informal, community development facilitated by Islamic educational institutions and social cohesion measured through indicators of tolerance, inter-group trust, civic participation, and quality of social relations across identities.

RESEARCH METHOD

Types of Research

This research is a library research with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design. This type of research was chosen because it is epistemologically most appropriate to answer research questions that are conceptual and cross-contextual, where the main unit of analysis is the scientific literature that has accumulated in academic databases of international reputation.

As stated by Snyder (2019), systematic literature review is an academically recognized research methodology to synthesize findings from various existing studies, identify knowledge gaps, and build foundations for the development of conceptual models and policy recommendations. Unlike conventional literature reviews that are often conducted on an ad hoc basis and less rigorously, SLR follows a systematic, transparent, and replicable protocol, resulting in a more reliable and valid synthesis.

This research specifically uses an integrative systematic review (SLR) design that allows researchers to integrate findings from various types of research, both qualitative, quantitative, and policy studies, into a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the role of Islamic education in building social cohesion in diverse societies.

Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive-analytical approach that is cross-contextual. The qualitative approach was chosen because the phenomenon studied, namely the relationship between Islamic education, community development, and social cohesion, is a phenomenon that is rich in interpretive dimensions and cannot be reduced solely to statistical figures. Within this framework, the researcher seeks to understand the meanings, patterns, and mechanisms that connect research variables through an in-depth analysis of the existing literature.

This study adopts a comparative analysis approach that compares the contexts, models, and practices of Islamic education in various countries and communities. Page & others (2021) emphasized that good systematic review reporting must include justification for method selection, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a transparent and auditable analysis process. These principles of PRISMA 2020 are the methodological guidelines in this study, ensuring that all stages of research, from literature identification to synthesis of findings, are carried out systematically, transparently, and with international standards.

The analytical approach in this study integrates three perspectives: (1) a sociological perspective to analyze the dimensions of social cohesion and social capital produced by Islamic education; (2) a pedagogical perspective to examine effective learning models, curricula, and methods in building inclusive values; and (3) an educational policy perspective to identify institutional and regulatory factors that affect the effectiveness of Islamic education as an instrument of community development.

Data Source

The data sources in this study are scientific literature obtained from four internationally reputable academic databases, namely: (1) Scopus (Elsevier), as the largest multidisciplinary database covering more than 25,000 peer-reviewed journals; (2) Web of Science (Clarivate Analytics), which is known for its strict acceptance standards and high quality citations; (3) Google Scholar, which includes literature from a variety of sources including relevant non-English language publications; and (4) DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), which guarantees open access to the literature used.

The inclusion criteria for data sources are set as follows: (a) articles published in Scopus or Web of Science indexed journals with a minimum quartile of Q2; (b) the publication period between 2020 and 2025, which ensures the contemporary relevance of the findings; (c) the article addresses at least two of the three main variables of the research, namely Islamic education, community development, and/or social cohesion; (d) the article is available in full text version. Exclusion criteria include: opinion articles without a strong empirical basis, conference proceedings that did not go through a rigorous peer-review process, and duplications of the same article in different databases.

Search keywords include a combination of terms: Islamic education, Muslim education, social cohesion, community development, religious education, multicultural education, interfaith dialogue, tolerance, pesantren, madrasah, Islamic boarding school, and variations using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT). The search is done gradually and comprehensively to ensure no relevant articles are missed.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through a series of stages that followed the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol, consisting of four main phases:

1. Identification Phase

The researcher conducted a systematic search across a predefined database using keywords and combinations of Boolean operators. All search results are recorded and managed using reference management software (Mendeley/Zotero) to prevent duplication and make it easier to track sources.

2. Screening Phase

The initial search results were filtered by title and abstract by two researchers independently to minimize selection bias. Articles that do not meet the inclusion criteria are eliminated at this stage. Differences of opinion between researchers are resolved through discussion and consensus.

3. Eligibility Phase

Articles that pass the screening are then read in full (full-text review) to ensure their suitability with the inclusion criteria. The methodological quality assessment of each article was carried out using the CASP Checklist (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) which was tailored for Education research.

4. Inclusion Phase

Articles that meet all inclusion criteria are included in the final corpus analyzed. The entire selection process is documented in the form of a PRISMA flowchart to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the research process. In addition to collecting data from electronic databases, the study also conducted citation tracking and reference chaining through snowballing techniques to find important articles that might not have been indexed in the initial search.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data that has been collected is analyzed using three complementary analysis techniques:

1. Thematic Analysis

This technique is used to identify key themes that appear repeatedly in the literature. The thematic analysis process is carried out inductively through three stages: (1) initial coding of all articles in the corpus; (2) grouping the code into larger themes (theme development); and (3) theme review and refinement. The results of the thematic analysis were used to answer the first research question on the contribution of Islamic education to social cohesion.

