RELIGIOUS INCLUSIVITY THROUGH AL-ISLAM AND KEMUHAMMADIYAHAN EDUCATION: A CASE FROM UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH PALOPO

Rizka, Suyadi*

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*suyadi@fai.uad.ac.id

Abstract

Although courses on multiculturalism and tolerance have emerged at state Islamic religious universities, to date, no state Islamic university has accepted non-Muslim students. In contrast, private Islamic religious universities, particularly Muhammadiyah universities, accept non-Muslim students. In fact, more than 60% of Muhammadiyah universities in eastern Indonesia have non-Muslim students. The urgency of this research is a critical analysis of Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan (AIK) education for non-Muslims at UM Palopo. The purpose of this research is to discover the concept of multicultural AIK expressed by 20 non-Muslim students at UM Palopo in religion classes. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with non-Muslim students at UM Palopo as informants. The results show that the expression of

multicultural religiosity among non-Muslim students at Muhammadiyah universities is very different from the multicultural concepts in studies of religious scriptures as they have developed so far. Non-Muslim students: Christians are becoming more Christian and Catholic students are becoming more devout in church, likewise Muslims are becoming more devout in worship. The findings of this study complement the theory of Christian Muhammadiyah (Krismuha) which has successfully managed multiculturalism in Papua.

Keywords: *Islam; Muhammadiyah; Multiculturalism; Muslim; Religious Tolerance.*

Abstrak

Meskipun dikursus tentang mulkulturalisme dan toleransi lahir dari Perguruan tinggi keagamaan Islam negeri, namun hingga saat ini belum ada satu pun perguruan tinggi Islam negeri yang menerima mahasiswa non muslim. Sebaliknya, justru perguruan tinggi keagamaan Islam swasta, terutama perguruan tingi Muhammadiyah, menerima mahasiswa non muslim. Bahkan, perguruan tinggi Muhammadiyah di Indonesia timur lebih dari 60% mahasiswanya adalah non muslim. Urgensi penelitian ini adalah analisis kritis pendidikan Al-Islam dan Kemuhammadiyahan (AIK) bagi non muslim di UM Palopo. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menemukan konsep AIK multikultural yang diekspresikan 20 mahasiswa non Muslim di UM Palopo pada kelas agama. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan informan mahasiswa non muslim di UM Palopo. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ekspresi keberagamaan multikultural mahasiswa non muslim di perguruan tinggi Muhammadiyah sangat berbeda dengan konsep-konsep multikultural dalam penelitian-penelitian teks kitab suci agama-agama seperti yang selama ini berkembang. Mahasiswa non muslim: yang Kristen semakin Kristen dan mahasiswa Katolik semakin taat ke gereja, demikian pula yang muslim semakin taat beribadah.

Temuan penelitian ini melengkapi teori Kristen Muhammadiyah (Krismuha) yang berhasil mengelola mulkulturalisme di Papua.
Kata Kunci: *Islam; Kemuhammadiyahan; Mulkulturalisme; Muslim; Toleransi Beragama.*

INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah is recognized as one of the largest socio-religious organizations in the world, having established 163 higher education institutions across Indonesia, with one located in Malaysia (Bachtiar & Zakiyuddin Baidhawy, 2022). Although rooted in Islamic traditions, Muhammadiyah universities have become inclusive educational spaces that welcome students from diverse religious backgrounds (Nusi, 2022). A clear example can be found at Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo, where non-Muslim students constitute about 20% of the student population. Even more strikingly, at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kupang in East Nusa Tenggara and Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong in Papua, non-Muslim students make up more than 60% (Husnaini et al., 2021). These facts demonstrate that Muhammadiyah universities open their doors widely to anyone who seeks knowledge, regardless of religious affiliation (Arifin et al., 2022). This inclusivity stands in stark contrast to the reality in several state Islamic higher education institutions such as UIN, IAIN, or STAIN, which, in some cases, have not yet been able to admit non-Muslim students (Syarif et al., 2020). This limitation largely stems from existing regulations that do not permit such admissions within PTKIN (State Islamic Higher Education Institutions).