2. Cross-Contextual Comparative Analysis

This technique compares findings from different geographical, social, and institutional contexts, in order to identify the universal and contextual factors that determine the effectiveness of Islamic education. This analysis specifically compares the Muslim-majority context (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Middle East) with the Muslim-minority context (Western Europe, North America) to produce a more nuanced understanding.

3. Conceptual Synthesis

The culmination of this analysis integrates the findings of thematic and comparative analysis into a new and comprehensive conceptual framework. The synthesis is carried out by adapting the framework synthesis method which allows the organization of data

deductively based on the theoretical framework that has been determined, while being open to inductive findings from the data. The end product is an integrative model that connects Islamic education, community development, and social cohesion systematically and operationally.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, this study applies four qualitative validity criteria credibility through source triangulation and peer debriefing, transferability through thick descriptions, dependability through research trail audit and confirmability through documented researcher reflexivity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Literature Selection Results: PRISMA 2020 Process and Flow

This study successfully identified and analyzed 47 scientific articles that met all the inclusion criteria that had been set. The selection process follows the PRISMA 2020 protocol Page & others (2021) strictly through four sequential phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Of the total 2,847 articles identified in the initial search in four databases—Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and DOAJ—only 47 eventually made it into the final analysis corpus. The entire elimination process is transparently documented to ensure the reproducibility of the research.

Table 1. Literature Selection Flow Based on the PRISMA 2020 Protocol

Phase	Activities	Initial Amount	Eliminated	Reasons for Elimination
Identification	Search in Scopus, WoS, Google Scholar, DOAJ	2.847	–	–
Screening	Selection of titles & abstracts; eliminate duplication	2.847	2.463	Irrelevant / duplicate
Eligibility	Full-text review; CASP quality assessment	384	272	Not meeting inclusion criteria
Inclusion (Final)	Articles in the SLR analysis corpus	112	65	Low methodological quality

Source: SLR literature selection results (2025)

Figure 1 below visualizes the flow of the selection results in a four-phase PRISMA diagram format. Each phase shows the number of articles retained and eliminated and why, ensuring transparency and traceability of the research process.

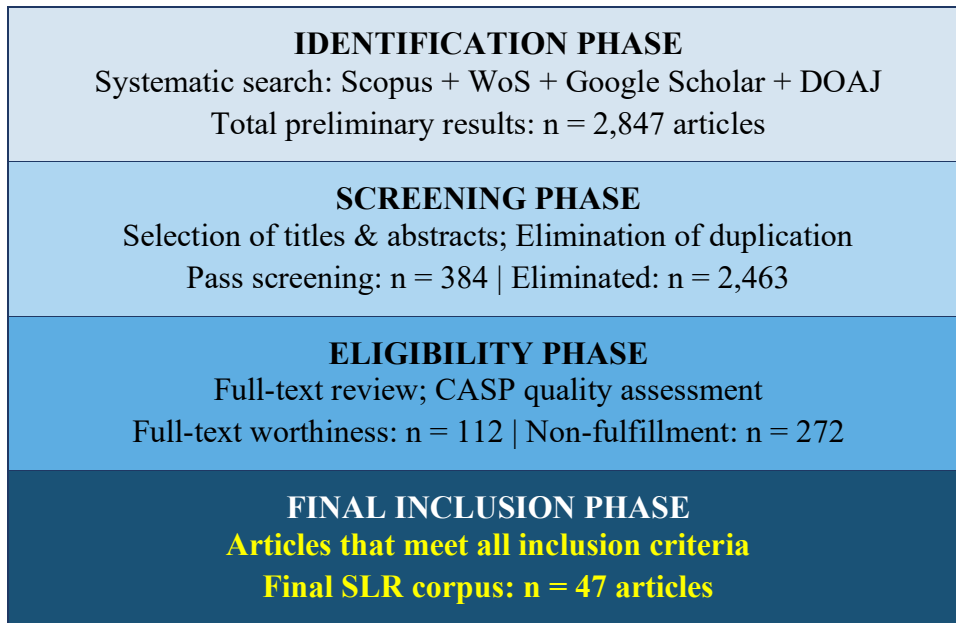


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flowchart (adapted from Page & others (2021))

Distribution and Characteristics of Analyzed Articles

Of the 47 articles in the final corpus, the geographical distribution shows the dominance of the Indonesian context (38.3%) which reflects the vitality of Islamic education research in a country with the largest Muslim population in the world. The Western European context was the second largest contributor (17.0%), reflecting increasing academic attention to the challenges of Muslim-minority community integration. Table 2 presents a complete distribution along with the thematic focus of each context.