The official handbook of *Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan* (AIK) courses explicitly states that the AIK curriculum is designed to accommodate all students, including non-Muslims, while ensuring that each student continues to receive religious education in accordance with their own faith traditions (Suyadi et al., 2020). Indeed, many non-Muslim graduates—ranging from bachelor's to

doctoral degrees—have emerged from Muhammadiyah universities.

To date, studies and research on multicultural education, particularly regarding education for non-Muslim students, have been relatively extensive (Rosa, 2020). However, most of these studies tend to focus on religious textual analysis or adopt purely normative-theological approaches (Priwati et al., 2021). While such approaches are essential as philosophical foundations, they have not fully addressed the empirical dimensions of social dynamics (Suyadi, 2019). Unfortunately, only a few studies have explicitly explored the lived experiences of non-Muslim students pursuing education at Islamic-based universities, including those within Muhammadiyah institutions (Hastasari et al., 2022). Yet, such empirical narratives hold great potential for contributing new perspectives toward the development of a more inclusive, humanistic, and transformative Islamic education.

Several previous studies are noteworthy in this context. Hefner's *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* discusses Islamic education within the framework of pluralism but does not specifically touch upon the experiences of non-Muslim students in Islamic institutions (Darwin & Haryanto, 2021). Likewise, Zamroni's *Pendidikan Multikultural: Konsep dan Implementasi dalam Konteks Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia* highlights the importance of multicultural values in Islamic education but remains largely theoretical (Budiwan & Malikah, 2022). Furthermore, Nugroho's article "Toleransi dan Pendidikan Multikultural di Perguruan Tinggi Islam" explores the concept of tolerance education but does not investigate the real practices and experiences of non-Muslim students (Sa'dudin, 2018). Similarly, the study by Sukmawati and Suparto titled "Penerapan Pendidikan Multikultural dalam Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam di Perguruan Tinggi" focuses primarily on curriculum aspects and does not delve deeply into the cultural or personal experiences of non-Muslim students (Qadri et al., 2024). Hence, there remains a research gap in studies of multiculturalism—particularly

concerning non-Muslim students in Islamic higher education institutions such as Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo.

The innovative approach proposed in this study is the concept of developing cohabitation within plural societies, also known as the *Christian–Muhammadiyah Sociological Convergence* (abbreviated as *Krismuha*) (Barton, 2014). In this context, Muhammadiyah Muslims and Christian communities jointly build citizenship based on mutual diversity, transforming differences and social harmony into a cohesive collective unity.

This approach differs significantly from many other studies on multiculturalism, which often emerge from contexts of interreligious conflict, violence, or even bloodshed. In contrast, *Krismuha*, through its sociological convergence and cohabitation, manages to foster multicultural education in harmony. In this model, Christians become more active in their churches, while Muslims grow increasingly devout in their religious practices. Only through such a process can differences be transformed into social harmony as a collective strength.

This study aims to identify a model of *Multicultural Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan Education* at Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo. Thus, it holds not only academic relevance but also strategic significance as a concrete contribution to realizing Indonesia's vision of upholding tolerance and social justice amidst diversity (Suyadi et al., 2022). *Figure 1* illustrates the state of the art based on VOSviewer analysis.
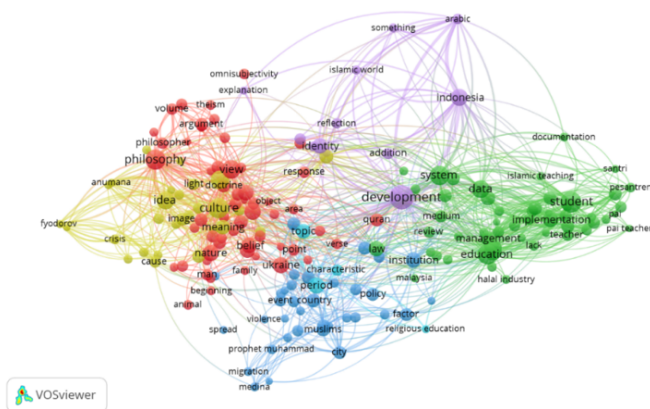
Figure 1. State of the Art and Research Novelty

Figure 1 presents the results of a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer, mapping the relationships among keywords in studies concerning Islamic and multicultural education. The visualization identifies five color clusters representing diverse themes such as philosophy, culture, multiculturalism, and Islamic higher education (Sumaryati et al., 2022). However, there is still no explicit focus on the experiences of non-Muslim students in AIK courses (Jacinto et al., 2023). This gap underscores the novelty of the present study, which offers an inclusive, multicultural, and empathetic perspective on the participation of non-Muslim students in AIK education at Muhammadiyah universities.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach (M. A. Abdullah, 2020). This type of research was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of the participants' religious experiences. Phenomenological studies have been proven effective in uncovering the depth and meaningfulness of religious experiences.