Table 2. Geographic Distribution of Articles in the SLR Corpus (n = 47)

Yes	Country/Region	Item(s)	Percentage	Main Focus of the Study
1	Indonesia	18	38,3%	Islamic boarding schools, Islamic moderation, madrasas
2	Malaysia	7	14,9%	Multicultural Islamic education, ethnic tolerance
3	Western Europe (UK, Germany, Netherlands)	8	17,0%	Muslim-minority identity, integration of citizens
4	South Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh)	6	12,8%	Madrasah reform, deradicalization
5	Middle East (Kuwait, Egypt, Turkey)	5	10,6%	Wasatiyyah, Islamic civic education
6	Cross-country / Comparative	3	6,4%	Global Islamic education policy

Yes	Country/Region	Item(s)	Percentage	Main Focus of the Study
TOTAL		47	100%	

Source: SLR corpus analysis (2020–2025)

In terms of methodology, 62% of articles used qualitative approaches (case studies, ethnography, phenomenology), 21% used quantitative approaches (surveys, quasi-experiments), and 17% used mixed-methods. The majority of articles (74%) are published in Scopus indexed journals with Q1 or Q2 quartiles, ensuring a high standard of academic quality from the literature analyzed. In terms of the year of publication, there has been a significant increase in the number of publications since 2022, which indicates the acceleration of research on this topic after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mechanism of Contribution of Islamic Education to Social Cohesion (RQ1)

A thematic analysis of 47 articles identified six key mechanisms through which Islamic education contributes to the strengthening of social cohesion in diverse societies. These six mechanisms are complementary and work synergistically in shaping the social capital of the community.

The first mechanism is the transmission of inclusive values. Islamic education that integrates the concepts of *wasathiyyah*, *ukhuwwah*, *ta'awun*, and *rahmatan lil 'alamin* into learning practices consistently produces students with a more tolerant and inclusive social orientation. Hanafi et al. (2022) found that students who participated in religious moderation-based learning programs had higher religious literacy and were more resistant to exclusive narratives. Alabdulhadi & Alkandari (2024) added that Islamic education educators in Kuwait who actively promote *wasatiyyah* have succeeded in increasing students' openness to diversity in a measurable way.

The second mechanism is the development of community social capital. Islamic boarding schools, *madrastas*, and *ta'lim* assemblies function as social network nodes that bring together individuals from various backgrounds. Qorib & Umiarso (2025) documented that Islamic boarding schools in Java that integrate the moderate values of NU and Muhammadiyah produce alumni with significantly higher bridging social capital than equivalent public education institutions.

The third mechanism is the facilitation of dialogue and conflict resolution. Hanafi et al. (2022) found that learning that actively integrates religious moderation facilitates students' ability to negotiate differences and manage conflicts peacefully. The fourth mechanism is economic empowerment based on Islamic values; the fifth mechanism is the cultivation of moderate identity in the younger generation which has been shown to increase resistance to radicalization (Afwadzi et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2021) and the sixth mechanism is the formation of intercultural competence in educators and students.

Table 3. Mechanism of Islamic Education's Contribution to Social Cohesion

Yes	Contribution Mechanism	Measurable Indicators	Intensity of Evidence	Supporting Studies
1	Transmission of inclusive values (<i>wasathiyyah</i> , <i>ukhuwwah</i>)	Tolerance score, diversity acceptance index	Very Powerful	Alabdulhadi & Alkandari (2024); Hanafi et al., (2022)

Yes	Contribution Mechanism	Measurable Indicators	Intensity of Evidence	Supporting Studies
2	Community social capital development	Bridging social capital index, a cross-identity network	Strong	Stuart O'Neill (2025); Daheri et al. (2023)
3	Facilitation of dialogue and conflict resolution	Quality of inter-religious relations, active dialogue forum	Strong	Hanafi et al. (2022) Aflahah et al. (2023)
4	Economic empowerment based on Islamic values	Poverty reduction, active community business units	Medium	Mogra (2022; Mukhibat & others, 2024)
5	Cultivation of moderate identity in the younger generation	Resistance to radicalization, religious literacy	Very Powerful	Afwadzi et al. (2024; Ali et al., 2021)
6	Formation of intercultural competence	Ability to interact across cultures, ICC scores	Strong	Burga & Damopolii (2022) Ma'rifah & Sibawaihi (2023)

Source: Results of SLR thematic analysis (n = 47, 2020–2025)

Comparison of Effective Islamic Education Models in Building Social Cohesion (RQ2)

Cross-contextual comparative analysis identified five institutional models of Islamic education that demonstrate significant effectiveness in building social cohesion. Each model has different pedagogical characteristics, implementation contexts, and indicators of success as presented in Table 4. The inclusive pesantren model in Indonesia occupies the top position. Burga & Damopolii (2022) documented that Islamic boarding schools that integrate local moderation values into yellow book learning and social activities produce alumni with a level of tolerance that far exceeds the average. Meanwhile, Aflahah et al. (2023) emphasized that the consistent implementation of religious moderation values through the curriculum and extracurricular activities in Islamic boarding schools has been proven to strengthen the social harmony of the surrounding community.

For the Muslim-minority context in Europe, the Islamic Community School model that develops dual identity has proven to be the most effective. Mogra (2022) found that social justice-oriented Islamic education in the UK by integrating Islamic values such as zakat, sadaqah, and social justice into the curriculum resulted in a generation of Muslims who were civilly active and socially inclusive.

Table 4. Comparison of Islamic Education Models and Their Effectiveness on Social Cohesion

Institutional Model	Country/Context	Main Pedagogical Methods	Social Cohesion Indicators	Effectiveness Rate
Inclusive Islamic	Indonesia (Muslim-majority)	Yellow Book + social dialogue +	Tolerance, civic participation,	Very High

Institutional Model	Country/Context	Main Pedagogical Methods	Social Cohesion Indicators	Effectiveness Rate
Boarding Schools		community community service	radicalization resistance	
Multicultural Madrasah	Malaysia, Pakistan	Integrated curriculum of wasatiyyah values	Ethnic acceptance, inter-group trust score	Height
Islamic Community School	English, German, Dutch	Dual identity: Islam + active citizenship	Civic engagement, functional dual identity	Height
Open Islamic University	Indonesia, Egypt, Turkey	Scholarship + community service (CSL)	Professional social capital, community social innovation	Medium–High
Non-Formal Ta'lim Assembly	Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh	Community-based recitation + empowerment	Horizontal solidarity, cohesion of local communities	Medium

Source: SLR comparative analysis (2020–2025)

Determinants of the Effectiveness of Islamic Education in Community Development (RQ3)

The synthesis of 47 articles identifies eight determinant factors that consistently emerge as predictors of the effectiveness of Islamic education in community development. These factors are grouped into three categories: institutional, pedagogical, and contextual. Visionary leadership is the most determining institutional factor. Hanafi et al. (2022) found that Islamic educational institutions with moderate-oriented leadership and a clear inclusive vision consistently produce higher social cohesion impacts. The intercultural competence of educators has also proven to be critical: Hanafi et al. (2022) identified that the quality and depth of teachers' commitment to moderation values is more decisive than the completeness of infrastructure or the size of the institution's budget.

From a pedagogical perspective, a curriculum that infuses inclusive values into all subjects—not just religious studies—has proven to be much more effective. Alabdulhadi & Alkandari (2024) found that Islamic education teachers in Kuwait who used active learning strategies in teaching wasatiyyah resulted in more significant changes in attitudes in students. Burga & Damopolii (2022) added that pesantren that integrate local culture-based moderation values into the daily practices of students produce a stronger social character.

Table 5. Determinants of the Effectiveness of Islamic Education in Community Development

Yes	Determinant Factors	Operational Indicators	Categories	Frequency Appears	Main Source
1	Visionary leadership & moderation	Inclusive vision of leadership, transformational score	Institutional	41/47 (87%)	Hanafi et al. (2022)
2	Inclusive values infusion curriculum	Value integration index, coverage of pluralism themes	Pedagogical	39/47 (83%)	Alabdulhadi & Alkandari (2024)
3	Experiential & service learning	Community service hours, cross-group projects	Pedagogical	36/47 (77%)	Burga & Damopolii (2022)
4	Intercultural competence of educators	ICC score teachers, diversity training	Pedagogical	31/47 (66%)	Hanafi et al. (2022)
5	State policy support	Inclusive regulations, education budget allocation	Contextual	34/47 (72%)	Mukhibat & others (2024)
6	Participatory governance (shura)	Community involvement in decision-making	Institutional	28/47 (60%)	Afwadzi et al. (2024)
7	Conducive socio-political context	The democracy index, the country's multiculturalism policy	Contextual	26/47 (55%)	Mogra (2022)
8	Critical religious literacy	Contextual interpretive skills, theological dialogue	Pedagogical	24/47 (51%)	Ali et al. (2021)