The selection of research subjects was conducted using purposive sampling, in which informants were intentionally

chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The research subjects consisted of three *Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan* (AIK) lecturers who teach the course, as well as non-Muslim students from various faculties—namely the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), the Faculty of Health Sciences (FIKES), and the Faculty of Science and Technology (FSAINTEK) (Arthur Vianna Ferreira, 2022).

The research process followed the phenomenological qualitative research procedures outlined in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman Denzin (Yusuf, 2014). Systematically, the stages of phenomenological qualitative research in this study are include: a) determining the research locus on non-Muslim students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo; b) conducting participant observation among non-Muslim students at UM Palopo; c) performing coding analysis of the multicultural AIK curriculum at UM Palopo; d) analyzing religious experiences; e) describing the essence of AIK education; f) synthesizing the meaning of religiosity; and g) conducting a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to formulate holistic findings.

Data collection in this study was conducted using three main techniques. First, direct observation was carried out in classrooms to examine the practice of AIK learning, the interaction between lecturers and students, and the responses and participation of non-Muslim students. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with AIK lecturers and non-Muslim students to explore their perceptions, experiences, and the meanings they derived throughout their participation in AIK classes. Third, documentation was collected, including supporting materials such as semester learning plans (*Rencana Pembelajaran Semester* – RPS), AIK course guidelines, classroom activity photos, and institutional archives related to AIK policy (Muhammad Hisyam Fathin, 2020).

Data were analyzed inductively and thematically, following the model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion

drawing/verification (Baker et al., 2020). The data collected were analyzed based on key emerging themes throughout the research process, such as inclusive AIK learning strategies, non-Muslim students' responses to teaching materials and lecturers' approaches, and the integration of multicultural and tolerance values in AIK education.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, this study employed triangulation of sources, methods, and theories. Additionally, data validation was performed through member checking, by confirming interview results with the informants, and through peer debriefing with colleagues who possess expertise in Islamic education and multiculturalism (Abram et al., 2020). These procedures were implemented to guarantee that the research findings accurately reflect empirical realities and are scientifically accountable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are presented in a single core model—**Multicultural AIK**—specifically designed for non-Muslim students. It represents the expression of religious experiences among non-Muslim students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo (UM Palopo). This form of religious expression manifests as Multicultural AIK, demonstrated through the students' everyday campus behavior.

The **Multicultural AIK curriculum** for non-Muslim students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo serves as a strategic step toward fostering an inclusive and tolerant learning environment. As an Islamic-based university, UM Palopo is committed to providing an understanding of Islam's universal values without disregarding the diversity of existing beliefs. This approach ensures that non-Muslim students feel accepted while simultaneously strengthening interfaith relationships through dialogue and respectful learning. It is expected that this foundation will promote social harmony both on campus and in the wider

community. The following presents the results of the analysis gathered from all informants concerning the AIK educational process for non-Muslim students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo.

The mention of freedom in choosing the type of assignment reflects a flexible learning approach that values students' creativity. This policy allows students to align their assignments with their interests, abilities, and contextual backgrounds. As a result, students do not merely feel burdened by tasks; rather, they are provided the space to explore learning in a more personal and relevant way. The fundamental vision of multiculturalism is to address how to manage an egalitarian and peaceful social life—one in which everyone willingly recognizes a plural society composed of multiple ethnicities, races, cultures, and religions without any dominant culture (David Efendi & Suswanta, 2017). Table 1 below presents excerpts from the content of the Multicultural AIK curriculum.