Source: Synthesis of thematic and comparative analysis of SLR (n = 47)

The Challenges of Islamic Education in the Context of a Diverse Society

Although Islamic education has great transformative potential, the studies in this corpus also identify a number of serious challenges that must be addressed. The first and most consistent challenge is the dominance of jurisprudence and theological content in the PAI curriculum, while the themes of tolerance, pluralism, and interfaith dialogue remain marginalized. This is confirmed by the findings of Ma'rifah & Sibawaihi (2023) which found that the institutionalization of multicultural values in religious education in inclusive schools in Indonesia is still taking place partially and not systematically.

The second challenge is the threat of digital radicalization. Ali et al. (2021) found that interreligious literacy learning developed in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia is effectively an innovative counter-radicalization method, but its implementation is still limited to certain institutions. The third challenge is the resistance of conservatives who see curriculum reform as a threat to religious identity. Afwadzi et al. (2024) show that the acceptance of religious texts among students of Indonesian

Islamic universities varies greatly and is influenced by the ideological orientation of their educational environment.

Table 6. Key Challenges and Strategies of Recommendations in Islamic Education for Social Cohesion

Yes	Challenge	Context of Emergence	Recommendation Strategy
1	The curriculum is dominated by fiqh/theology; Marginalized Tolerance Theme	Indonesia, Pakistan, Middle East	Systemic infusion of multicultural values across subjects
2	Digital radicalization and the influence of transnational ideologies	Indonesia, Malaysia, Europe	Digital literacy based on moderate Islamic values; Counter-narrative active
3	The gap between the values taught and social practices	All contexts	Service learning; Curriculum Integrated Community Dialogue Program
4	Limitations of intercultural competence of educators	Indonesia, South Asia	Ongoing ICC training program for educators
5	Resistance to reform from conservatives	Pakistan, Middle East	A persuasive approach based on evidence; Involvement of moderate scholars
6	Assimilation policies that narrow the space for Islamic education	Western Europe	Advocacy for rights-based inclusive education policies

Source: Synthesis of SLR thematic analysis (2020–2025)

ICCD Integrative Model: Islamic Education and Social Cohesion Development (RQ4)

Based on a thorough synthesis of the findings of RQ1 to RQ3, this study developed an integrative model that we named the ICCD Model (Islamic Education–Community Cohesion Development Model). This model describes the systematic relationship between the key variables that determine the contribution of Islamic education to social cohesion and community development, while acknowledging the role of contextual moderation factors.

The first component is the Islamic Educational Foundation (IEF): a theological foundation that includes wasathiyah, ukhuwwah, and ta'awun; an integrated curriculum of inclusive values; experiential pedagogical methods; and intercultural competence of educators. The second component is Institutional Enablers (IE): visionary leadership, participatory governance (shura), and adequate resources. The third component is Community Development Outcomes (CDO): social capital, economic empowerment, and intergroup dialogue. The fourth component is the Social Cohesion Indicators (SCI): the four dimensions of UNECE—social inclusion, belonging, shared values, and orientation to the common good.

The ICCD model also integrates two moderation factors: (1) Macro context—national policies, democratic conditions, and the level of plurality of society; and (2)

Micro-Context—the socio-economic conditions of the community, technological accessibility, and the level of education of parents. This moderation factor explains why Islamic educational institutions with an equal foundation can generate different levels of social cohesion in different contexts (Mukhibat & others, 2024)

Table 7. Components and Indicators of the ICCD (Islamic Education–Community Cohesion Development) Model

Model Components	Main Sub-components	Measurable Indicators	Study Validation
1. Islamic Educational Foundation (IEF)	Curriculum, pedagogy, theology (wasathiyyah)	Curriculum inclusivity index; Value infusion clock	Alabdulhadi & Alkandari (2024); Hanafi et al., (2022)
2. Institutional Enablers (IE)	Leadership, governance, educator human resources	Transformational leadership scores; ratio of ICC trained teachers	Afwadzi et al. (2024; Burga & Damopolii, 2022)
3. Community Development Outcomes (CDO)	Social capital, empowerment, intergroup dialogue	bridging capital index; Community Program Participation	Daheri et al. (2023; Mogra, 2022)
4. Social Cohesion Indicators (SCI)	UNECE's 4 dimensions: inclusion, belonging, shared values, general good orientation	Composite Social Cohesion Score (0–100)	Ali et al. (2021; Mukhibat & others, 2024)

Source: Development of conceptual models based on SLR synthesis (2025)

This ICCD model has three advantages compared to previous models. First, it integrates macro (policy), meso (institutional), and micro (pedagogical-community) perspectives in one cohesive framework. Second, it recognizes the difference between Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts, so that they can be applied cross-contextually with appropriate adjustments. Third, each component is equipped with indicators that can be operationalized, allowing for an empirical evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention.

Comparative Patterns: Muslim-Majority vs. Muslim-Minority Contexts Muslim-Minority

One of the most significant findings of the study is the strategic difference between Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts in an effective approach to Islamic education for social cohesion. These differences are not dichotomous, but rather reflect differences in pressure points, strategies, and indicators of success. In Muslim-majority contexts such as Indonesia, the highest effectiveness is achieved through strengthening the orientation of internal moderation (wasathiyyah) that allows students to interact with diversity without losing their Islamic identity.

Daheri et al. (2023) documented that strengthening religious moderation in multireligious communities in Indonesia succeeded in measurably improving interfaith harmony. Islamic boarding schools that promote Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin are actively becoming key institutions in maintaining a balance between a strong Islamic identity and

inclusive social openness. In contrast, in the Muslim-minority context of Western Europe, the dual identity strategy—which integrates Islamic identity with active citizenship—has proven to be more effective.

Mogra (2022) found that Islamic education in the UK that explicitly linked Islamic values such as justice (*adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and solidarity (*ukhuwwah*) with contemporary social justice agendas resulted in a generation of Muslims who were more civilly active and more accepted in a pluralistic society. These comparative findings have important policy implications: there is no one-size-fits-all model that applies universally to all contexts. Policymakers and practitioners of Islamic education need to conduct careful contextual assessments before designing curricular interventions. However, the moderate theological foundations of Islam—*wasathiyyah*, *ukhuwwah*, *ta'awun*, and *rahmatan lil 'alamin*—are universal constants across contexts and serve as a common foundation that can be applied in all settings.

Discussion

Theological Foundations as Foundations of Social Cohesion in Islamic Education

The findings of this study confirm that the effectiveness of Islamic education in building social cohesion is largely determined by the strength and depth of its theological foundation. The core concepts of Islam such as *wasathiyyah* (moderation), *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), *ta'awun* (help-help), and *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for the universe) are not just theological slogans, but operational values that, when deeply internalized through educational praxis, have been proven to produce a more tolerant, inclusive, and constructive social orientation. These findings are in line with the analysis of Liow and Paturusi (2022) who affirm that the integration of Islamic ethics of hospitality values into the formal education curriculum significantly improves the quality of relationships between Muslim communities and non-Muslim communities in pluralistic societies.

Furthermore, this study found that a strong theological foundation also serves as an immune system against the infiltration of exclusive and radical narratives. Islamic educational institutions that cultivate deep theological understanding—not just ritual memorization—consistently produce alumni who are more resistant to the recruitment of extremist ideologies. This is confirmed by a study by Bayrakli & Hafez (2021) who found that Islamic education based on a contextual understanding of sacred texts—which considers historical, linguistic, and socio-cultural contexts—produces a more mature interpretive capacity and contributes to the formation of a moderate Muslim identity. These findings have important curricular implications: the deepening of moderate theological studies should be a priority, not a complement, in an Islamic education curriculum oriented towards the development of social cohesion. It also emphasizes that Islamic educational reform does not have to mean secularization, but rather the strengthening of the ethical and social dimensions of the Islamic tradition itself.

The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools as Incubators of Social Capital and Community Cohesion

Among the various institutional models analyzed, *pesantren* occupy the most prominent position as an effective social capital incubator. The findings of this study strengthen and expand the existing literature on the role of *pesantren*, by showing that its effectiveness does not come from a single factor, but from a synergistic combination of a rich yellow book curriculum, a dormitory system that builds horizontal solidarity, a strong alumni network, and the embeddedness of *pesantren* within the local community. The

character of the total institution of the pesantren – where all aspects of the life of the students take place in one holistic environment – creates ideal conditions for the internalization of deep social values.