Table 1. Excerpts from the Multicultural AIK Curriculum for Non-Muslim Students

No	Course Title	Course Content
1	Islam and World Religions	Within the scope of Islam and World Religions, various topics of Islamic studies are explored in multiple dimensions—such as doctrinal, ritual, spiritual, intellectual, social-institutional, and ethical aspects—as well as topics on interreligious social relations. Specifically, this course covers: (1) two types of religions: Abrahamic Religions (samawi) and Wisdom Religions (ardhi); (2) six dimensions of religion; (3) the concept of Islam, doctrines of divinity, prophethood, scripture, and

		eschatology; (4) the meaning of rituals/worship—types, practices, and spiritual experiences; (5) religion and science; (6) religious sects and institutions; and (7) religion in relation to humanitarian and tolerance issues.
2	Islamic Ethics	The course covers Islamic ethics in domestic, public, and environmental domains, including ethics toward oneself, society, the nation, business, professional fields, environment, plants, and water. It also discusses Islamic dimensions in the perspective of religious studies and multiculturalism, as well as social and humanitarian values within Islam from a multicultural perspective— highlighting the universality of these values.
3	Muhammadiyah Studies	This course introduces non-Muslim students to the Muhammadiyah movement from various perspectives. To illustrate the importance of the movement, the course begins with an introduction to Islamic spirituality in the Muhammadiyah view, followed by practical activities allowing students to experience Muhammadiyah spirituality in social life. The course then explores the ideological foundations of Muhammadiyah and how its spirituality correlates with the movement's social and religious missions. Further materials include Muhammadiyah as a movement of

			da'wah, tajdid (renewal), Islam, and social transformation, emphasizing the values and concerns that shape the movement and its vision for the Second Century of Muhammadiyah.
4	Islam	and Science	This course critically and analytically examines the integration and application of Islamic values within science and technology at local, regional, national, and global levels. Topics include: knowledge in the Islamic perspective; the nature and position of reason and revelation; *qauliyah* and *qauniyah* verses; the integration of Islam and science; the essence of knowledge, technology, and art in Islam; the obligation to pursue and develop knowledge; and Islamic perspectives on science, technology, and art.

Based on the above excerpts from the Multicultural AIK curriculum document, it is evident that the AIK courses for non-Muslim students are not intended for Islamization but rather for academic inquiry into world religions. The purpose is to help participants—particularly non-Muslim students—understand the foundational principles applied within the campus environment, which may relate to prevailing social, cultural, and ethical norms.

In this regard, UM Palopo's leadership emphasized that the intention is to **introduce Islam** while simultaneously encouraging students to actively practice their respective religions. The administration also underscored that assignments are consistently aligned with students' own faith-based practices, aiming to address tendencies among some students to be less active in their religious observance.

This approach reflects respect for religious plurality while emphasizing the importance of spiritual engagement in daily life. The strategy used involves assigning tasks that are relevant to each non-Muslim student's religious practices, according to their individual faith traditions. This illustrates an inclusive pedagogical model that aligns academic assignments with students' religious and life backgrounds.

Furthermore, one of the Multicultural AIK lecturers at UM Palopo stated that the **Islamology program** serves as an introduction to basic Islamic concepts, aiming to provide students—especially non-Muslims—with a clear understanding of Islam and Muhammadiyah. This approach helps reduce potential prejudice resulting from a lack of knowledge. The lecturer also expressed hope that through such understanding, non-Muslim students would develop openness toward Islamic teachings and perhaps even be inspired toward spiritual transformation in the future. In this context, the AIK curriculum stands out as a distinctive feature supported by the **Ma'had program**, which involves both Muslim and non-Muslim students in learning Islamic and Muhammadiyah values.

The Islamology program thus serves as a strategic effort to inclusively introduce Islamic and Muhammadiyah principles to all students. One non-Muslim student admitted that initially, they thought: *"Why should I study this? It's not my religion."* However, as the Multicultural AIK lecturers provided further explanation, the student came to accept that AIK is not merely doctrinal but an **academic field of study**.

The interviews highlight that the main benefit of learning AIK for non-Muslim students lies in the knowledge they gain, particularly regarding **daily ethical conduct (adab)**. The emphasis on *adab* indicates that AIK education focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on the formation of character and morality. This aligns with the broader aim of religious education—not merely to provide theoretical understanding but to cultivate behaviors that embody spiritual and ethical values.