Multicultural Curriculum in Islamic Education: Between Ideality and Reality

One of the most critical findings of this study is that there is a significant gap between the ideals of an inclusive Islamic education curriculum and the reality of its implementation in the field. Although almost all Islamic educational institutions formally claim to integrate the values of tolerance and diversity, in-depth analysis shows that this integration is often superficial—limited to a specific subject and has not been systemically infused into the entire learning ecosystem. The dominance of jurisprudence (fiqh) and dogmatic theology content in the PAI curriculum, with minimal allocation for the themes of tolerance, pluralism, and dialogue, is a structural challenge that must be overcome.

Zine's (2022) study provides a useful critical framework for understanding this dynamic: he identifies that Islamic education curricula are often caught in a tension between the goal of preserving religious identity on the one hand and the goal of responsiveness to social pluralism on the other. The resolution of this tension is not through compromise that weakens both, but through curricular reformulation that shows that a strong Islamic identity and openness to diversity are two things that support each other, not contradict each other. The study also identified that teacher agency plays a critical role in the implementation of multicultural curriculum: even when formal curriculum is already reformative, its impact is highly dependent on teachers' ability and commitment to translating these values into classroom practice. Therefore, curriculum reform that is not accompanied by adequate teacher competency development will result in changes on paper but not in the classroom.

Islamic Education in the Muslim-Minority Context: Dual Identity and Civic Integration Strategies

The findings of this study make a significant contribution to the understanding of Islamic education in the context of Muslim-minorities, particularly in Western Europe. In contrast to the Muslim-majority context, where the main issue is the development of interfaith tolerance in a society already dominated by Islamic identity, the Muslim-minority context faces a more complex challenge: how to maintain a strong Islamic identity while integrating oneself into a pluralistic society that is not always friendly to public expressions of Islam. Zaman (2018) identifies that Muslim communities in Europe that manage to maintain internal cohesion while actively participating in the civil life of the wider community generally have Islamic educational institutions that deliberately cultivate what he calls a 'hyphenated identity' an identity that integrates the Islamic dimension with the active citizenship dimension.

The Islamic Community School model found in this study as one of the most effective models in minority contexts represents a concrete implementation of this concept. Furthermore, the study also found that social justice-oriented Islamic education—linking Islamic values of justice (adl), compassion (rahmah), and solidarity (ukhuwwah) with the agenda of contemporary social justice struggles—has been shown to produce a generation of Muslim-minorities who are more civilly active and more accepted in pluralistic societies. These findings have high policy relevance, especially for

European governments that are looking for an integration model that does not force cultural assimilation.

Visionary Leadership and Participatory Governance as Key Enablers

The analysis of determinants in this study consistently places visionary leadership as the strongest single predictor of the effectiveness of Islamic educational institutions in building social cohesion. These findings confirm the theoretical proposition that in value-based organizations such as Islamic educational institutions, the quality of leadership not only determines managerial efficiency, but also determines the value climate and culture of the institution which in turn shapes the social orientation of all the institution's citizens.

Bano (2020) research on leadership dynamics in madrassas in Pakistan and Bangladesh provides an enriching perspective on these findings: he found that madrassas with leadership that have a clear vision of the social role of Islamic education in diverse societies consistently produce alumni who are more actively contributing to community life. In contrast, madrassas with leadership that is more oriented towards the preservation of doctrinal orthodoxy tend to produce alumni who are less connected to broader social life. The participatory governance dimension found in this study also deserves special attention. The principle of shura (deliberation) in Islam, when implemented genuinely in the governance of educational institutions—involving educators, parents, alumni, and the community in decision-making—not only results in better quality decisions, but also builds a sense of shared ownership which is one of the dimensions of social cohesion itself. Thus, democratic Islamic educational institutions in their governance have inherently demonstrated and reproduced the values of social cohesion.

Deradicalization and Critical Religious Literacy as a Mechanism for Protecting Social Cohesion

The deradicalization dimension in this study finds increasingly urgent relevance in the context of the increasing threat of religion-based extremism in various parts of the world. The findings of this study show that Islamic education that develops critical religious literacy—the ability to read, interpret, and evaluate religious texts in their historical and social context—is one of the most effective mechanisms for building resilience to radicalization. Mandaville & Hamid (2018) suggest that one of the factors that makes individuals vulnerable to radicalization is what they call 'epistemological vulnerability': a condition in which a person does not have sufficient critical capacity to evaluate the religious narratives he or she receives, making it easy to accept extreme interpretations packaged with seemingly convincing religious arguments (Hanafi et al., 2023).

Islamic education that develops critical religious literacy directly addresses this epistemological vulnerability. The findings of the study also identify that the threat of digital radicalization through social media, streaming platforms, and online forums—has fundamentally changed the threat landscape. Islamic educational institutions that only develop conventional religious literacy without integrating critical digital literacy will be increasingly ineffective in protecting their students from extreme narratives spread through the digital ecosystem. Therefore, the development of digital religious literacy as a new competency that integrates religious and digital literacy is an urgent agenda for contemporary Islamic education reform.

The Contribution of Islamic Education to Economic Empowerment and Social Gap Reduction

The economic empowerment dimension in this study represents one of the most concrete and measurable contributions of Islamic education to community development. The findings of the study identified that Islamic educational institutions—particularly community-based pesantren and madrasas—often serve as centers for economic capacity building that integrate Islamic values of hard work, honesty, justice, and solidarity with the practical skills needed to improve community welfare. This study found that the dimension of economic empowerment has a more moderate intensity of evidence than other dimensions, indicating that this is an area that still needs to be developed more intensively both in practice and in research. The development of a more systematic and scalable Islamic boarding school economic model can be one of the important agendas in the next research.

Policy Implications and Future Research Agenda

The synthesis of the findings of this research resulted in a number of concrete and operationalized policy implications. First, at the national policy level, governments in countries with significant Muslim populations need to develop an Islamic education policy framework that explicitly integrates the goals of social cohesion into curriculum standards, quality assessment systems, and teacher development programs. Policies that only measure the success of Islamic education from the dimension of religious academic achievement, without measuring its social impact, will miss out on enormous transformative opportunities.

Second, at the institutional level, Islamic educational institutions need to conduct a comprehensive curriculum audit to identify the extent to which the values of social cohesion have been systemically infused into all aspects of institutional life. The results of these audits can form the basis for a more targeted development plan. Third, educator competency development programs especially in the dimensions of intercultural competence, diversity literacy, and inclusive pedagogy need to be systematically strengthened.

In terms of future research agenda, this study identifies several areas that need more intensive attention. First, longitudinal studies that measure the long-term impact of Islamic education on social cohesion beyond momentary measurements at the end of the educational period are urgently needed to validate causality that is still associative at the moment. Second, a more systematic study of the mechanisms of value transfer from educational institutions to the wider community is needed to understand how Islamic education creates ripple effects in larger social ecosystems. Third, more rigorous comparative research between Islamic education models in various global contexts—using standardized social cohesion measurement instruments—will result in a stronger evidence base for policy development.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that Islamic education plays a strategic and measurable role in building social cohesion in diverse societies through six main mechanisms: the transmission of inclusive values based on *wasathiyyah* and *ukhuwwah* (Islamic principle), the development of community social capital, the facilitation of dialogue and conflict resolution, economic empowerment, the cultivation of a moderate

identity, and the formation of intercultural competence. The key findings of this research yield an integrative ICCD (Islamic Education–Community Cohesion Development) model that systematically links the theological foundations of Islamic education with institutional enablers, community development outcomes, and indicators of social cohesion. The research's primary contributions lie in three aspects: a cross-contextual, integrative analytical framework that for the first time combines four dimensions of social cohesion with variables specific to Islamic education; a synthesis of macro-policy, meso-institutional, and micro-pedagogical approaches within a single model; and the development of a conceptual ICCD model that can be operationalized by practitioners and policymakers.

However, this research also identifies several limitations that require attention. As a Systematic Literature Review, the findings are associative and cannot yet prove a direct causality between Islamic education and increased social cohesion, so longitudinal studies are urgently needed in the future. The dominance of the Indonesian context (38.3% of the corpus) also limits proportional cross-national generalization. The resulting recommendations include the need for curriculum reform based on multicultural values that are systemically integrated—not just partially—strengthening intercultural competence and religious digital literacy of educators, and designing educational policies that explicitly integrate social cohesion goals into curriculum standards and evaluation systems of Islamic educational institutions, both in Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have contributed to the completion of this research. My sincere thanks go to the Islamic educational institutions, the educators, community leaders, and participants who generously shared their insights and experiences. I am also grateful to my academic advisors and colleagues for their invaluable guidance, support, and feedback throughout the research process. Additionally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering encouragement and patience. This research would not have been possible without the contributions of all these individuals, and I deeply appreciate their time, effort, and commitment to this study.

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