The data obtained show that multicultural education for non-Muslim students at UM Palopo has been implemented since 2019. Currently, UM Palopo has a vision to develop students with a multicultural outlook. Multiculturalism, including the presence of non-Muslims on Islamic university campuses, plays an important role in fostering tolerance and understanding of diversity (Fiqih Aiyatul Farokhah, 2019). UM Palopo is also well known as a campus that consistently admits non-Muslim students every year across its various faculties.

The implementation of Multicultural AIK (Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah Studies) education at Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo demonstrates the institution's commitment to creating harmony within a tolerant educational environment. This approach reflects an inclusive effort to respect the religious and cultural differences of students, especially non-Muslim students. In this context, lecturers play a crucial role in ensuring that multicultural values are applied, both in the delivery of course materials and in classroom interactions. The goal is to instill cross-religious understanding that promotes mutual respect and encourages students to learn to coexist peacefully amid diversity.

For non-Muslim students, AIK education is still provided with adjustments to make the content relevant without violating their individual beliefs. Although they are not required to perform Islamic religious practices, non-Muslim students are still given the opportunity to understand religious concepts in Islam. As a substitute for worship practices, they are assigned specific tasks relevant to their religious background, such as observing or reporting on worship activities in their own places of worship, for example, in churches. This approach not only respects diversity but also enriches students' understanding of the importance of interreligious tolerance.

These special assignments given to non-Muslim students also serve as a means to maintain the relevance of AIK education to their reality. By studying the religious context in their respective

places of worship, students can better understand the spiritual values underlying their own faiths, while recognizing universal values such as goodness, compassion, and peace. This strengthens mutual respect among students from different religious backgrounds on campus. Overall, the implementation model of AIK education with multicultural content at Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo represents a strategic step toward creating an inclusive and conducive learning environment. By respecting diversity without neglecting Islam as the university's foundational identity, this program aims to produce graduates who are not only academically excellent but also socially competent to live in a plural society with a high degree of tolerance (Kahar, 2018).

The majority of non-Muslim students strongly agree that Islam is a tolerant religion. The perception that Islam is radical is inconsistent with the reality observed by the researcher. (2) Their belief that there is only one God and that Muhammad SAW is the last Prophet is also widely agreed upon, although they maintain their belief in the Trinity. (3) They strongly agree that Universitas Muhammadiyah Kupang is a higher education institution that highly upholds the values of tolerance, religious and ethnic diversity; (4) Muhammadiyah is seen as an inclusive organization, open to all religions, teaching interfaith harmony, rejecting radical teachings, and playing a significant role in maintaining the sovereignty of Indonesia; (5) They strongly agree with the Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah Studies course (Syarif Idris PS, 2020).

Multicultural education is highly important for Indonesia as an effort to reduce horizontal conflicts in society resulting from cultural, ethnic, customary, and religious differences. By emphasizing learning that values differences, this education teaches that diversity is part of the natural law that must be accepted and managed, not used as a reason for division (Ambarudin et al., n.d.). One of the major problems facing the nation today is the attitude of antipathy toward differences. Differences are often viewed as threats that trigger division. This arises from the way we interpret religious teachings as opposing

views that lead to intergroup conflicts. Consequently, many become trapped in group fanaticism in the name of religion (Kadir, 2018). Even the influence of local culture does not affect these interactions—everyone engages in self-maturation by analyzing the positive values from both Islamic and non-Islamic cultures (Riska, 2022).

AIK Education for Non-Muslim Students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo

Amid global concerns about rising religious intolerance, the findings of this study refute the stigma that religious education in Islamic universities is exclusive to Muslims. The results show that AIK at UM Palopo fosters the understanding of universal values such as honesty, discipline, and empathy among non-Muslim students, without imposing theological doctrines. This aligns with the studies of Faidi et al. (2021) and Badarussyamsi et al. (2021), which demonstrate that interfaith interaction within religious education promotes greater social tolerance (Badarussyamsi et al., 2021; Faidi & Septiadi, 2021), as well as the works of Abdul (2023) and Abu-El-Noor (2023), confirming that pluralist approaches enhance respect for diversity (Abd, 2023; Abu-El-Noor et al., 2023). In other words, the dialogical and non-dogmatic AIK model is not only locally relevant but also consistent with international best practices that position religious education as a space for inclusion rather than segregation.

The achievement of this inclusive attitude does not occur by chance but is constructed through strategic learning design (Kamal, 2021). Open discussions, case studies, and an emphasis on ethical values applied in AIK classes at UM Palopo align with the *interreligious literacy* model, which has been proven effective in cross-country research for reducing stereotypes and enhancing empathy (Shofiyuddin et al., 2024). Khosiin's (2023) study also highlights the importance of a structured religious moderation curriculum, including tolerance assessment and lecturer

competency in managing differences (Khosiin et al., 2023). Both findings reinforce that AIK at UM Palopo has adopted principles of experiential pedagogy recommended by global literature, successfully building religious literacy that extends beyond cognitive knowledge to encompass affective and social domains.

The implications of these findings go beyond the classroom. Inclusive and dialogical AIK at UM Palopo contributes to building a tolerant campus climate, in line with Abrams' (2018) research showing that students' openness to interfaith issues increases when public discourse is supported by rational dialogue (Abrams et al., 2018). More broadly, the publication trend mapped in Wibowo's (2023) study indicates growing academic attention to tolerance education in higher education (Wibowo et al., 2024). This means the AIK model is worth replicating in other universities as a best practice supporting the national religious moderation policy. Furthermore, this success conveys a strategic message that religious education, when designed inclusively, can serve as a driver of social harmony and national unity rather than a source of polarization.

Dynamics of Interreligious Learning

Based on the interviews, a surprising yet academically sound finding emerged: the initial resistance of non-Muslim students to AIK quickly subsided when lecturers structured equal dialogues, avoided dogmatism, and emphasized universal values. This pattern of reduced resistance aligns with Akmaluddin's (2020) study in the tolerant city of Salatiga, which found that acceptance of "the Others" increased when interfaith interactions were facilitated deliberately and repeatedly (Akmaluddin, 2020). It also coheres with Abrams' (2018) study showing that pluralism-oriented religious education enhances cross-faith respect and religious literacy among students (Abrams et al., 2018). Further evidence from *Religius* indicates that students tend to use rational reasoning when discussing sensitive issues (e.g., interfaith marriage) if a safe dialogue space is available, showing reduced

othering and increased openness. Thus, the AIK classroom design positions interfaith experiences as cognitive-affective bridges rather than sources of friction (Subchi et al., 2022; Wildan, 2021).

The three most effective strategies are open discussion, contextual case studies, and an emphasis on public ethics—all of which neutralize confusion over worship terminology and prevent "over-theologizing." These findings are closely related to research on the Religious Moderation Curriculum, which underscores the need for scaffolding key concepts, attitude assessments (beyond cognition), and faculty development to manage dissent productively (Pajarianto et al., 2022). The implementation of formative assessments, such as structured reflective journals, enables lecturers to monitor attitude shifts without pressuring students' identities, consistent with reviews on integrated moderation learning in higher education that highlight explicit goal–content–method strategies (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022). Remaining challenges include uneven interfaith literacy across classes and varying lecturer competencies. However, cross-study evidence shows that meaningful interfaith interaction and collaborative tasks gradually erode stereotypes (Aripudin et al., 2022; Wildan, 2021). In other words, the AIK design aligns with the global consensus on experiential pedagogy.

The direct impact felt by students includes increased comfort in dialogue, reduced othering, and readiness to collaborate across faiths in campus projects. This evidence parallels *Religius* findings that openness to interfaith issues increases when campuses emphasize rational, argument-based dialogue over sectarian rhetoric (Shofiyuddin et al., 2024). At the program level, the framework of religious moderation curricula developed and evaluated in Indonesian universities provides a replication route: mapping tolerance achievements, lecturer training, and interfaith community partnerships (Wibowo et al., 2024). Conceptually, pluralist religious education expands the social comfort zone and stabilizes classroom climates—conditions necessary for sustainable campus harmony (Akmaliah, 2020; Alvian & Ardhani, 2023;

Inayatillah et al., 2022). Hence, the experiences and challenges within the AIK classroom are not local anomalies but part of a broader body of evidence showing that dialogical learning design can be scaled up to strengthen tolerance and productive coexistence in higher education ecosystems.

Implications for Interreligious Tolerance and Harmony

Based on the interviews, the findings—though surprising—firmly demonstrate that systematic exposure to AIK at UM Palopo does not weaken non-Muslim students' religious identities; rather, it strengthens mutual respect and reduces tendencies of othering. This reverses the common assumption that religious education in Islamic universities automatically promotes exclusivity (David Efendi & Suswanta, 2017; Idris et al., 2023). These results align with empirical studies showing that religious education programs designed for moderation and interreligious contact (structured dialogue, interfaith tasks, guided reflection) enhance tolerance and students' rational argumentation skills on sensitive issues (Alvian & Ardhani, 2023). Research on religious moderation curricula and academic pluralism policies affirms that repetitive and safe learning mechanisms facilitate the internalization of inclusive norms in classrooms, laying the foundation for productive coexistence on campus (Alvian & Ardhani, 2023).

Further analysis connects these findings with *intergroup contact theory* and *interreligious literacy*: repeated structured contact (class activities, community engagement, interfaith visits) enhances both cognitive and affective empathy, while explicit curricular approaches that map tolerance outcomes and affective assessments produce measurable attitude changes (Asep Saepudin Jahar, 2019). Evidence from Scopus-indexed literature reveals similar patterns—religious moderation programs (I. Abdullah et al., 2019; Achruh & Sukirman, 2024; Aditoni & Rohmah, 2022) tested in several universities show reduced stereotyping and increased willingness to collaborate across faiths (as cumulatively observed in curriculum

studies and student surveys) (Elumalai et al., 2019; Husnaini et al., 2021). In addition, cross-regional studies emphasize the role of lecturer development as a key moderating variable: trained lecturers can facilitate productive dissent without marginalizing identities (Akmaliah & Nadzir, 2024; Berkovich & Eyal, 2020). In other words, UM Palopo's findings follow a causal path supported by theory and international empirical evidence.

The practical implications of these findings are extensive: first, AIK developed as a multicultural program should be viewed as a campus policy tool to strengthen social harmony—not as a threat to pluralism. Second, for transferability, other universities should adopt a policy package that includes: (a) curricula containing explicit tolerance learning outcomes; (b) formative attitude assessments (reflective journals, empathy rubrics); (c) faculty development programs for moderation pedagogy; and (d) interfaith community partnerships for field experiences. International literature supports this policy design as a prerequisite for effective replication in diverse contexts, while also warning of potential challenges (local politics, uneven religious literacy among students) that must be mitigated through holistic institutional policy (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024; Akmaliah, 2020; Alvian & Ardhani, 2023). In short, inclusive AIK as implemented at UM Palopo has policy replication potential to strengthen national tolerance if supported by appropriate design and regulation.

CONCLUSION

Amid the large number of Islamic higher education institutions that still do not accept non-Muslim students, Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo stands out as an Islamic university that not only welcomes non-Muslim students but also provides religious courses specifically tailored for them. This demonstrates that the university is not merely engaging in interfaith tolerance discourse but is practicing institutionalized interreligious tolerance in a concrete and sustainable way.

Rather than reproducing narratives of religious conflict—as commonly examined by earlier researchers—UM Palopo fosters interfaith dialogue within dynamic classroom interactions. Moreover, the Multicultural AIK at UM Palopo contains no element of Islamization, contrary to common assumptions. On the contrary, its four courses (*Islam and World Religions, Islamic Ethics, Muhammadiyah Studies,* and *Islam and Science*) have inspired Christian students to become more devoted to church life, and students of other faiths to grow more spiritually committed to their own religions, without the need to embrace Islam.

Thus, Multicultural AIK is not a theoretical construct confined to debate but an empirical model that should be promoted in academic spaces—both within religiously affiliated universities and in higher education institutions more broadly.

The limitation of this study lies in its focus on a single Muhammadiyah university. Future research should extend to other Muhammadiyah institutions with larger non-Muslim student populations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation and broader impact of the Multicultural AIK model.

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